
Approval process report

AECC University College, Physiotherapy, 2023-2024

Executive Summary

This is a report of the process to approve MSc Physiotherapy (pre-registration) programme at AECC University College. This report captures the process we have undertaken to assess the institution and programme(s) against our standards, to ensure those who complete the proposed programme(s) are fit to practice.

We have

- Reviewed the institution against our institution level standards and found our standards are met in this area
- Reviewed the programme(s) against our programme level standards and found our standards are met in this area following exploration of key themes through quality activities
- Recommended all standards are met, and that the programme(s) should be approved

Through this assessment, we have noted:

- The programme meets all the relevant HCPC education standards and therefore should be approved.

Previous consideration	Not applicable. This approval process was not referred from another process.
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Decision	<p>The Education and Training Committee (Panel) is asked to decide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• whether the programme(s) is approved,• whether issues identified for referral through this review should be reviewed through the focused review process:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ We want to review effectiveness of the processes for ongoing collaboration with practice placement providers in Dublin. The visitors aim to assess the effectiveness of the education provider's placement sourcing strategy to ensure it offers a safe and supportive learning environment.○ We want to review the processes that are used to ensure practice educators effectively support safe learning.○ These were areas of risk which was reviewed through the quality activity process and the visitors agreed the standards were met. A further review through the focused review process should provide further
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assurance about the processes the education provider stated would be implemented.

Next steps

Outline next steps / future case work with the education provider:

- The education provider is currently engaged in one other active approval cases Independent and Supplementary Prescribing (part time).
 - We will conduct a focused review in the 2026-2027 academic year to review areas highlighted in the referral in section 5 of this report.
 - The education provider's next performance review will be 2028-2029 academic year.
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Section 1: About this assessment

About us

We are the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), a regulator set up to protect the public. We set standards for education and training, professional knowledge and skills, conduct, performance and ethics; keep a register of professionals who meet those standards; approve programmes which professionals must complete before they can register with us; and take action when professionals on our Register do not meet our standards.

This is a report on the approval process undertaken by the HCPC to ensure that the programme(s) detailed in this report meet our education standards. The report details the process itself, evidence considered, outcomes and recommendations made regarding the programme(s) approval / ongoing approval.

Our standards

We approve education providers and programmes that meet our education standards. Individuals who complete approved programmes will meet proficiency standards, which set out what a registrant should know, understand and be able to do when they complete their education and training. The education standards are outcome focused, enabling education providers to deliver programmes in different ways, as long as individuals who complete the programme meet the relevant proficiency standards.

Our regulatory approach

We are flexible, intelligent and data-led in our quality assurance of programme clusters and programmes. Through our processes, we:

- enable bespoke, proportionate and effective regulatory engagement with education providers;
- use data and intelligence to enable effective risk-based decision making; and
- engage at the organisation, profession and programme levels to enhance our ability to assess the impact of risks and issues on HCPC standards.

Providers and programmes are [approved on an open-ended basis](#), subject to ongoing monitoring. Programmes we have approved are listed [on our website](#).

The approval process

Institutions and programmes must be approved by us before they can run. The approval process is formed of two stages:

- Stage 1 – we take assurance that institution level standards are met by the institution delivering the proposed programme(s)

- Stage 2 – we assess to be assured that programme level standards are met by each proposed programme

Through the approval process, we take assurance in a bespoke and flexible way, meaning that we will assess whether providers and programmes meet standards based on what we see, rather than by a one size fits all approach. Our standards are split along institution and programme level lines, and we take assurance at the provider level wherever possible.

This report focuses on the assessment of the self-reflective portfolio and evidence.

How we make our decisions

We make independent evidence based decisions about programme approval. For all assessments, we ensure that we have profession specific input in our decision making. In order to do this, we appoint [partner visitors](#) to design quality assurance assessments, and assess evidence and information relevant to the assessment. Visitors make recommendations to the Education and Training Committee (ETC). Education providers have the right of reply to the recommendation. If an education provider wishes to, they can supply 'observations' as part of the process.

The ETC make the decisions about the approval and ongoing approval of programmes. In order to do this, they consider recommendations detailed in process reports, and any observations from education providers (if submitted). The Committee takes decisions through different levels depending on the routines and impact of the decision, and where appropriate meets in public. Their decisions are available to view [on our website](#).

The assessment panel for this review

We appointed the following panel members to support this review:

Fleur Kitsell	Lead visitor, Physiotherapist
Jennifer Caldwell	Lead visitor, Occupational therapist
Louise Winterburn/	Education Quality Officer
Kabir Kareem	Education Manager

Section 2: Institution-level assessment

The education provider context

The education provider currently delivers seven HCPC-approved programmes across six professions. It is a Higher Education Institution and has been running HCPC approved programmes since 2020.

The education provider engaged with the approval review process in the legacy model of quality assurance in 2020. They were introducing the BSc (Hons) Radiography (Radiotherapy and Oncology), and BSc (Hons) Radiography (Diagnostic Imaging) full time programmes. This review involved consideration of documentary evidence and a virtual approval visit, to consider whether the programmes meet our standards for the first time. After considering the education provider's response to the conditions set, we were satisfied that the conditions were met, and the programme was approved in 2020.

The education provider engaged with the approval process in the current model of quality assurance in 2021. They were introducing the MSc Occupational Therapy; MSc Speech and Language Therapy; MSc Dietetics, and MSc Podiatry programmes. We were satisfied that there was sufficient evidence to demonstrate that our standards were met, and that the programmes were approved by the Education and Training Committee in 2022.

Practice areas delivered by the education provider

The provider is approved to deliver training in the following professional areas. A detailed list of approved programme awards can be found in [Appendix 1](#) of this report.

	Practice area	Delivery level		Approved since
Pre-registration	Chiropodist / podiatrist	<input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate	2023
	Dietitian	<input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate	2023
	Occupational therapy	<input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate	2023
	Physiotherapist	<input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate	2021
	Radiographer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate	2020
	Speech and language therapist	<input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate	2023

Institution performance data

Data is embedded into how we understand performance and risk. We capture data points in relation to provider performance, from a range of sources. We compare provider data points to benchmarks, and use this information to inform our risk based decisions about the approval and ongoing approval of institutions and programmes.

This data is for existing provision at the institution, and does not include the proposed programme(s).

Data Point	Bench- mark	Value	Date	Commentary
Total intended learner numbers compared to total enrolment numbers	180	200	2023	<p>The benchmark figure is data we have captured from previous interactions with the education provider, such as through initial programme approval, and / or through previous performance review assessments. Resources available for the benchmark number of learners was assessed and accepted through these processes. The value figure is the benchmark figure, plus the number of learners the provider is proposing through the new provision.</p> <p>The value number shows an increase in their total learner numbers. I recommend we pay close attention to the resources in place to ensure they have capacity to support these learners and also the ratio of academic staff to learners.</p>
Learners – Aggregation of percentage not continuing	3%	2%	2020-21	<p>This data was sourced from a data delivery. This means the data is a bespoke Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data return, filtered based on HCPC-related subjects.</p> <p>The data point is below the benchmark, which suggests the provider is performing above sector norms.</p>

				<p>When compared to the previous year's data point, the education provider's performance has improved by 3%</p> <p>We did not explore this data point through this assessment because no impact on SETs were considered and the education provider is currently engaging with performance review where this was picked up.</p>
<p>Graduates – Aggregation of percentage in employment / further study</p>	93%	100%	2020-21	<p>This data was sourced from a data delivery. This means the data is a bespoke HESA data return, filtered based on HCPC-related subjects.</p> <p>The data point is above the benchmark, which suggests the provider is performing above sector norms.</p> <p>When compared to the previous year's data point, the education provider's performance has been maintained.</p> <p>We did not explore this data point through this assessment because it showed the education provider is performing well in this area and no impact on the SETs were considered.</p>
<p>Learner positivity score</p>	75.2%	66.8%	2023	<p>This National Student Survey (NSS) positivity score data was sourced at the subject level. This means the data is for HCPC-related subjects.</p>

				The data point is below the benchmark, which suggests the provider is performing below sector norms. We explored this data point through email clarification although no impact on SETs were considered.
HCPC performance review cycle length	N/A	tbc	2023	The education provider is currently engaging in performance review for the period 2018-2023.

The route through stage 1

Institutions which run HCPC-approved provision have previously demonstrated that they meet institution-level standards. When an existing institution proposes a new programme, we undertake an internal review of whether we need to undertake a full partner-led review against our institution level standards, or whether we can take assurance that the proposed programme(s) aligns with existing provision.

As part of the request to approve the proposed programme(s), the education provider supplied information to show alignment in the following areas.

The education provider explained how their HCPC approved MSc Physiotherapy (pre-registration) programme has been running for two and there are plans to grow learner numbers. As a result, they have developed second MSc Physiotherapy programme which will be based in Dublin Ireland in partnership with Portobello Institute. The programme will be delivered by AECC University College and have access to the placement opportunities provided by the Portobello Institute.

Admissions

Findings on alignment with existing provision:

- **Information for applicants –**
 - The education provider has explained how all programmes have a course-specific downloadable document on the website. This document outlines the specific information learners need for the programme and will apply to the MSc Physiotherapy (pre-registration) programme.
 - The education provider stated their Recruitment, Selection, and Admission Regulations and Policy are set at the institution level and

will apply to all programmes. This policy contains information on admissions principles and the application process, information for applicants on deferred entry, and applicants requiring a visa to study in the UK.

- The policies are institution-wide and will apply to the proposed programme.
- **Assessing English language, character, and health –**
 - The education provider has stated that specific information for programmes will be in the 'Admissions regulations and entry requirements' section of the course specification document.
 - The 'Recruitment, Selection and Admission Regulations' and the 'Recruitment, Selection and Admission Policy and Procedure: Taught Courses' documents contain information on; English language proficiency. They also contain information on English language details which are on individual course pages.
 - Admissions are subject to the receipt of a satisfactory enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate or National Police Certificate for those living outside of the UK.
 - Each programme webpage and applicant information pack contain information for applicants on the health requirements of learners, including vaccination and occupational health assessments.
 - Overseas applicants will require International English Language Testing System (IELTS) with an overall score of 7.0 with no less than 6.5 in each component or equivalent.
 - The policies are institution-wide and will apply to the proposed programme.
- **Prior learning and experience (AP(E)L)**
 - Information on this area is outlined in the education provider's 'Recruitment, Selection and Admission Policy' document and in the 'Policy and Procedures for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)' document. All applicants undergo a thorough initial assessment process.
 - This policy is set at the institution level and will apply to all programmes.
- **Equality, diversity and inclusion**
 - The education provider has referred to their 'Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Policy' in support of this area. This policy is set at institutional level and will apply to all programmes.
 - The education provider has an Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Policy which explains how they are committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive culture which offers equality and opportunity for all. This is achieved by eliminating unlawful discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and promoting respectful relations on campus.
 - The education provider also refers to their 'Criminal Convictions Procedure' policy which aims to promote a duty of care to ensure the safety of all stakeholders. All applicants who present a criminal

conviction will be carefully assessed against any potential risk to the education provider's staff and learners.

- The policies are institution-wide and will apply to the proposed programme.

Non-alignment requiring further assessment: None

Management and governance

Findings on alignment with existing provision:

- **Ability to deliver provision to expected threshold level of entry to the Register¹**
 - The education provider has a number of policies which they reference in support of this area. The 'Course Design Framework' policy includes information on how the education provider ensures that programmes are delivered at the appropriate level.
 - The education provider has stated their 'Management and Academic Governance' and their 'Course and Unit Monitoring Policy' contain information on how approved course and unit specifications are set and the appropriate Framework for Higher Education Qualification (FHEQ) level identified. This is explored as part of programme approval and review.
 - The education provider delivers a number of HCPC approved programmes and have been running the MSc Physiotherapy programme successfully since 2021. The delivery of the proposed programme is monitored through policies and processes already in existence.
 - The policies are institution-wide and will apply to the proposed programme.
- **Sustainability of provision**
 - The education provider has referred to their 'Business Continuity Management (BCM) Policy'. They state that learners will be taught by AECC University College academic staff and qualified professional practitioners with relevant expertise. The staff base is supported by a visiting faculty approach through partnership with local healthcare providers.
 - The education provider has stated that a business case must be presented to the University College's Senior Management Group for internal consideration and approval as part of the overall course consideration process. The provider also has a periodic review process to ensure that the curriculum is contemporary, and the programme is fit for purpose and sustainable.

¹ This is focused on ensuring providers are able to deliver qualifications at or equivalent to the level(s) in SET 1, as required for the profession(s) proposed

- The programme will be funded through Student tuition fees and Office for Students high-cost subject recurrent teaching allocation (price group B).
- The policies are institution-wide and will apply to the proposed programme.
- **Effective programme delivery**
 - The education provider uses their 'Course and Unit Monitoring Policy' to support effective programme delivery. All programmes have steering groups who meet regularly to discuss, develop and deliver the programme action plan. There is also an annual monitoring and reporting process for individual programmes.
 - Each programme sits within a specific academic School where Course Leaders are line managed by the Head of that School. The Head sits on the Institution's Senior Management Team and reports directly to the Board of Governors. This demonstrates the education providers' institutional management process relating to the running of programmes.
 - Appropriate qualification and experience (being HCPC registered and a member of the relevant professional body) are articulated as essential criteria in the job description for all academic staff appointed to the programme.
 - The policies are institution-wide and will apply to the proposed programme.
- **Effective staff management and development**
 - The education provider has a 'People Policy' and 'Staff Development Policy' which sets out their approach to staff management. This contributes to effective management and development of staff.
 - The education provider explained how staff development includes all policies, practices, and procedures to support and develop the capabilities of staff. This aims to improve the quality of their work and to ensure success of the education provider. It is an ongoing process, closely linked to their annual appraisal process.
 - To ensure that learners are taught and guided in their learning by appropriately qualified staff, all non-clinical academic staff are expected to have, or be working towards, a PhD or other doctoral qualification. Clinical staff must have full registration with the relevant PSRB and conform to the continuing professional development (CPD) requirements of the relevant regulator and/or professional body.
 - New staff without teaching experience are encouraged to complete a Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching or equivalent, with support for achieving recognition as a Fellow of Advance HE.
 - Staff involved with delivery and management of the proposed programme will be existing staff with plans approved to appoint further physiotherapy specific staffing for delivery of the programme in Dublin.
 - The policies are institution-wide and will apply to the proposed programme.

- **Partnerships, which are managed at the institution level**
 - The 'Course Consideration, Approval and Periodic Review Policy and Procedure' document functions to establish the procedure all new programme proposals must adhere to before being accepted for development and validation. This policy is set at the institution level and will apply to all programmes.
 - The education provider has an institution wide 'Placement Policy' that outlines the process for the identification, approval, and ongoing monitoring of student practice placements.
 - The ARF states that placement provider partnerships and agreements are coordinated by the University College Executive Team and signed off by the Vice-Chancellor.
 - The education provider states they have been working in partnership with the Portobello Institute, an education provider based in Dublin, Ireland. The Portobello Institute are a small specialist education provider who have access to placement opportunities for learners based in Dublin. AECC aim to develop the second MSc Physiotherapy programme delivered in Dublin to facilitate access to these placement opportunities.
 - The policies are institution-wide and will apply to the proposed programme.

Non-alignment requiring further assessment: None

Quality, monitoring, and evaluation

Findings on alignment with existing provision:

- **Academic quality**
 - The education provider has several policies and mechanisms in place to manage and monitor academic quality. These include their 'Course Design Framework' policy and the 'Education Strategy.' Academic quality monitoring is an ongoing process and is key to the continuous enhancement of learners' experiences of their programmes.
 - The baseline document states that all programmes undergo continuous monitoring and Course Leaders complete an annual monitoring report form. The forms are considered through an internal review process and received by Academic Standards and Quality Committee, which is a committee of Academic Board. Annual monitoring leads to the development of a course action plan that is monitored by the relevant Course Steering Committee throughout the year.
 - All programmes are reviewed every six years. The procedure is the same as for new programmes, but also includes consideration of a range of qualitative and quantitative monitoring data.
 - Changes to programmes between reviews are managed through the institutional 'Course and Unit Modification' policy. To ensure institutional oversight, any changes to programmes approved at

programme level are reported to the institutional Academic Standards and Quality Committee.

- The policies are institution-wide and will apply to the proposed programme.
- **Practice quality, including the establishment of safe and supporting practice learning environments**
 - The education provider uses their 'Placement Policy' to outline the requirements and expectations for course teams involved in the organisation, approval, and ongoing management of placement learning.
 - The education provider's institutional 'Placement Policy' sets out arrangements for learner concerns and whistleblowing, emphasising its importance, and the need to support learners. At the programme level, specific arrangements covering 'whistleblowing,' etc., are included in each Placement Handbook. Guidance on conduct and ethics is embedded in the curriculum, which focuses on expectations regarding reporting concerns.
 - The education provider outlines the specific role and responsibilities of the Practice Educator, including their level of experience and qualification in the Practice Educator Handbook. The education provider has also stated that they will run training and continuing professional development (CPD) for Practice Educators to further ensure the required knowledge, skills, and experience are developed in Practice Educators working with learners.
 - The education provider states that the Portobello Institute have a long-established placement provision for a number of their current programmes. Career prospects of learners are maximised via successful engagement with a wide variety of employers in sports, healthcare and private and public sector to offer placement-based learning, as well as internship opportunities.
 - The policies are institution-wide and will apply to the proposed programme.
- **Learner involvement**
 - The education provider refers to their 'Course and Unit Monitoring Policy' and the 'Student Engagement Policy' to demonstrate learner involvement in the programme. Learners at both mid and end points of individual units of study provide feedback on their programmes. All years of study have at least one student representative who sits on the Course Steering Group and the university-wide Student Experience Committee.
 - The 'Course Design Framework' and 'Course Consideration Policy' include the institutional expectation that learners are involved in the design process for new programmes, and this is tested as part of the course consideration/approval process. Groups of learners are invited to meet with the course consideration panel to give feedback on the learning experience.

- Student representatives for each programme are members of the Course Steering Committee. The remit of the Committee is to maintain the academic standards of the programme and to ensure that it operates in accordance with the approved programme specification. The Committee also seeks to maintain and enhance the quality of learning opportunities, ensuring that issues requiring improvement are addressed, and good practice shared.
- There is learner representation on all committees of the Academic Board and on the Board of Governors. The Student Experience Committee has the specific remit to promote and facilitate a two-way channel of communication between learners and staff. This relates to learner experience and enhancement, support services, and learner engagement in academic governance.
- The policies are institution-wide and will apply to the proposed programme.
- **Service user and carer involvement**
 - The education provider uses their 'Sharing Patient and Community Experience' (SPaCE) Group, along with other groups that contribute to this area, to demonstrate service user and carer involvement. The 'Friends of the Clinic' group of service users provides regular feedback and input into the delivery of services in the AECC University College Clinic. The clinic will provide some placements for learners on HCPC approved courses. This feedback is reported directly to a Clinical Governance Group. In the clinic, the patient voice is also collected through annual questionnaires and comment cards.
 - The education provider has stated that by working with service users and carers, they can provide person-centred care to patients in the local community and appropriate education to healthcare learners.
 - The policies are institution-wide and will apply to the proposed programme.

Non-alignment requiring further assessment: None.

Learners

Findings on alignment with existing provision:

- **Support**
 - The education provider offers a broad range of support services via their onsite Student Services Team. This provision also includes well-being advice and counselling services. Learners are also able to talk to their assigned Personal Tutor regarding pastoral issues, as well as any tutor they feel they can confide in.
 - The institutional 'Placement Policy' sets out overarching arrangements for student concerns and whistleblowing, emphasising its importance, and the need to support learners.

- The 'Student Complaints Policy and Procedure' is set at the institutional level and applies to learners on all programmes leading to AECC University College awards. The policy considers the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) good practice guidance. Learners are encouraged to raise and resolve complaints informally in the first instance. If this does not address their concerns, there is a three-stage complaints procedure. At the end of the process, learners may take a complaint to the OIA.
- The policies are institution-wide and will apply to the proposed programme.
- **Ongoing suitability**
 - The education provider has referred to several mechanisms as being in place to determine learners' ongoing suitability. This includes the 'Fitness to Study' and the 'Fitness to Practice' (FtP) policies, as well as the 'Student Disciplinary Policy.' Any concerns relating to the ongoing suitability of learners' conduct, character, and health will be addressed institutionally through these policies.
 - The education provider has an established Student Monitoring and Wellbeing Group that meets regularly for each programme. They consider matters related to individual learner progress, including academic performance, skills attainment, attendance requirements, and well-being issues. This group considers and helps to identify learners who perform below the required standard or are in danger of doing so, makes recommendations, and monitors outcomes.
 - The policies are institution-wide and will apply to the proposed programme.
- **Learning with and from other learners and professionals (IPL/E)**
 - The education provider has a specific guidance document for learners within the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, providing information on interprofessional education and learning. This involves shared learning with other relevant healthcare profession-focused programmes, as well as in-placement learning.
 - Placement Handbooks and unit descriptors are utilised to introduce learners to concepts of interprofessional learning and interprofessional practice at the start of all programmes. There is joint delivery of units across health profession-focused programmes to foster interprofessional education, and interprofessional learning forms a core part of the placement experiences of learners.
 - The policies are institution-wide and will apply to the proposed programme.
- **Equality, diversity and inclusion**
 - The education provider has stated that they are committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive culture that offers equality and opportunity for all by eliminating unlawful discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity, and promoting respectful relations on campus. This

commitment is evidenced through their 'Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging Policy.

- The education provider utilises its Changing the Culture working group, a joint University College/Students' Union group, to collaborate on bringing about cultural change and undertaking activities to promote an inclusive culture. This includes initiatives related to Black Lives Matter, disability, LGBTQ+, mental health, and well-being.
- The policies are institution-wide and will apply to the proposed programme.

Non-alignment requiring further assessment: None.

Assessment

Findings on alignment with existing provision:

- **Objectivity**
 - To ensure objectivity in assessments, the education provider has existing policies, procedures, and regulations in place, including the 'Course Design Framework' policy, 'Assessment Criteria' policy, and 'Academic Misconduct' policy. The education provider asserts that all assessments align with these policies, as well as with the 'Assessment Regulations' and the 'Marking and Moderation Policy,' which are institutional-wide policies.
 - The institutional 'Setting and Scrutiny of Assessments Policy and Procedure,' referenced in the baseline document, guides the scrutiny of assessments to ensure validity, reliability, and accurate assessment documentation. Implementation occurs at the School level, where all assessments have clear criteria objectively mapped to institutional generic assessment criteria.
 - The policies are institution-wide and will apply to the proposed programme.
- **Progression and achievement**
 - The education provider has confirmed that assessment regulations operate institutionally, outlining requirements for progression and awards. If necessary, specific regulations for individual programmes are approved separately. Learner progress aligns with Assessment Regulations and the Marking and Moderation policy.
 - Course Specifications and the University College Student Handbook direct learners to approved assessment regulations for details on progression and achievement.
 - The Course Handbook will convey information on programmes with specific minimum attendance requirements. Failing to meet these requirements will impact the learner's ability to pass the unit and proceed with their studies.
 - The policies are institution-wide and will apply to the proposed programme.

- **Appeals**

- The education provider has stated that appeals across the institution are managed in accordance with the referenced policies, which include the 'Academic Appeals Policy and Procedures (Taught Awards),' 'Disciplinary Policy,' and 'Employer and Apprentice Complaints Policy (Apprenticeships).' This process is already in place and in use for their existing provision.
- Appeals follow a two-stage process: stage 1 involves an informal discussion, and stage 2 includes a panel review. At the end of this process, learners may escalate a complaint to the OIA.
- The policies are institution-wide and will apply to the proposed programme.

Non-alignment requiring further assessment: None

Outcomes from stage 1

We decided to progress to stage 2 of the process without further review through stage 1, due to the clear alignment of the new provision within existing institutional structures, as noted through the previous section.

Education and training delivered by this institution is underpinned by the provision of the following key facilities:

The education provider explained how Portobello Institute is strategically located in the heart of Dublin, making it easily accessible via various modes of transport. The institute's two large buildings are well-connected to different parts of the city, with convenient access to bus and train stations, ensuring that students and staff can commute with ease.

The facilities within these buildings are designed to support both academic and extracurricular activities. They include:

- **Offices for Academic and Support Staff:** These offices provide spaces for faculty and administrative staff to work and support students.
- **Classrooms:** Equipped with modern teaching aids to facilitate effective learning.
- **Library:** A resource-rich environment for students to study and access academic materials.
- **On-site Clinic:** Offers healthcare services to students and staff.
- **Gym:** A well-equipped fitness center for physical well-being.
- **Labs and Clinical Skills Lab:** These labs are essential for practical learning and skill development in various fields.
- **Learner Canteen and Rest Room:** Spaces for students to relax, eat, and socialize.

Risks identified which may impact on performance: None

Outstanding issues for follow up: None

Section 3: Programme-level assessment

Programmes considered through this assessment

Programme name	Mode of study	Profession (including modality) / entitlement	Proposed learner number, and frequency	Proposed start date
MSc Physiotherapy (pre-registration)	FT (Full time)	Physiotherapy	40 learners, one cohort per year	16/09/2024

The education provider shared that their HCPC-approved MSc Physiotherapy (pre-registration) program has been running for two years and they plan to increase student enrolment. Consequently, they have developed a second MSc Physiotherapy program, which will be based in Dublin, Ireland, in collaboration with Portobello Institute. This program will be delivered by AECC University College and will benefit from the placement opportunities offered by Portobello Institute.

Stage 2 assessment – provider submission

The education provider was asked to demonstrate how they meet programme level standards for each programme. They supplied information about how each standard was met, including a rationale and links to supporting information via a mapping document.

Quality themes identified for further exploration

We reviewed the information provided, and worked with the education provider on our understanding of their submission. Based on our understanding, we defined and undertook the following quality assurance activities linked to the quality themes referenced below. This allowed us to consider whether the education provider met our standards.

We have reported on how the provider meets standards, including the areas below, through the [Findings section](#).

Quality theme 1 – process for ensuring effective and ongoing collaboration with practice placement providers.

Area for further exploration: The education provider supplied limited information about how their processes for interacting with practice placement providers. The visitors noted the education provider had explained how placements were sourced but had not explained the process for ensuring ongoing regular collaboration. They decided to explore this through quality activity to identify the education provider's processes for ensuring regular and effective engagement with practice education providers.

This is important because the education provider needs to have effective processes to ensure practice placement providers offer safe and relevant supportive learning environment for learners. There is risk to quality of the programmes and learning & safety of learners if there are no effective collaboration processes between the education provider and the practice education providers. It is also particularly important because the programme will be delivered in Dublin, Ireland. As a result, the visitors requested further information about their engagement with the practice education providers in Dublin.

Quality activities agreed to explore theme further: We agreed to explore this area further by requesting email and documentary evidence from the education provider. We considered this would be the most effective method to understand how the programme demonstrated this area.

Outcomes of exploration: In response to this quality theme, the education provider submitted an explanation of their initial placement sourcing strategy. This document outlines the process for identifying practice placements, ensuring alignment with HCPC requirements. In Dublin, partnerships with physiotherapy providers have been established to offer placement education. Additionally, a dedicated Placement Coordinator in Dublin will manage contracts and communication with placement providers with the aim ensuring learners have a positive placement experience.

They explained how support for educators will increase around each placement module. Group drop-in session will be held weekly during placements and starting two weeks prior to quickly address concerns or questions. Each placement practice provider will have a Placement Link Lecturer as the main liaison between the education provider and practice educators. They will gather feedback, address issues and complete mid-placement and formal assessments. After each placement block, feedback from practice educators will be gathered through evaluations, surveys, and a stakeholder meeting. This input will be used to update the curriculum. Practice educators will also be invited to an end-of-year steering group meeting to influence course content and teaching methods.

The visitors agreed the education provider have submitted an appropriate response to this quality activity. The education provider has established a comprehensive placement sourcing strategy, including partnerships in Dublin and a dedicated

Placement Coordinator. Enhanced educator support through drop-in sessions and Placement Link Lecturers should ensure effective communication and feedback. Post-placement evaluations and an end-of-year steering group meeting will further refine the curriculum, fostering a positive placement experience for learners.

Quality theme 2-ensuring practice educators have the expertise and skills to support safe and effective learning

Area for further exploration: The visitors observed that the education provider did not adequately explain how they would ensure that practice educators possess the necessary relevant knowledge, skills, and experience to effectively support safe learning. They also noted the handbook referred to voluntary workshops practice educators can attend which introduces relevant procedures and policies.

The visitors were concerned about whether the education provider had appropriate process to ensure practice educators possess the necessary expertise related to the field they would be supervising. This is a risk because they need to understand the subject matter, practice skill, and any specific requirements for safe and effective practice. It is important for the education provider to demonstrate how they meet the relevant standard because practice educators are responsible for supporting learners during their work placements.

Quality activities agreed to explore theme further: We agreed to explore this area further by requesting email and documentary evidence from the education provider. We considered this would be the most effective method to understand how the programme demonstrated this area.

Outcomes of exploration: In response to this quality theme, the education provider stated the Practice Educator Handbook provides information on information regarding the practice educator's relevant knowledge, skills and experience to support safe and effective learning. They stated practice educators can access their internal register so that the practice-based learning lead for each organisation knows who is qualified to supervise students on placement and can allocate appropriately. As well as providing this e-learning to their Practice Educators, they also have a website for practice educators to access for course information and support. They have developed a process of supporting the practice educators based in Dublin in mirroring the practice educator model of learning and development for learners studying in Dublin.

The visitors agreed the education provider have demonstrated they have a process to support practice educators, ensuring they have the necessary knowledge and skills and resources for effective learning. They are satisfied that the standard for this area has been met.

Outcomes of exploration:

Section 4: Findings

This section details the visitors' findings from their review through stage 2, including any requirements set, and a summary of their overall findings.

Overall findings on how standards are met

This section provides information summarising the visitors' findings against the programme-level standards. The section also includes a summary of risks, further areas to be followed up, and areas of good practice.

Findings of the assessment panel:

- **SET 1: Level of qualification for entry to the Register** – This standard is covered through institution-level assessment.
- **SET 2: Programme admissions** –
 - The programme documentation clearly articulates the entry and selection criteria of the programme.
 - The admissions requirements are provided on the website so that applicants can make an informed decision about the programme. Entry requirements are also set out in the MSc Physiotherapy Dublin Student Journey document.
 - We were satisfied that the entry criteria are appropriate to the level of the programme and will in turn ensure that learners are able to meet our standards for registration once they have successfully completed the programme.
 - Therefore, the visitors were satisfied that the relevant standards in this SET area are met.
- **SET 3: Programme governance, management and leadership** –
 - There is evidence of stakeholder meetings and agreements between practice placement providers for the structure of the programme. A Placement Sourcing Strategy document sets out the work undertaken to identify placement sites in Dublin in a variety of professional areas.
 - The MSc Physiotherapy Dublin Student Journey sets out the arrangements for staff delivering the programme in Dublin. Learners will be taught by AECC University College academic staff and professional practitioners. This will include HCPC registered physiotherapists. Through [quality theme 1](#), the visitors explored how the education provider ensures there is a process to ensure effective and ongoing collaboration with practice education providers. The education provider addressed the concern by explaining the placement sourcing strategy. This includes partnerships and a dedicated Placement coordinator in Dublin.
 - The education provider explained how learners were actively involved in developing the MSc Physiotherapy (pre-reg) programme. Learner representatives from each year participate in the Course Steering Group and the broader 'Student Voice' committee. All learners provide feedback through mid and end-of-unit evaluations and at the programme level.

- They explained how they have a significant expertise to non-physiotherapy aspects of the curriculum. Examples of these include human science, psychology, exercise prescription, and musculoskeletal therapy. The programme is supported by full-time Senior Lecturers and a team of qualified physiotherapists, exercise physiologists, and experts in various medical fields. These professionals have extensive teaching and practice educator experience. The diverse educator backgrounds enhance the integrated programme, with associate tutors and practice educators delivering practical sessions to promote evidence-based learning, in close collaboration with the core team at the education provider.
- The visitors agreed this standard has been met. The education provider demonstrated they have effective processes in place to manage the programme.
- **SET 4: Programme design and delivery –**
 - Evidence in the mapping document and unit specifications showed that outcomes meet the standards of proficiency for physiotherapists.
 - The mapping document showed that learning outcomes ensure that learners can meet the standards of conduct, performance and ethics. This was evidenced in the module content within the Professional Practice Units.
 - The information provided in the annual review of course content, and practice educators reviews from Ireland and the UK, demonstrated that the programme is relevant to current physiotherapy practice and development of the profession.
 - There is clear evidence of the integration of theory and practice within the programmes. This is demonstrated within the Practice Educators and Students Practice Handbooks.
 - We noted that the learning and teaching methods are appropriate to the effective delivery of the learning outcomes. This was evidenced in the Learning and Teaching Strategies and Methods section within the Course Specification document. This includes small group learning activities, simulated learning, work-based learning and case presentations. This is alongside scheduled lectures, seminars, tutorials and practical classes.
 - There was sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the programme has been designed in a way that would ensure that learners who complete it meet our standards for their professional knowledge and skills and are fit to practise.
- **SET 5: Practice-based learning –**
 - Practice-based learning is clearly described in the Programme Specification documentation and in the MSc Physiotherapy Dublin Student Journey and Practice Placement Handbooks.
 - Learners will undertake a minimum of 1000 hours of mandatory clinical/applied practice placements. Core areas include cardiorespiratory care, neurological and musculoskeletal specialities, as well as areas such as primary community care and older adult and disability specialities. This enables learners to develop their skills and competencies to meet the

learning outcomes and standards of proficiency to register. This is for both HCPC and CORU (the regulator Health and Social Care Professionals in Ireland). The placement setting will be in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Learners will be supported by practice educators in clinical settings.

- The education provider delivers training and continuous professional development to practice educators to ensure they have the necessary knowledge and skills to support learners on the programme. This training will also be available for those supporting the Dublin-based programme. The Placement Handbook specifies a six week notice period for placement preparation. Through [quality theme 2](#), the visitors explored how the education provider will effective and ongoing collaboration with practice educators especially in Dublin. The education provider has developed a thorough placement sourcing strategy, incorporating partnerships in Dublin and appointing a dedicated Placement Coordinator.
- The visitors agreed this standard has been met. The education provider has demonstrated they have appropriate processes in place to ensure practice based learning is appropriate and effective.
- **SET 6: Assessment –**
 - The education provider submitted a standards of proficiency (SOPs) mapping, unit specification documents, a programme specification document and Physiotherapy Dublin Students Handbook to support this standard.
 - The visitors noted a good range of assessments are used throughout the programme as articulated in the Course Specification document, 'Assessment Strategy and Methods' section. Methods of assessment include group and individual presentations, reflective reports, role plays as well as research proposals and portfolios and a dissertation.
 - Assessment methods have been developed and selected for their ability to assess the Programme Learning Outcomes and to comply with the education provider's assessment policies. Learners will receive explanatory and diagnostic feedback, as well as receiving grades.
 - Standards of professional practice are embedded into programme learning.
 - The visitors saw sufficient evidence to determine that all standards within this SET area are met.

Risks identified which may impact on performance: 'None'.

Section 5: Referrals

This section summarises any areas which require further follow-up through a separate quality assurance process (the approval, focused review, or performance review process).

Recommendations

We include recommendations when standards are met at or just above threshold level, and where there is a risk to that standard being met in the future. They do not need to be met before programmes can be approved, but they should be considered by education providers when developing their programmes.

Standard 3.5- There must be regular and effective collaboration between the education provider and practice education providers.

The education provider gave limited details on their interaction processes with practice placement providers. While they explained how placements were sourced, they didn't clarify how ongoing collaboration was maintained

Through the quality activity process, the education provider outlined their placement sourcing strategy, meeting HCPC requirements. They formed partnerships with Dublin physiotherapy providers and appointed a Placement Coordinator.

Educator support will include weekly drop-in sessions starting two weeks before placements. Each provider will have a Placement Link Lecturer for feedback and assessments. Post-placement feedback will be gathered through evaluations, surveys, and meetings to update the curriculum. An end-of-year steering group meeting will further refine course content and teaching methods.

The visitors want to review the effectiveness of the education provider's placement sourcing strategy. The risk they want to address to ensure that the processes the education provider has in place do offer a safe and relevant supportive learning environment for learners. As a result, the visitors have suggested this reviewed as part of our focused review process.

Standard 5.6- Practice educators must have relevant knowledge, skills and experience to support safe and effective learning and, unless other arrangements are appropriate, must be on the relevant part of the Register

The visitors noted that the education provider explained how they ensure practice educators are qualified. However, the visitors were concerned about ensuring practice educators had the necessary expertise. This is important for safe and effective practice. The education provider needed show how they met these standards, as practice educators support learners during placements.

Through the quality activity process, the education provider explained how they ensured practice educators are qualified through a handbook and an internal

register. They offer e-learning and a support website. They also support Dublin-based educators similarly to those in Dublin.

The visitors want to ensure that the processes for verifying practice educators' qualifications are effective. They aim to confirm that learners are supported and supervised by qualified educators. Additionally, they want to review how support educators are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills for effective learning.

Summary of issue: Concerns about the management practice placements of the Portobello Institute in Dublin.

The Visitors have recommended that the program undergo a future-focused review due to its unique nature and its location in Dublin, Ireland. This review would also allow for an assessment of how practice placements, previously evaluated during the quality activity process, are being managed. The Visitors expressed concerns about the ongoing collaboration and the effective management of these placements in Ireland, highlighting a potential risk that learners may not receive an adequate practice-based learning experience.

We have referred this to the focused review process for the 2026-2027 academic year to assess how the concerns raised by the Visitors have been addressed and the processes implemented.

Section 6: Decision on approval process outcomes

Assessment panel recommendation

Based on the findings detailed in section 4, the visitors recommend to the Education and Training Committee that all standards are met, and therefore the programme should be approved.,

Appendix 1 – summary report

If the education provider does not provide observations, only this summary report (rather than the whole report) will be provided to the Education and Training Committee (Panel) to enable their decision on approval. The lead visitors confirm this is an accurate summary of their recommendation, and the nature, quality and facilities of the provision.

Education provider	Case reference	Lead visitors	Quality of provision	Facilities provided
AECC University College	CAS-01490-X3V9G6	Fleur Kitsell Jennifer Caldwell	<p>Through this assessment, we have noted:</p> <p>The programme(s) meet all the relevant HCPC education standards and therefore should be approved.</p>	<p>The facilities within these buildings are designed to support both academic and extracurricular activities. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offices for Academic and Support Staff: These offices provide spaces for faculty and administrative staff to work and support students. • Classrooms: Equipped with modern teaching aids to facilitate effective learning. • Library: A resource-rich environment for students to study and access academic materials. • On-site Clinic: Offers healthcare services to students and staff. • Gym: A well-equipped fitness center for physical well-being.

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labs and Clinical Skills Lab: These labs are essential for practical learning and skill development in various fields. • Learner Canteen and Rest Room: Spaces for students to relax, eat, and socialize. <p>Additionally, the institute ensures that high-speed Wi-Fi is available throughout the buildings, supporting the digital needs of students and staff. Laptops can be borrowed from the reception area, providing flexibility for those who need them.</p> <p>Portobello Institute is also committed to future development. They are investing in a new campus that will feature:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Clinic Simulation Environments: These will provide realistic settings for students to practice clinical skills. • Human Performance Labs: Designed for research and practical learning in human
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				<p>performance and sports science.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anatomy (Non-Cadaveric) Facilities: These facilities will offer innovative ways to study anatomy without the use of cadavers. • Additional Classrooms and Office Space: To accommodate the growing number of students and staff. • Inclusive Spaces: The new campus will include facilities to support students with neurodiversity and mobility issues, ensuring an inclusive environment for all.
Programmes				
Programme name			Mode of study	Nature of provision
MSc Physiotherapy (pre-registration) Delivery in Dublin			Full time	Taught (HEI)

Appendix 2 – list of open programmes at this institution

Name	Mode of study	Profession	Modality	Annotation	First intake date
MSc Podiatry (Pre-registration)	FT (Full time)	Chiropodist / podiatrist			16/01/2023
MSc Dietetics (Pre-registration)	FT (Full time)	Dietitian			16/01/2023
MSc Occupational Therapy (pre-registration)	FT (Full time)	Occupational therapist			09/01/2023
MSc Physiotherapy (Pre-registration)	FT (Full time)	Physiotherapist			01/01/2021
BSc (Hons) Radiography (Diagnostic Imaging)	FT (Full time)	Radiographer	Diagnostic radiographer		01/09/2020
BSc (Hons) Radiography (Radiotherapy and Oncology)	FT (Full time)	Radiographer	Therapeutic radiographer		01/09/2020
MSc Speech and Language Therapy (pre-registration)	FT (Full time)	Speech and language therapist			09/01/2023