HCPC approval process report

Education provider	University of Liverpool
Name of programme(s)	MSc Physiotherapy (pre-registration), Full time
	MSc Occupational Therapy (pre-registration), Full time
	BSc (Hons) Physiotherapy, Full time
Approval visit date	07 July 2021
Case reference	CAS-16912-P0W1L0

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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:

Carol Rowe	Physiotherapist
Julie-Anne Lowe	Occupational therapist
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.

Louise Almond	Independent chair (supplied by the education provider)	University of Liverpool
Allan Saunders	Secretary (supplied by the education provider)	University of Liverpool

Section 2: Programme details

Programme name	MSc Physiotherapy (pre-registration)
Mode of study	FT (Full time)
Profession	Physiotherapist
Proposed first intake	01 January 2022
Maximum learner cohort	Up to 40
Intakes per year	1
Assessment reference	APP02328

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.

Programme name	MSc Occupational Therapy (pre-registration)
Mode of study	FT (Full time)
Profession	Occupational therapist
Proposed first intake	01 January 2022
Maximum learner cohort	Up to 40
Intakes per year	1
Assessment reference	APP02329

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.

Programme name	BSc (Hons) Physiotherapy
Mode of study	FT (Full time)
Profession	Physiotherapist
First intake	01 September 1999
Maximum learner cohort	Up to 57
Intakes per year	1
Assessment reference	APP02330

We undertook this assessment via the approval process, which involved consideration of documentary evidence and virtual 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 decided to review and update this programme as part of the same process for the initial approval of the new MSc programmes.

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	We received quality monitoring documentation for the existing programme but not for the new programmes, as we only request this if the programme (or a previous version) is currently running

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	Comments
Learners	No	The education provider did not arrange a meeting with learners
Service users and carers (and / or their representatives)	No	The education provider did not arrange a meeting with service users and carers
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 03 September 2021.

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.

Condition: With regard to the MSc Physiotherapy programme only, the education provider must demonstrate that all necessary information to make an informed choice is available to applicants.

Reason: In their MSc Physiotherapy mapping document, the education provider included a URL which showed the visitors a draft version of what would be available to applicants or potential applicants on their website. However, the visitors considered that this did not provide sufficient information that would enable applicants to make an informed choice. For example, it did not tell them about additional costs associated with practice-based learning, or give them an idea of the travel that was likely to be associated with practice-based learning. At the visit the programme team stated that an expanded version of this had been produced and would be supplied to applicants in time. However, without seeing the detail of this expanded version, the visitors were unable to determine whether the standard was met, and require the education provider to submit additional evidence demonstrating that all applicants will be given appropriate information to enable them to make an informed choice.

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 two standards, the education provider should respond to this condition as one issue.

Condition: The education provider must demonstrate that there will be regular and effective collaboration between the education provider and the practice education providers, and that this will deliver an effective process for ensuring sufficient availability and capacity of practice-based learning.

Reason: This condition concerns the MSc Occupational Therapy programme. In their evidence for this standard, the education provider pointed the visitors to several pieces of evidence. This included minutes and agendas for meetings between the education provider and practice education providers, and a role description for a practice educator which included their mandated attendance at programme management commitment meetings.

The visitors considered that this evidence met the standard for the physiotherapy programmes – the existing BSc and the new MSc – because the documentation showed the education provider's plans to meet the standards built on the existing mechanisms used for the undergraduate programme. However, for the occupational therapy programme, it was not clear to the visitors that the evidence provided showed that there would be ongoing collaboration with occupational therapy practice providers. They were also not sure that there was an effective process in place to ensure availability and capacity of practice-based learning for all learners. This was because the evidence supplied mostly concerned relationships with physiotherapy-focused settings and physiotherapy practitioners.

At the visit the senior team, the programme team and the practice educators all indicated that there was appropriate collaboration with occupational therapy practice providers, and that they were confident of being able to find sufficient good quality placements for the MSc Occupational Therapy. However, the visitors considered that they needed further detail that fleshed out these verbal assurances, along the lines of that supplied for the occupational therapy aspects of the visit – minutes of meetings, agendas, and similar documentation. They therefore require the education provider to submit additional evidence showing how they will ensure effective ongoing relationships with occupational therapy placement providers, and how they will ensure availability and capacity of practice-based learning for occupational therapy.

3.12 The resources to support learning in all settings must be effective and appropriate to the delivery of the programme, and must be accessible to all learners and educators.

Condition: For both the MSc Physiotherapy and the MSc Occupational Therapy programmes, the education provider must demonstrate how they will ensure that practice educators will have access to appropriate resources to support learning in practice placement settings.

Reason: In the mapping document for the M-level programmes, the education provider directed the visitors to a number of documents in which learners would be introduced to academic writing, library services and similar resources. Also included in the documentation were links to short IT courses and basic online training for practice educators on the M-level programmes. The visitors considered that this was helpful but it was not clear to them how the education provider would ensure that practice educators had access to all the resources they would need – for example, access to physical and digital books and textbooks, teaching materials and clinical materials. The visitors raised this at the visit, and were given assurances by the programme team that

practice educators would have regular meetings to encourage them to keep in touch with the programme and its requirements. However, the visitors remained unclear about how often these meetings would take place or how attendance by those who needed to attend would be ensured. They therefore require further evidence relating to how the education provider will maintain practice educators' ability to support learning appropriately.

3.12 The resources to support learning in all settings must be effective and appropriate to the delivery of the programme, and must be accessible to all learners and educators.

Condition: For the MSc Physiotherapy, the education provider must demonstrate how they will ensure that learners have access to appropriate information of the kind that would normally be included in a programme handbook.

Reason: The visitors were aware from the documentation that the education provider planned to produce a programme handbook for the MSc Physiotherapy, but that this was not yet available. At the visit the programme team told the visitors that this would be produced by the time the programme started. There is no HCPC requirement for a specific programme handbook to be produced. However, it is necessary under our standards for the type of information normally included in a handbook to be conveyed to learners. The visitors considered therefore that they would need to be assured of how this information would be conveyed before they considered the standard met. They require further evidence showing either that the programme handbook will be available for learners or that the information will be made available in some other way.

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.

3.17 There must be an effective process in place to support and enable learners to raise concerns about the safety and wellbeing of service users.

Recommendation: The education provider should keep under review the accessibility of the information for learners about the concerns process.

Reason: The visitors considered that this standard was met because there was a process in place for learners to raise concerns about service user safety and wellbeing appropriately. However, they did note that the way the process was presented in materials available for learners was not very clear, and that if some learners were not entirely sure what they needed to do, this might create a risk that in future that the standard would not be met. They therefore suggest that the education provider keep in mind the need for processes to be clearly explained.

5.5 There must be an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff involved in practice-based learning.

Recommendation: The education provider should reflect on how best to support practice educators to explore and implement new models of supervision.

Reason: The visitors considered that this standard were met, as the education provider had demonstrated how they would ensure that sufficient appropriate staff were available for practice-based learning, through relationships with practice providers and audits. However, they did note that some of the practice educators met at the visit had expressed concern about the move to different models of supervision, away from the "traditional" models with which they were most familiar. This might in future create a risk that the standard was no longer met because staff would not be appropriately qualified and experienced. The visitors therefore suggest that the education provider reflect on how best to support practice educators who have such concerns.

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 28 September 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.