

HCPC approval process report

Education provider	University of Plymouth
Name of programme(s)	BSc (Hons) Physiotherapy, Full time MPhysio (Hons) Physiotherapy, Full time MSc Physiotherapy (pre-registration), Full time accelerated PgDip Physiotherapy (Pre-registration), Full time
Approval visit date	10-11 March 2020
Case reference	CAS-15497-R2Q0C3

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Executive Summary

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.

The following is a report on the approval process undertaken by the HCPC to ensure that programme(s) detailed in this report meet our standards of education and training (referred to through this report as ‘our standards’). The report details the process itself, the evidence considered, and recommendations made regarding programme approval.

Section 1: Our regulatory approach

Our standards

We approve programmes that meet our education standards, which ensure individuals that complete the programmes meet proficiency standards. The proficiency standards 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.

Programmes are normally [approved on an open-ended basis](#), subject to satisfactory engagement with our monitoring processes. Programmes we have approved are listed [on our website](#).

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 undertake assessment of evidence presented through our processes. The visitors make recommendations to the Education and Training Committee (ETC). Education providers have the right of reply to the recommendation of the visitors, inclusive of conditions and recommendations. If an education provider wishes to, they can supply 'observations' as part of the process.

The ETC make 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 meets in public on a regular basis and their decisions are available to view [on our website](#).

HCPC panel

We always appoint at least one partner visitor from the profession (inclusive of modality and / or entitlement, where applicable) with which the assessment is concerned. We also ensure that visitors are supported in their assessment by a member of the HCPC executive team. Details of the HCPC panel for this assessment are as follows:

Fleur Kitsell	Physiotherapist
Pamela Bagley	Physiotherapist
Frances Ashworth	Lay
Patrick Armsby	HCPC executive

Other groups involved in the approval visit

There were other groups in attendance at the approval visit as follows. Although we engage in collaborative scrutiny of programmes, we come to our decisions independently.

Paul Brunt	Independent chair (supplied by the education provider)	University of Plymouth
Jackie Hunt	Secretary (supplied by the education provider)	University of Plymouth
Shan Aguilar-Stone	Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) Panel member	CSP – Professional Body
Vicky Pearsall	CSP Panel member	CSP – Professional Body

Julie Wilkins	External panel member	Glyndwr University – External reviewer on behalf of Plymouth University.
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Section 2: Programme details

Programme name	BSc (Hons) Physiotherapy
Mode of study	FT (Full time)
Profession	Physiotherapist
First intake	01 September 2004
Maximum learner cohort	70 learners shared across all Physiotherapy programmes
Intakes per year	1
Assessment reference	APP02164

We undertook this assessment via the approval process, which involves consideration of documentary evidence and an onsite approval visit, to consider whether the programme continues to meet our standards. We decided to assess the programme via the approval process due to the outcome of a previous assessment. The education provider had made changes to this programme alongside the introduction of the programmes below.

Programme name	MPhysio (Hons) Physiotherapy
Mode of study	FT (Full time)
Profession	Physiotherapist
First intake	01 September 2020
Maximum learner cohort	70 learners shared across all Physiotherapy programmes
Intakes per year	1
Assessment reference	APP02166

We undertook this assessment of these new programmes proposed by the education provider via the approval process. This involves consideration of documentary evidence and an onsite approval visit, to consider whether the programme meet our standards for the first time. This programme is an integrated Masters and allows for learners to exit with a BSc (Hons) award.

Programme name	MSc Physiotherapy (pre-registration)
Mode of study	FT (Full time)
Profession	Physiotherapist
First intake	01 September 2021
Maximum learner cohort	70 learners shared across all Physiotherapy programmes
Intakes per year	1
Assessment reference	APP02167

Programme name	PgDip Physiotherapy (Pre-registration)
Mode of study	FT (Full time)
Profession	Physiotherapist
First intake	01 September 2020

Maximum learner cohort	70 learners shared across all Physiotherapy programmes
Intakes per year	1
Assessment reference	APP02246

We undertook this assessment of these new programmes proposed by the education provider via the approval process. This involves consideration of documentary evidence and an onsite approval visit, to consider whether the programme meet our standards for the first time.

Section 3: Requirements to commence assessment

In order for us to progress with approval and monitoring assessments, we ask for certain evidence and information from education providers. The following is a list of evidence that we asked for through this process, and whether that evidence was provided. Education providers are also given the opportunity to include any further supporting evidence as part of their submission. Without a sufficient level of evidence, we need to consider whether we can proceed with the assessment. In this case, we decided that we were able to undertake our assessment with the evidence provided.

Type of evidence	Submitted	Comments
Completed education standards mapping document	Yes	
Information about the programme, including relevant policies and procedures, and contractual agreements	Yes	
Descriptions of how the programme delivers and assesses learning	Yes	
Proficiency standards mapping	Yes	
Information provided to applicants and learners	Yes	
Information for those involved with practice-based learning	Yes	
Information that shows how staff resources are sufficient for the delivery of the programme	Yes	
Internal quality monitoring documentation	Yes	Only requested if the programme (or a previous version) is currently running

We also usually ask to meet the following groups at approval visits, although there may be some circumstances where meeting certain groups is not needed. In the table below, we have noted which groups we met, along with reasons for not meeting certain groups (where applicable):

Group	Met	Comments
Learners	Yes	The panel met with current BSc (Hons) Physiotherapy learners as the programme is running.

Service users and carers (and / or their representatives)	Yes	
Facilities and resources	Yes	
Senior staff	Yes	
Practice educators	Yes	
Programme team	Yes	

Section 4: Outcome from first review

Recommendation of the visitors

In considering the evidence provided by the education provider as part of the initial submission and at the approval visit, the visitors' recommend that there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate that our standards are met at this time, but that the programme(s) should be approved subject to the conditions noted below being met.

Conditions

Conditions are requirements that must be met before programmes can be approved. We set conditions when there is insufficient evidence that standards are met. The visitors were satisfied that a number of the standards are met at this stage. However, the visitors were not satisfied that there is evidence that demonstrates that the following standards are met, for the reasons detailed below.

We expect education providers to review the issues identified in this report, decide on any changes that they wish to make to programmes, and then provide any further evidence to demonstrate how they meet the conditions. We set a deadline for responding to the conditions of 18 May 2020.

3.1 The programme must be sustainable and fit for purpose.

Condition: The programmes must reflect the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications to ensure it is fit for purpose.

Reason: In the programme specifications for the three programmes the visitors were able to see a section titled 'Programme Intended Learning Outcomes'. These learning outcomes were related to the programme overall rather than the assessed learning outcomes that were stated in the module descriptors. The visitors were satisfied that the assessed learning outcomes were appropriately mapped to the standards of proficiency for physiotherapists. However, they considered that the programme intended learning outcomes did not accurately reflect the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) which is set out by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and underpins all higher education qualifications in the UK.

To illustrate the visitors' issue, they have provided an example as follows. From the FHEQ the visitors noted that holders of a level 6 qualification must be able to 'critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be incomplete), to make judgements, and to frame appropriate questions to achieve a solution - or identify a range of solutions - to a problem'. For the BSc (hons) level 6 programme, an outcome for learners is 'The skills of problem solving, evaluation, clinical reasoning and reflective practice' under 'cognitive and intellectual skills' (section 8.2). For the level 7 programmes under the same heading an outcome for learners is

'The skills of complex problem solving, critical evaluation, clinical reasoning and reflective practice'.

The visitors considered that the level 6 programme intended learning outcome did not reflect the FHEQ level 6 requirements appropriately. The programme learning outcomes for level 7 were considered more reflective of FHEQ level 6 requirements. The HCPC normally expects the threshold entry route onto the Register for Physiotherapists to be a Bachelor degree with honours (level 6). The FHEQ sets out the philosophy, core values, skills and knowledge base for qualifications at this level and so the programme must reflect this accurately to ensure that learners are appropriately prepared for entering the Register. As the current programme intended learning outcomes do not appropriately show that learners will be effectively prepared to enter the profession, the visitors considered that this impacted the programmes ability to be fit for purpose. Therefore, the education provider must show that the programme intended learning outcomes appropriately reflect the FHEQ to ensure the programme is fit for purpose.

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. Recommendations do not need to be met before programmes can be approved, but they should be considered by education providers when developing their programmes.

2.1 The admissions process must give both the applicant and the education provider the information they require to make an informed choice about whether to take up or make an offer of a place on a programme.

Recommendation: The visitors recommend making detailed information around additional costs for learners available to applicants earlier in the application process, to enhance applicant's ability able to make an informed choice about whether to take up a place on the programme.

Reason: The visitors determined from the documentation provided and discussions at the visitors that learners were suitably informed about the programme and that there would be additional costs associated. They could also see information around available on the education providers website. However, at the visit the visitors were told that more detailed information about the nature of the additional costs would be provided at open days and interviews. The visitors understood the education providers approached but considered it would be more useful for applicants if this information was available at an earlier date. Therefore, the visitors recommend that the education provider provides more detailed information around additional costs for learners earlier in the application process.

Section 5: Visitors' recommendation

Considering the education provider's response to the conditions set out in section 4, the visitors are satisfied that the conditions are met and recommend that the programme(s) are approved.

This report, including the recommendation of the visitors, will be considered at the 02 July 2020 meeting of the ETC. Following this meeting, this report should be read alongside the ETC's decision notice, which are available [on our website](#).