

HCPC approval process report

Education provider	Buckinghamshire New University
Name of programme(s)	MSc Physiotherapy, Full time
Approval visit date	25 – 26 February 2021
Case reference	CAS-16241-T8M3K3

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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.

Through undertaking this process, we have noted areas that may need to be considered as part of future HCPC assessment processes in section 6 of this report.

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
Jo Jackson	Physiotherapist
Niall Gooch	HCPC executive

Other groups involved in the virtual approval visit

There were other groups involved with the approval process as follows. Although we engage in collaborative scrutiny of programmes, we come to our decisions independently.

Kevin Maher	Independent chair (supplied by the education provider)	Head of School for Business, Law and Computing, Buckinghamshire New University
Naj Riaz	Secretary (supplied by the education provider)	Buckinghamshire New University
Reena Patel	Assessor	College and Society of Physiotherapists

Dearbhla Gallagher	Internal panel member	Buckinghamshire New University
Melanie Hayward	Internal panel member	Buckinghamshire New University

Section 2: Programme details

Programme name	MSc Physiotherapy
Mode of study	FT (Full time)
Profession	Physiotherapist
Proposed first intake	01 September 2021
Maximum learner cohort	Up to 30
Intakes per year	1
Assessment reference	APP02279

We undertook this assessment of a new programme proposed by the education provider via the approval process. This involved consideration of documentary evidence and a virtual 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	No	Only requested if the programme (or a previous version) is currently running
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Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the education provider decided to move this event to a virtual (or remote) approval visit. In the table below, we have noted the meeting held, along with reasons for not meeting certain groups (where applicable):

Group	Met
Learners	Yes
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 virtual 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 30 April 2021.

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

3.6 There must be an effective process in place to ensure the availability and capacity of practice-based learning for all learners.

The following condition applies to the above standards. For simplicity, as the issue spans several standards, the education provider should respond to this condition as one issue.

Condition: The education provider must demonstrate how they will ensure ongoing effective collaboration with their practice partners, and that the collaboration can deliver sufficient availability and capacity of an appropriate scope and breadth of practice in practice-based learning.

Reason: The visitors were aware from the documentation and from discussions at the visit that the education provider had various contacts with the organisations that they were planning to use to provide practice-based learning. The main one of these was the London and South East Area Partnership for Placements (LSEAPP). In the initial submission the visitors had seen some information about meetings and contacts between the education provider and the LSEAPP, as well as about some of the other potential partners. This information provided the visitors with an overall understanding of how the education provider intended to use relationships with these bodies to deliver sufficient appropriate placements for the programme. They also had an opportunity to discuss placement development at the visit, and were given an update on further meetings and consultations that had taken place. However, they considered that they had not been provided with sufficient detail about how the collaboration would work going forward; they had not seen plans for further meetings, noting for example attendees and agenda items, or memoranda laying out relationships. They noted also that they had not seen evidence of how the education provider intends to finalise agreements with those bodies, and that there was a lack of information, either from the documentation or from the visit, about placement providers other than the LSEAPP. The visitors additionally considered that it was not clear how the relationships with placement partners would be managed at the education provider's end. They therefore were unable to determine whether the standards were met and require further evidence demonstrating that the education provider will have effective ongoing collaboration with providers of practice-based learning, and how this relationship delivers sufficient placement capacity for the programme to function effectively.

3.9 There must be an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff in place to deliver an effective programme.

Condition: The education provider must demonstrate how the current appointment process will ensure an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff, and what contingency planning is in place if an appointment is not made.

Reason: The visitors were aware that the education provider was planning to bring its staff team up to full strength and to fill certain skills and knowledge gaps through a recruitment process that was currently ongoing. The intention was to recruit two additional FTE. The visitors were able to discuss this at the visit and it had been indicated in the documentation. From these discussions, the visitors knew that the position had been advertised. They considered that the job description was appropriate, but they were not clear what the education provider's plan was if they were not able to make an appointment before the planned start of the programme. The visitors took the view that if the appointment was not made, the programme would not be able to run in the way intended by the education provider. They therefore require that the education provider submit further evidence showing that an appointment will be made and explaining what they would do if they were not able to make an appointment.

3.11 An effective programme must be in place to ensure the continuing professional and academic development of educators, appropriate to their role in the programme.

Condition: The education provider must demonstrate how they will ensure that clinical educators have access to appropriate continuing professional and academic development.

Reason: The visitors were satisfied with the arrangements for continuing professional development for the programme team, as outlined in the documentation and elaborated by the senior team during discussions at the visit. However, it was not clear to them from the initial evidence how the education provider would ensure that clinical educators working in practice-based learning settings would have access to professional and academic development. They asked about this at the visit. The senior team and the programme team both reported that they had plans to take this forward, but there was no formal evidence of what form the development would take. They therefore require further evidence showing that those working in supervision roles in practice-based learning would have access to appropriate development activities.

4.1 The learning outcomes must ensure that learners meet the standards of proficiency for the relevant part of the Register.

6.1 The assessment strategy and design must ensure that those who successfully complete the programme meet the standards of proficiency for the relevant part of the Register.

The following condition applies to the above standards. For simplicity, as the issue spans several standards, the education provider should respond to this condition as one issue.

Condition: The education provider must demonstrate how they will ensure that the learning outcomes on the programme are clearly aligned with the standards of proficiency, and that assessment will ensure that the learners meet the standards of proficiency.

Reason: The visitors reviewed the standards of proficiency (SOPs) mapping exercise during their documentary review. The education provider had mapped the SOPs to module outlines. However, the module outlines submitted at this stage of the process were so broad that the visitors were not able to understand how specific SOPs would be met by particular parts of the modules. SOPs were not connected to specific learning outcomes. This also meant that it was not clear how the SOPs would be delivered or assessed. As a result the visitors did not have a clear idea of how specifically the education provider intended to deliver and assess some of the knowledge, skills and aptitudes that learners would require for safe and effective practice.

During discussions at the visit the programme team stated that the details of the alignment of SOPs and learning outcomes would be finalised once they had recruited appropriate additional staff (see the condition under SET 3.9 above) who would be able to carry out this task. Nevertheless, at present the lack of clarity about the alignment of learning outcomes and SOPs made meant the visitors were unable to fully understand how the different parts of the programme would link together, and how the curriculum noted above would be assessed. They therefore were unable to determine that these standards were met, and require further evidence showing how the education provider will deliver and assess the standards of proficiency through the leaning outcomes.

4.4 The curriculum must remain relevant to current practice.

Condition: The education provider must clarify how they will ensure that the curriculum remains relevant to current practice.

Reason: The visitors were able to review the documentation relating to the module descriptors and the curriculum. They also asked the programme team about how they intended to maintain professional and clinical currency in the curriculum. The visitors understood that the education provider were relying on good relationships with practice partners to meet this standard. However, as noted in the condition under SETs 3.5 and 3.6 above, there remained some uncertainty about the form of these ongoing relationships, The visitors were therefore unclear that this standard was met, because they were not sure what the education provider's ongoing relationship with practice partners would look like and so were not sure how it would be used to ensure relevance to current practice. They require further evidence demonstrating that the curriculum will remain relevant to current practice.

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.

5.7 Practice educators must undertake regular training which is appropriate to their role, learners' needs and the delivery of the learning outcomes of the programme.

The following condition applies to the above standards. For simplicity, as the issue spans several standards, the education provider should respond to this condition as one issue.

Condition: The education provider must demonstrate how they will ensure that practice educators are suitable persons for their role, and that they are appropriately trained.

Reason: The visitors reviewed the documentation submitted by the education provider, and discussed how practice educators were going to be selected, prepared and trained for their roles. The visitors understood that there were clear plans for this, but they were not able to see detail for how the training and preparation would work. They considered that this was potentially linked to other parts of this report, for example the conditions set under SETs 3.5, 3.5 and 3.9 above, because it would be difficult for the education provider to clarify their plans for practice educators without clarifying their overall staffing situation and the relationships with practice partners. The visitors therefore require further evidence showing that practice educators will have relevant knowledge, skills and experience, and that they will undertake regular training.

6.3 Assessments must provide an objective, fair and reliable measure of learners' progression and achievement.

6.5 The assessment methods used must be appropriate to, and effective at, measuring the learning outcomes.

The following condition applies to the above standards. For simplicity, as the issue spans several standards, the education provider should respond to this condition as one issue.

Condition: The education provider must clarify how they will ensure that the assessments used on the programme are appropriate for assessing learner progress, and that they constitute a reliable and fair approach.

Reason: The visitors had reviewed the documentation as regards assessment, and asked the programme team about their approach. Some details about assessment were not clear either from the initial submission or from conversations at the visit. For example, the visitors were not given a clear understanding of how moderation would work. This was especially important given the planned small size of the programme team. They were also not clear about how assessment in placement was intended to be monitored and its quality assured. They considered that there was a link between this condition and the one set under SETs 4.1 and 6.1 above; the fact that SOPs were not clearly aligned to specific learning outcomes made it difficult for them to be sure that the assessment would be fair and reliable and that it would measure learning outcomes appropriately. They therefore require further evidence demonstrating how assessment will work.

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 26 May 2021 meeting of the ETC. Following this meeting, this report should be read alongside the ETC's decision notice, which are available [on our website](#).

Section 6: Future considerations for the programme(s)

We include this section to note areas that may need to be considered as part of future HCPC assessment processes. Education providers do not need to respond to this section at this time, but should consider whether to engage with the HCPC around these areas in the future.

With regard to the condition set under SET 3.9 above, the visitors considered that the standard was now met, because a staffing plan had been provided by the education provider which gave a clear idea of how they intended to recruit appropriate staff. However, they did want to flag for the education provider the need to keep under review the staffing arrangements on the programme in order to ensure sufficient staff if their recruitment process did not deliver the expected outcome in terms of securing sufficient staff for the programme's needs.