

Education and Training Committee – 8 September 2011

Review of the process of approval of hearing aid dispenser pre-registration education and training programmes.

Executive summary and recommendations

Introduction

This paper is intended to provide the Committee with an update on the on-going process of reviewing pre-registration hearing aid dispenser education and training programmes against the standards of education and training.

The paper is structured to:

- Consider the transfer of data from the HAC to the HPC, looking at the work undertaken by the department once the Register had opened to ensure the hearing aid dispenser approved programme lists are correct
- Review the process used to schedule the visits and the changes made to the schedule
- Consider the progress of those hearing aid dispenser programmes that have been visited
- Review and analyse trends of the details of the visitors reports produced for each programme visited in terms of the conditions, recommendations and commendations given

Throughout the report, conclusions are drawn identifying key trends noted from the analysis. Actions to take forward during the next academic years' visits to hearing aid dispensing programmes are suggested. There are also actions that can be considered during future transfers of new professions to HPC regulation.

Information from this report will also be useful for education providers in preparing for their first visit from HPC.

Decision

The Committee is asked to discuss and agree the content of the substantive paper before it is distributed to education providers.

Background information

- Education and Training Committee paper - 'Hearing Aid Dispensers – list of approved programmes'(10 March 2010)
- Education and Training Committee paper - 'Hearing aid dispensers – approval and monitoring processes'(10 March 2010)
- Education and Training Committee paper – 'Hearing aid dispensers – approval prioritisation day 21 May 2010' (8 June 2010)

- Education and Training Committee paper - 'Hearing Aid Dispensers – list of approved programmes update'(8 June 2010)

Resource implications

Distribution of the substantive paper will be done electronically in the October edition of education update so no additional resources are required.

Financial implications

None

Appendices

None

Date of paper

8 September 2011

Hearing aid dispenser approval process review 2010–11

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 About this document

This report focuses on the transfer of the hearing aid dispenser profession to the Health Professions Council (HPC) Register on 1 April 2010. It concentrates in particular on three aspects of this transfer:

- the transfer of educational programme data for the hearing aid dispenser programmes;
- the scheduling of the approval visits to hearing aid dispenser programmes; and
- the hearing aid dispenser approval visits we conducted in the academic year 2010–11 and the outcomes of those visits.

At the time this report was written the approval process for the hearing aid dispenser programmes visited were not complete, no final decisions had been made or agreed by Education and Training Committee (ETC). This means the data used for analysis of the approval visits is unconfirmed data. Although this data is unconfirmed, we can use it to draw important findings and conclusions from the hearing aid dispenser visits. The findings can be used by education providers who deliver hearing aid dispenser programmes when preparing for an HPC visit. The education executive can benefit from these findings during the next academic year of approval visits to hearing aid dispenser programmes and in future transfers of new professions to the Register.

The evidence base for this report is made up of:

- quantitative and qualitative review of Education department records of the profession transfer and the on-going work to maintain our records; and
- quantitative and qualitative review of the approval reports produced after the hearing aid dispenser visits.

1.2 Overview of the approval process

We visit the programmes we approve to make sure:

- the education programme meets or continues to meet our standards of education and training (SETs);
- those who complete the programme are able to meet or continue to meet our standards of proficiency (SOPs) for their part of the Register; and
- all programmes and education providers are assessed fairly and consistently.

When we carry out an approval visit, we are represented by an HPC Panel. The HPC Panel is normally made up of two visitors. At least one visitor will be from the same part of the Register as the profession with which the programme is concerned. An education executive will accompany the visitors. The education executive's role is to support both the visitors and the education provider through the approval process.

At the visit, we meet with staff, students, senior managers and placement provider representatives. All discussion is directly related to our standards. At the end of the approval visit, the visitors make a judgement about whether, or to what extent, the programme meets or continues to meet our SETs.

The visitors' report records this decision and details any conditions, recommendations and commendations the programme has been given. Conditions and recommendations are directly linked to particular SETs and will have reasons explaining why there is a condition / recommendation.

Conditions are requirements that must be met by the education provider before the programme can be recommended for approval / on-going approval. Conditions are given when certain SETs have not been met or there is insufficient evidence of the standard being met.

Recommendations are observations on the programme or education provider, which do not need to be met before the programme is recommended for approval / on-going approval. Recommendations are given normally to encourage further enhancements to programme. They are given normally when it is felt the particular standard has been met at, or just above, the threshold level.

Commendations are observations of innovative best practice by a programme or education provider that, the visitors feel can be shared with other education providers.

After the approval visit, if conditions are set, the education provider will submit documentation in response to the conditions in the report. This response is sent to the visitors for them to review. The visitors must be satisfied with the education provider's response to the conditions before they can recommend approval or reconfirmation of approval to ETC. Education providers have two attempts to meet conditions on approval. The ETC will make their final decision for the programme based on the recommendation from the visitors.

More information about our approval process is available on our website (www.hpc-uk.org) and in our publication Approval process - supplementary information for education providers.

2.0 Hearing aid dispenser data transfer

On 10 March 2010 ETC received a paper outlining the list of currently approved hearing aid dispenser programmes and a list of programmes, which were approved historically for specific periods. The recommended lists were based on approval information provided from the Hearing Aid Council (HAC). ETC accepted the approval of these programmes based on the robust quality assurance procedures of the HAC.

The HAC held lists of approved higher education programmes that led to eligibility to apply to their register. The HAC also held ownership over two examination routes that led to eligibility to apply for their register. These were the:

- Company or trainee route, and
- Aptitude route

In the lead up to the transfer of regulatory functions to HPC, the HAC decided to close these examination routes and approve two higher education providers to deliver the examinations. The HAC owned examination routes were accepted by ETC as historical qualifications and the two higher education provider examinations (known as aptitude tests) were accepted as currently approved programmes.

2.1 Hearing aid dispenser list of approved programmes

The transfer of the regulation of hearing aid dispenser programmes to the HPC gave us a number of programmes, which needed to be visited and assessed against our SETs. Since 1 April 2010, a number of new programmes have also requested our approval. Table 1 illustrates the breakdown of those existing hearing aid dispenser programmes agreed by ETC and those that are new hearing aid dispenser programmes.

Table 1 - Hearing aid dispenser programmes on record

	Number of programmes on record	% of programmes on record
Approved 10 March 2010 ETC	16	73%
Approved 08 June 2010 ETC	2	9%
Not approved (new programmes seeking approval)	3	14%

Table 1 shows a 14 per cent uptake of new programmes requesting approval since the transfer of hearing aid dispenser regulation to the HPC. Previous professions joining the Register also demonstrated this trend. The practitioner psychologist approval process review noted a 42 per cent increase from the initial approved practitioner psychologist programme list. This 42 per cent was attributed to the addition of new programmes seeking approval for the first time and clarifications of modes of delivery. An increase in new programme creation appears to be a common outcome of professions joining the Register. This trend appears to indicate the system of regulation in use allows the market to determine the need for new programmes rather than the regulator. The role of the regulator is focussed on quality assuring the proposals for public protection purposes as a result. The increase in creation of new programmes is likely to mean that in future transfers of approved programmes we will not only see an increase in the workload arising from the transferred programmes but also the new programmes.

2.2 Changes to the list of currently approved hearing aid dispenser programmes

At the 10 March 2010 meeting of the ETC, it was anticipated that the day the register opened there would be 16 hearing aid dispenser programmes granted open-ended approval. At the 8 June 2010 meeting of the ETC, further evidence was produced regarding two programmes to be added to the list of approved hearing aid dispenser programmes. These two programmes had been granted approval by the HAC after the ETC meeting on the 10 March 2010. In total, 18 currently approved programmes transferred across from the HAC to the HPC programme list. Table 2 explores these 18 programmes in relation to subsequent changes to the programme data provided from the HAC.

Table 2 - Hearing aid dispenser programmes transferred from HAC and amendments made to data

	Number of programmes	% programmes
Number of programmes transferred	18	100%
First intake dates changed	12	66%
Programme title changed	1	5%
Programmes never ran	3	16%
Programmes with no changes made	6	33%

Of the changes made to the list of approved programmes, 33 per cent of programmes had no changes. One programme had a change to the programme name (5%) and three programmes were included in the list of approved programmes from the HAC and were never run by the education provider (16%). These changes to the data are important to note. However, generally the numbers of changes are lower than we have experienced previously. Previous transfers of approved programmes to HPC (for example, practitioner psychologists) show the changes are of a type that we should expect with any data transfer from one organisation to another. The differences in the way organisations hold and maintain their records means there is always likely to be a need for a small number of changes. In particular, most of the organisations we have received data from have been unable to provide accurate data relating to historical periods of approval for programmes or first intake dates.

The most significant area where we made changes was to the programmes' first intake dates. Table 2 shows 66 per cent of programmes had changes made to the first intake dates after ETC agreed the list of approved programmes. At the time of transfer, the first intake dates were agreed by the HAC. Once the Register opened, we received applications from individuals who had started their study before the first intake date. These individuals were informed they were ineligible to apply for HPC registration. Education providers then contacted us contesting the accuracy of the HPC approved programme data.

After further investigation, it became apparent the processes applied by the HAC to retrospectively approve programmes and graduating cohorts varied between education providers. After seeking legal guidance, we were advised we could only make amendments to the first intake date with supporting evidence to demonstrate the HAC had granted retrospective approval for the programme and / or all cohorts who graduated after approval were eligible for HAC registration. As well as obtaining this information from education providers, we attempted to obtain further information from the HAC. However, the abolition of the HAC made it challenging to locate further documentation to support amendments to the list of approved programmes.

Following the outcome of a Registration Appeal Panel hearing, further legal advice was confirmed from a former HAC Council member. We were informed that approval related to a particular programme for as long as it had been running (i.e. was backdated) with most programmes being relatively new at the time of HAC approval. Based on this legal advice we were able to amend first intake dates for the affected programmes.

The high proportion of those programmes that needed changes to first intake dates is reflective of the variable way in which the HAC conducted their processes. It also highlights the difficulties we have encountered because the HAC is no longer available to correspond with regarding data accuracy.

2.3 Conclusions from the hearing aid dispenser data transfer

We can draw some important conclusions about the transfer of new professions to the HPC Register from looking at the data and information collated above.

The approved programme lists we receive prior to the Register opening should be as accurate and as complete as possible. In order to ensure this, we need to continue to identify all the data we require for each programme and request it in a format we can most easily use. We need to continue to look closely at the processes of the previous regulatory body to ensure we understand aspects such as retrospective approval and the graduating cohorts' eligibility to apply for registration.

The work undertaken by the Department to correct inaccurate data, once the Register has opened, is a significant amount of work. We should continue to consider this when looking at the Department workplan in future years.

3.0 Hearing aid dispenser visit scheduling

3.1 Scheduling of visits

At the meeting on 10 March 2010, ETC received papers for discussion and agreement relating to the list of hearing aid dispenser approved programmes and the mechanism to be used by the HPC to ensure the programmes meet our SETs. It was agreed the approval process would be used to ensure the programmes meet our SETs and programmes would be visited in the 2010–11 and 2011–2012 academic years.

The mechanism agreed to prioritise the visits used documentation provided by the HAC in relation to their approval and monitoring processes. A prioritisation assessment day was held to produce a visit schedule for hearing aid dispenser programmes. Visitors considered the documentation for all hearing aid dispenser programmes granted open-ended approval by ETC on 10 March 2010. The visitors were asked to reach their decisions based on a proportionate response to the risks presented by each programme and its status with the HAC approval and monitoring processes. The programmes were individually assessed and visitors' reports were produced recommending an academic year in which to conduct the visit.

ETC agreed the resulting visit schedule at its meeting on 8 June 2010. Revisions to this visit schedule were later agreed at ETC meetings on 16 September 2010 and 10 March 2011. The summary of revisions made to the visit schedule is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 - Revisions made to prioritisation day schedule

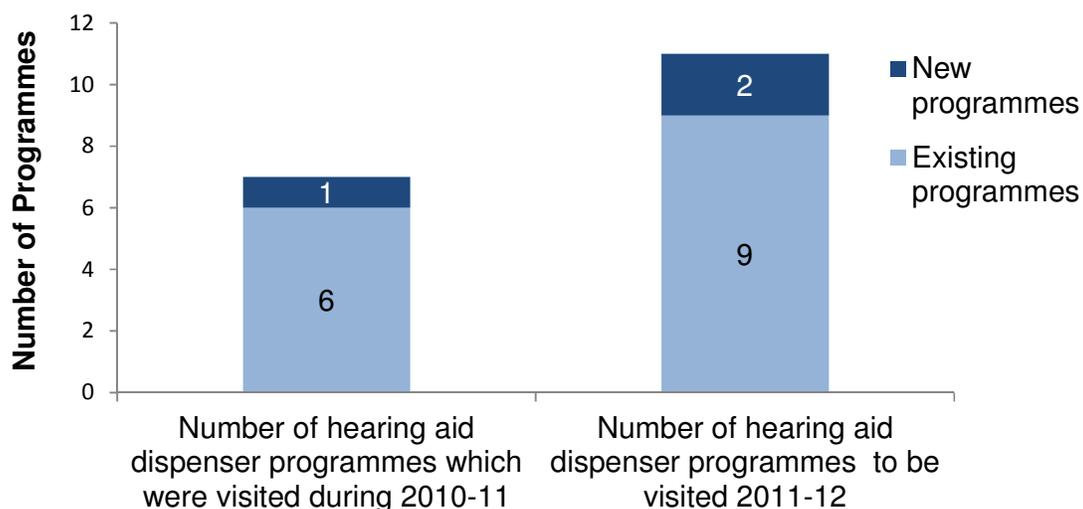
	Number of programmes
Programmes scheduled through prioritisation day	18
Amendments made to push visits back from 2010–11 to 2011–12	2
Amendments made to bring visit from 2011–12 forward to 2010–12	0

On 16 September 2010 ETC agreed the first revision to the visit schedule. The education provider had been notified of the academic year it was to be visited. Evidence then came to light indicating the visitors had not had full access to all documentation available owing to an internal administrative error. Upon reviewing the full documentation, the visitors produced a new report with a revised academic year for the programme to be visited. Once agreed by ETC, the programme's visit was pushed back from 2010–11 to the 2011–12 academic year.

At the ETC meeting on 10 March 2011, a second revision to the visit schedule was agreed. Evidence came to light that for a second programme the visitors had not had full access to all documentation available owing to it not being transferred to us from HAC. The visitors reviewed the full submission and submitted a visitors report to the ETC for approval. Once agreed by ETC the programme's visit was pushed back from 2010–11 to the 2011–12 academic year.

The data here shows that in the majority of instances the visitors' decision for the academic year of the visit was the correct decision. The cases where the schedule was revised were both because further evidence came to light after the prioritisation day. In both cases, the visit was pushed back rather than brought forward. This suggests the visitors' method of assessing the risks posed by not visiting the programmes is the correct way to prioritise the visits.

Graph 1 - Hearing aid dispenser programmes visit schedule



Graph 1 illustrates the final agreed visit schedule. This graph shows the majority of the hearing aid dispenser visits are to be undertaken in the 2011–12 academic year. It is hoped this review will provide insight into how the visits have proceeded so far and so help education providers when they consider the HPC's focus and how best to present evidence to us.

The one new programme that was visited in 2010–11 was a programme not included in the list of approved programmes obtained from the HAC. At the visit, it became apparent the programme being visited had an interim award that was also viewed as leading to registration by the education provider. We record our programmes with each interim award leading to registration, each validating body and each mode of study separately.

3.2 Conclusions of the hearing aid dispenser visit scheduling

We can draw some important conclusions about the scheduling of hearing aid dispenser visits from looking at the data and information collated above.

The data shows us the prioritisation day process is effective in scheduling new profession visits. The process was introduced for practitioner psychologists and has been amended for hearing aid dispensers. In the future, the prioritisation day process should continue to be reviewed and amended as necessary as other new professions are transferred to us.

From the two programmes that had their visit date rescheduled, we can see the importance of receiving a complete set of documentation initially from the regulatory body transferring the profession to us. When requesting this documentation we should ensure we continue to communicate the importance of receiving all available programme documentation.

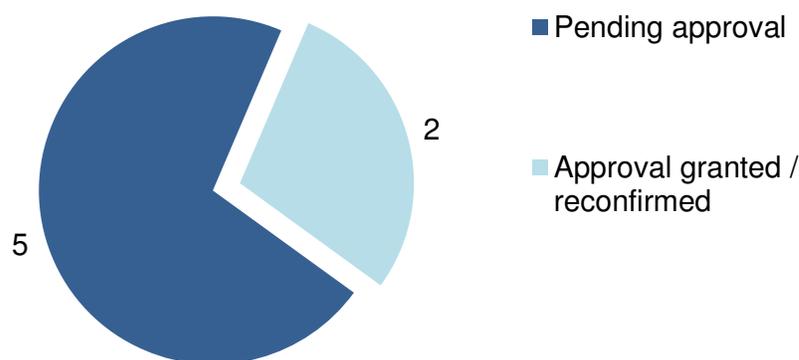
The HPC can be seen as effective in responding to education providers' concerns about inaccurate data. We should continue to ensure education providers know how to contact us with any queries or objections they have.

4.0 Analysis of hearing aid dispenser visit outcomes

4.1 The hearing aid dispenser programmes visited 2010–11

Once an approval visit has been undertaken, a report is written and agreed by the visitors detailing any conditions and recommending a final outcome. This report is then agreed by ETC. If conditions have been placed on approval these need to be met before the visitors can recommend a final outcome of approval to ETC. Once ETC have agreed the programmes' outcome all HPC reports on programme approval are published at www.hpc-uk.org

Graph 2 - Hearing aid dispenser programmes visited 2010–11 progress



Graph 2 illustrates the progress of those hearing aid dispenser visits conducted during 2010–11 (as of 8 September 2011). The majority of the visits are currently pending approval. This means they are awaiting a final decision and pending an outcome. All programmes have been recommended for approval or on-going approval subject to meeting conditions.

It is worth noting the hearing aid dispenser visits were all conducted in the second half of the academic year. The programmes visited the earlier in this period have had approval granted / reconfirmed (at the 25 August 2011 ETC Panel meeting). The rest are in the process of having the report agreed by ETC and / or meeting conditions.

The process for approval can take up to 9 months from requesting a visit to the date of the final ETC meeting. We encourage education providers to schedule approval visits as soon as possible in the academic year. We schedule visits with a minimum of 6 months' notice before the visit so we have enough time to arrange any resources. This also allows the process to have enough time to complete before new cohorts start. Our calendar very quickly reaches visit capacity and dates for visits are allocated on a 'first-come, first-served' basis. Increasingly it is likely that we will

require education providers to hold their approval visits earlier in the academic year as the number of visits in the schedule increases.

4.2 Conditions

Table 4 - Total number of conditions set on hearing aid dispenser programmes and all visited programmes in 2009–10

	Number of programmes visited	Total number of conditions set	Average number of conditions set per programme
All programmes visited during 2009–10	104	904	9
Hearing aid dispenser programmes visited during 2010–11	7	101	14

Table 4 compares the conditions data of the hearing aid dispenser programmes to that of all programmes visited in the academic year 2009–10. Compared to all of the programmes visited, the number of hearing aid dispenser programmes we visited is few. However, the average number of conditions set per hearing aid dispenser programme is almost proportionately higher than that of all programmes visited.

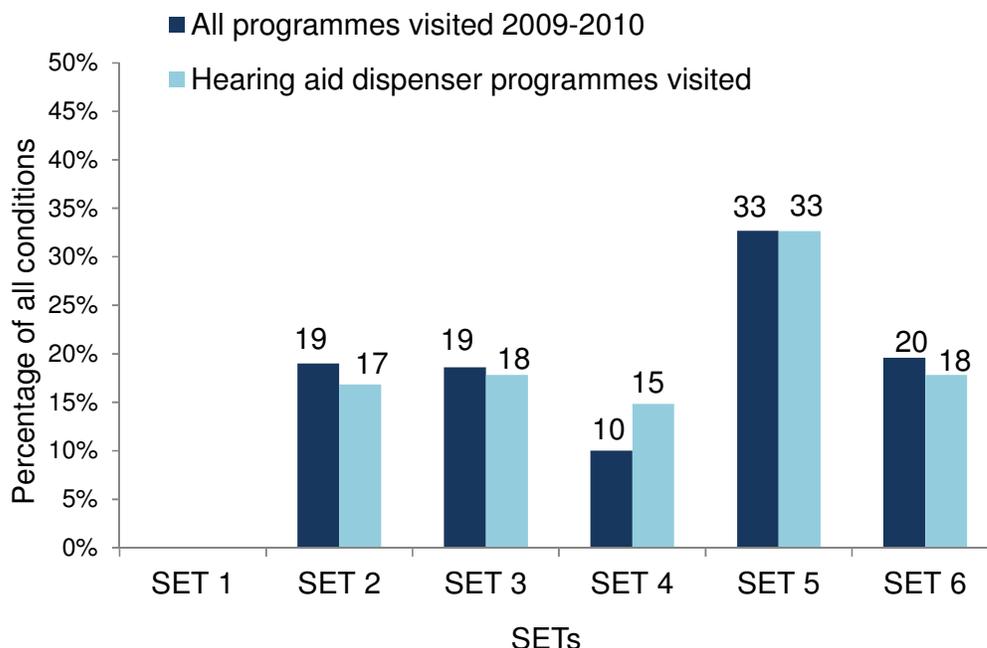
There are several reasons that could account for this. Firstly, this would have been the first time these hearing aid dispenser programmes had been visited by the HPC. This means they were inexperienced in evidencing their programmes against HPC SETs. The visitors needed to request further information where it was not provided in the first place.

Secondly, we know the HAC approval and monitoring processes were very different to the HPC processes. Some of these programmes may not have been subject to a visit from the HAC and so the HPC visit may have been the first time an external body has visited them. This could lead to the need for a more intensive scrutiny and so more conditions may have been needed.

Thirdly, there is a great deal of change occurring presently because of the Modernising Scientific Careers (MSC) work programme being undertaken by the Department of Health. Amongst others, hearing aid dispenser programmes may be changing because of the MSC standards and career framework. The uncertainty resulting from MSC means that education providers cannot always provide evidence

at visits of how our SETs will be met in the longer term as they await more information on funding and curricula.

Graph 3 - Percentage of conditions against SETs



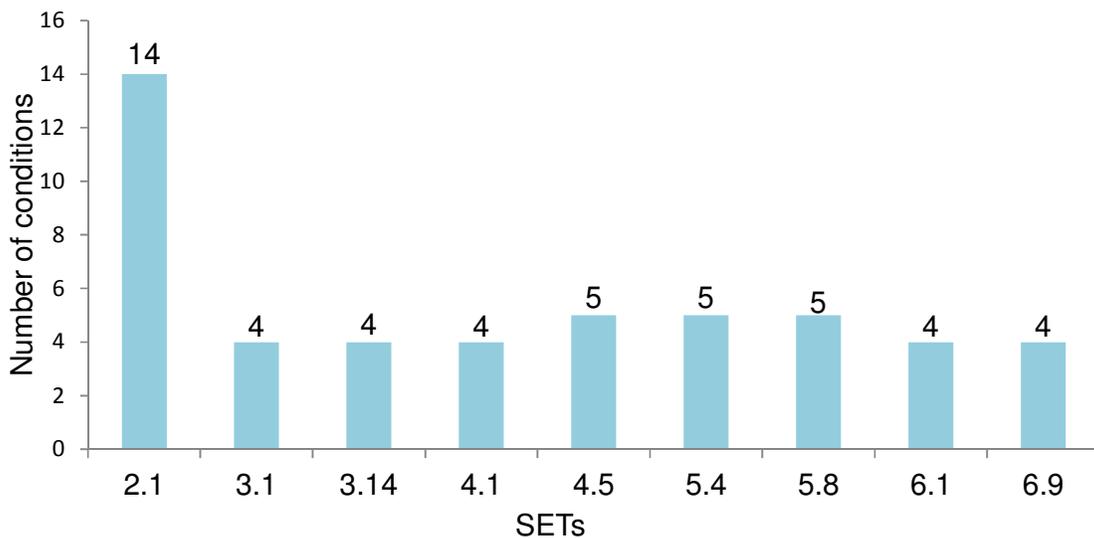
Graph 3 illustrates how conditions were applied in 2009–10 to hearing aid dispenser programmes compared to all other programmes. Looking at the percentages against each SET group overall there is little difference between hearing aid dispenser visits and all professions we regulate in terms of the conditions being set upon approval / reconfirmation of approval.

The group with the highest percentage of conditions across hearing aid dispenser programmes visited and all programmes visited in 2009–10 are those standards in SET 5 – practice placements. Looking at data produced for the Education Department’s annual report over past academic years (since 2005–06) yet again, we can see a consistently higher proportion of conditions in SET 5 across all programmes. It appears that hearing aid dispenser programme teams are experiencing no more difficulty in the coordination of placements than other professions.

There is a bigger gap between the conditions data for SET 4 – curriculum. SET 4 is where visitors can ensure the programme is appropriately and effectively covering all SOPs in the taught content of the programme. Hearing aid dispenser visits have had a much higher percentage of conditions placed under this SET group than all programmes visited in 2009–10. Looking at the conditions for these programmes many of them concentrate on the hearing aid dispenser profession specific aspects of the curriculum.

These programmes can have a multi-disciplinary function of which hearing aid dispensing is one. Whilst our visits concentrate on ensuring the programme produces individuals who are fit to practise as hearing aid dispensers, the programme is aimed to produce a wide range of skilled roles in the field of audiology. This may mean the hearing aid dispenser specifics of the programme are not as easy to pinpoint through the approval visit and so conditions are placed encouraging the education provider to highlight where in the programme the skills and knowledge specific to hearing aid dispensing is covered.

Graph 4 - The nine SETs with the highest number of conditions set against them



Graph 4 illustrates the nine SETs that had the highest number of conditions against them. Nine SETs have been looked at in this instance because, as can be seen, five different standards had the same values so all five need to be included when looking at those with the highest values.

SET 2.1 can be seen to have the highest number of conditions across the hearing aid dispenser visits in 2009–10 (14 conditions in total). This standard looks at the advertising materials produced and information available for potential applicants to the programme. Looking at data across all programmes visited in 2009–10 this SET also had the highest number of conditions against it. For SET 2.1 the hearing aid dispenser programmes had conditions that were very similar.

The language surrounding the HPC’s role in regulation was an area where the visitors required the programme documentation and advertising materials to be reviewed. The HPC ‘approves’ programmes where often it is stated we ‘accredit’ programmes. References to ‘state-regulation’ are out of date, as we no longer use this term. Upon successful completion of the programme, students are ‘eligible to **apply**’ for registration with the HPC under the specific profession title of ‘Hearing Aid Dispenser’.

The programme title was another area where visitors felt it was important to be consistent throughout the documentation and advertising materials, as to the correct and full programme award. As discussed earlier, these programmes often lead to several career pathways and as such, it can be unclear as to the professional title to which the programme leads to eligibility to apply for registration with. SET 6.9 also needs programmes to be clear any aegrotat awards or interim awards the programme may have do not lead to eligibility to apply for HPC registration.

This links back to what was earlier discussed regarding programme records and applying for registration. Our approved programme lists use the programme title of the award. Applicants to our Register will apply under that award and we check this with the programme lists we hold. If there are any inaccuracies in either the list or the applicants' award it may lead to the application being rejected.

SET 4.5 and SET 3.14 are standards with specific requirements (for the use of a consent form and relating to our standards of conduct, performance and ethics). Often we have conditions given to these standards due to the HPC specific requirements for each of these.

SETs 5.4 and 5.8 relate to practice placements. As previously seen SET 5 was the area, where there was the highest percentage of conditions placed for hearing aid dispenser visits so it is unremarkable that these two standards feature here. Looking at data from all programmes visited in 2009–10, these two standards are included in the list of the eight standards with the highest number of conditions. Practice placements often get a high number of conditions because the placement components require collaboration across multiple external bodies and takes place in the higher risk live practice environment. We expect education providers to keep overall responsibility for placements and there must be suitable systems in place to support them. Our SETs lay out these requirements.

SETs 4.1, 6.1 and 3.1 all link together. SET 4.1 and 6.1 are standards that directly link with the SOPs for hearing aid dispensers, ensuring they are appropriately taught and assessed in the programme. As highlighted earlier, the multi-disciplinary nature of the hearing aid dispenser programmes may mean the visitors were unable to determine where the skills and knowledge specific to hearing aid dispensing are covered. SET 3.1 addresses the security of the programme. Again, due to the multi-disciplinary nature of the hearing aid dispenser programmes, it was difficult for the visitors to determine where the hearing aid dispenser pathways through the programme sat alongside other pathways and therefore where the hearing aid dispenser specific support, resources, security and future was incorporated into any business plans.

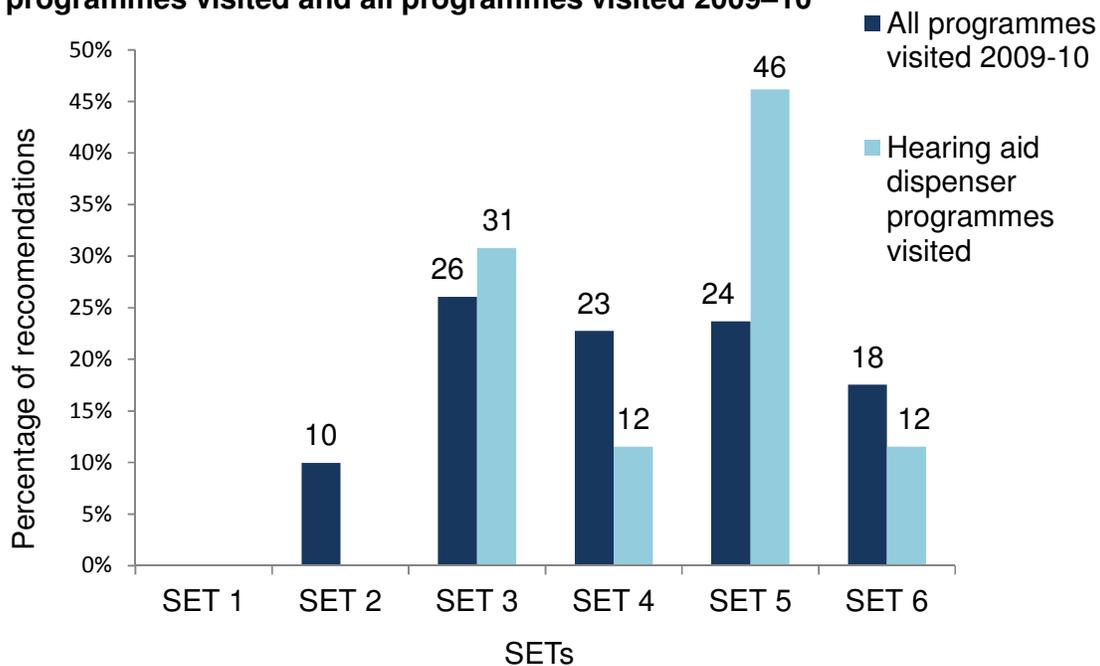
4.3 Recommendations

Table 5 - Total number of recommendations set on hearing aid dispenser programmes and all visited programmes in 2009–10

	Number of programmes visited	Total number of recommendations set	Average number of recommendations set per programme
All programmes visited during 2009–10	104	211	2
Hearing aid dispenser programmes visited during 2010–11	7	26	3.7

Table 5 compares the recommendations data of the hearing aid dispenser programme visits to that of all programmes visited in the academic year 2009–10. The average number of recommendations given per hearing aid dispenser programme visited is almost double that for all programmes visited 2009–10. This can be explained when we look into the detail of the recommendations given to the hearing aid dispenser programmes. Graph 5 illustrates where recommendations have been given to hearing aid dispenser programmes and compares it against recommendations given to all programmes visited in 2009–10.

Graph 5 - Recommendations for hearing aid dispenser programmes visited and all programmes visited 2009–10



SET 5 was the area where most recommendations were given to hearing aid dispenser programmes. As we have seen, the most conditions were given to SET 5 so it is likely this area has the most recommendations. Two reasons can be used to explain this.

Firstly, areas of the programme where conditions have been given may also have recommendations. This is because a condition is given where it cannot be seen how the threshold level of the SET is met. Recommendations may be used in these instances to suggest to the education provider what they can change or improve to meet or exceed the threshold level of the SET.

Secondly, areas where the programme has just managed to meet the threshold level of the standards may well have recommendations. In these instances the visitors give recommendations in order the programme can raise the level at which it meets the standard.

There is a gap for SET 4 – curriculum, between the percentages of recommendations for hearing aid dispensers and of all programmes visited in 2009–10. This is interesting because it is a large gap in the favour of all programmes visited in 2009–10. The standards under SET 4 look at the curriculum. Along with ensuring the programmes meet the profession specific skills and knowledge needed for practise; they also ensure the programme is able to keep up to date with current legislation and any relevant curriculum guidance for the profession.

Because of this, many of the recommendations given here are about how the programme ensures it keeps itself current in line with professional body curriculum

guidelines. Currently there are no such curriculum guidance documents available for hearing aid dispenser programmes. This means there are not any recommendations given suggesting how the programme can improve the way it keeps up to date with curriculum guidance.

4.4 Commendations

Commendations are given for instances of unique and innovative best practice across all professions regulated by HPC. Because of this, instances when we give commendations are rare.

One commendation has been made for one hearing aid dispenser programme visited. From all the hearing aid dispenser programmes visited in 2010–11 (7 in total), this equates to 14 per cent. For all programmes visited in 2009–10 (104 in total) just 16 per cent (17 programmes) received commendations.

The number of commendations that have been granted and the number of visits conducted makes it difficult to draw any conclusions from the data beyond recognising that commendations also appear to be relatively infrequent for hearing aid dispenser programmes.

5.0 Conclusions from the hearing aid dispenser visits

5.1 Hearing aid dispenser programmes visited 2010–11

Looking at the programmes we have visited, many of the visits were held later in the academic year meaning approval was not granted / reconfirmed by September (when the majority of approved programmes cohorts start). For existing programmes, this is not an essential requirement but for new programmes, it is essential we have granted approval before the first cohort starts.

When new professions transfer to HPC regulation we need to continue to ensure education providers are aware of our processes for arranging visits. When requesting visits education providers need to consider the time the approval process may take to complete and how we allocate visit dates. We should continue to encourage education providers to submit requests for visits as soon as possible so we will be more likely to be able to schedule requested dates.

5.2 Conditions

From looking at the analysis of the conditions data, education providers running hearing aid dispenser programmes should not be surprised if there appears to be many conditions given to the programmes. Education providers should exploit the analysis above and ensure before the visit the following areas have been considered and evidenced in the best possible way.

Practice placements were an area highlighted as receiving a lot of conditions. This is not unusual for any profession. It is important education providers understand the requirements for them to effectively manage their own placements.

The curriculum was another area highlighted for hearing aid dispenser programmes to receive conditions commonly. Visitors need to be sure that by the end of the programme, successful graduates will be able to meet the SOPs for their part of the Register. Clearly identifying the hearing aid dispenser specific elements of the programme will aid the visitors' assessment of this.

In terms of programme management, education providers may wish to consider clearly identifying the hearing aid specific elements of the programmes. This is so the visitors can be assured of the security of the programme for hearing aid dispenser students in the light of the broadening market for these programmes. With the changing nature of the programmes, we require clarity in all programme documentation and advertising materials to ensure the programme title and the profession title are both clearly identified.

Education providers may also want to consider the importance of clearly identifying the regulatory role of the HPC in terms of individuals being eligible to apply for registration upon completion of the approved programme. This is an area where education providers commonly receive conditions but owing the broader field of audiology will require additional clarification for our visitors.

Some of the 57 SETs are very specific in their function of ensuring individuals completing programmes will be able to meet the standards required for safe and effective practice. When evidencing the SETs we advise education providers to use the Standards of education and training guidance document to inform them of the particular nature of each SET.

5.3 Recommendations and Commendations

From looking at the analysis of the recommendations data, the number of recommendations and the areas where recommendations are given varies.

It can be noted that recommendations are useful when considering how to enhance the programme and raise the level at which the standards are met. When receiving a report with conditions, recommendations can be a place to highlight enhancement themes in programme design and delivery.

We do not regularly give commendations. If other bodies give commendations, this is because their criteria for awarding commendations are different to the HPC's criteria. Informal feedback may include areas of good practice and can be given in a variety of ways. This may happen at the informal feedback meeting at the end of the visit or the education executive can contact education providers after the visit to pass on any comments the visitors have.