
Health and Care Professions Council response to Department for Education consultation on the Office for Students: ‘Securing student success: risk-based regulation for teaching excellence, social mobility and informed choice in higher education.’

1. Introduction

- 1.1 We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation.
- 1.2 The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) is a statutory regulator of health, social work, and psychological professions governed by the Health and Social Work Professions Order 2001. We regulate the members of 16 professions. We maintain a register of professionals, set standards for entry to our register, approve education and training programmes for registration and deal with concerns where a professional may not be fit to practise. Our role is to protect the public.
- 1.3 We approve 1,074 education and training programmes delivered by 144 education providers.¹ These education providers include private providers alongside higher education institutions.

2. Our comments on the proposals

- 2.1 We have not addressed each consultation question as many of these questions are directed at providers of higher education and are about more detailed matters of implementation. As a professional regulator involved in the quality assurance of higher education programmes for the purposes of registration, however, we maintain a strong interest in the role of the Office for Students (OfS) and are keen to engage with the new body as it takes up its new responsibilities.
- 2.2 We have based our comments around a small number of themes raised in the consultation document.

Overall regulatory approach

- 2.3 We welcome the focus in the consultation document on a model of regulation which is based on the principles of risk mitigation and proportionality – principles which should guide any regulatory scheme which impacts upon the sector.
- 2.4 We further welcome the focus in the consultation on ensuring that required outcomes for students are achieved to expected standards, rather than focusing on how those outcomes are achieved. This is consistent with our approach to quality assurance – our standards of education and training are focused on outcomes. This approach helps to facilitate innovation in programme design and delivery by wherever possible avoiding prescriptive ‘input based’ requirements.

¹ Figures correct as at November 2017

The student as consumer

- 2.5 We welcome the focus in the consultation document on the student as a consumer of higher education. Again, this very much aligns with our approach. Students play an important role at quality assurance visits to education providers. Our standards also place responsibility on education providers to ensure that students ('learners' in our language) are involved in programmes, ensuring that their experience is central to the quality and effectiveness of programmes.
- 2.6 In the health and care sector, other stakeholders also have a crucial influence on, and stake in, quality and effectiveness – including employers and their stake in the skills of the future workforce; and service users and the public who will benefit from their services.

Competition

- 2.7 We note the focus in the consultation document on competition within the sector as a driver for innovation and improvement (above the 'threshold' requirements expected of all providers), whilst also noting the dual aim of providing stimulus for collaboration, such as through thematic sector-level reviews.
- 2.8 We can foresee that competition might create some challenges in the health and care sector. For example, this may prove challenging for smaller professions with few programmes in existence, the closure of which would negatively impact the workforce and ultimately service user safety. If the market were to be led by short-term pressures, this might result in programme closures in harder to recruit but high need areas with consequent impact on workforce planning, employers and service users.

Future engagement

- 2.9 We would be very keen to engage further with the OfS as it becomes established. In particular, there is work to be done to ensure mutual understanding between the OfS, other similar bodies in the UK and the professional regulatory bodies of roles, responsibilities and approaches and of any potential for adding value whilst reducing regulatory burden.