
Performance review process report

Hidden Hearing Limited, Review Period 2022-2024

Executive summary

This is a report of the process to review the performance of Hidden Hearing Limited. This report captures the process we have undertaken to consider the performance of the institution in delivering HCPC-approved programmes. This enables us to make risk-based decisions about how to engage with this education provider in the future, and to consider if there is any impact on our standards being met.

We have:

- Reviewed the institution's portfolio submission against quality themes and found that we needed to undertake further exploration of key themes through quality activities
- Undertaken quality activities to arrive at our judgement on performance, including when the institution should next be reviewed
- Recommended when the institution should next be reviewed
- Decided when the institution should next be reviewed

Through this assessment, we have noted:

- The following areas should be referred to another HCPC process for assessment:
 - The education provider informed us all learners are placed in settings where they have regular and deliberate interactions with other healthcare professionals. The education provider plans to continue developing interprofessional education (IPE) to reflect changes in adult social care, as well as expanding guest speaker involvement to include a wider range of healthcare professionals. The visitors noted this and considered the education provider should reflect on the implementation of their plans to enhance interprofessional education through their next engagement with our performance review process.
 - The education provider acknowledged the need to enhance service user involvement in their programmes. In response, they undertook actions such as recruiting a hearing aid user for the Curriculum Development Group (CDG). They added they were looking at increasing service user involvement further when opportunities arise. The education provider explained a new initiative proposed contacting a sample of service users post-appointment to gather targeted feedback. If approved, this will launch with the July 2025 cohort and aims to enhance curriculum development and service user care. The visitors noted this and considered the education provider should reflect on the implementation of their plans to enhance service user and carer involvement through their next engagement with our performance review process.
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- The education provider must next engage with monitoring in two years, the 2026-27 academic year, because:
 - The education provider engages with a range of stakeholders with quality assurance and enhancement in mind.
 - The education provider considers sector and professional development in a structured way.
 - Through this review, the education provider started the work to provide data points equitable to those we receive from HESA and NSS. They supplied data points for some cohorts that had been externally verified. We will continue to take forward this work, in order to establish a regular supply of data.
 - From data points considered and reflections through the process, the education provider considers data in their quality assurance and enhancement processes and acts on data to inform positive change.
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Previous consideration	Not applicable. This performance review was not referred from another process.
Decision	<hr/> <p>The Education and Training Committee (Panel) is asked to decide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when the education provider's next engagement with the performance review process should be • whether issues identified for referral through this review should be reviewed, and if so how <hr/>
Next steps	<hr/> <p>Outline next steps / future case work with the education provider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject to the Panel's decision, the education provider's next performance review will be in the 2026-27 academic year • Subject to the Panel's decision, we will undertake further investigations as per section 5 <hr/>

Included within this report

Section 1: About this assessment	4
About us	4
Our standards	4
Our regulatory approach	4
The performance review process.....	4
Thematic areas reviewed.....	5
How we make our decisions	5
The assessment panel for this review.....	5
Section 2: About the education provider.....	6
The education provider context	6
Practice areas delivered by the education provider	7
Institution performance data	7
Section 3: Performance analysis and quality themes	9
Portfolio submission.....	9
Data / intelligence considered.....	9
Quality themes identified for further exploration	9
Section 4: Findings.....	9
Overall findings on performance	10
Quality theme: Institution self-reflection	10
Quality theme: Thematic reflection.....	16
Quality theme: Sector body assessment reflection	19
Quality theme: Profession specific reflection.....	19
Quality theme: Stakeholder feedback and actions	21
Data and reflections	22
Section 5: Issues identified for further review	24
Referrals to next scheduled performance review.....	24
Section 6: Decision on performance review outcomes	25
Assessment panel recommendation.....	25
Education and Training Committee decision	26
Appendix 1 – summary report	27
Appendix 2 – list of open programmes at this institution	28

Section 1: About this assessment

About us

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.

This is a report on the performance review process undertaken by the HCPC to ensure that the institution and practice areas(s) detailed in this report continue to meet our education standards. The report details the process itself, evidence considered, outcomes and recommendations made regarding the institution and programme(s) ongoing approval.

Our standards

We approve education providers and programmes that meet our education standards. Individuals who complete approved programmes will meet proficiency standards, which 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.

Our regulatory approach

We are flexible, intelligent, and data-led in our quality assurance of programme clusters and programmes. Through our processes, we:

- enable bespoke, proportionate, and effective regulatory engagement with education providers;
- use data and intelligence to enable effective risk-based decision making; and
- engage at the organisation, profession, and programme levels to enhance our ability to assess the impact of risks and issues on HCPC standards.

Education providers and programmes are [approved on an open-ended basis](#), subject to ongoing monitoring. Programmes we have approved are listed [on our website](#).

The performance review process

Once a programme institution is approved, we will take assurance it continues to meet standards through:

- regular assessment of key data points, supplied by the education provider and external organisations; and

- assessment of a self-reflective portfolio and evidence, supplied on a cyclical basis

Through monitoring, we take assurance in a bespoke and flexible way, meaning that we will assess how an education provider is performing based on what we see, rather than by a one size fits all approach. We take this assurance at the education provider level wherever possible, and will delve into programme / profession level detail where we need to.

This report focuses on the assessment of the self-reflective portfolio and evidence.

Thematic areas reviewed

We normally focus on the following areas:

- Institution self-reflection, including resourcing, partnerships, quality, the input of others, and equality and diversity
- Thematic reflection, focusing on timely developments within the education sector
- Education provider reflection on the assessment of other sector bodies, including professional bodies and systems regulators
- Education provider reflection on developments linked to specific professions
- Stakeholder feedback and actions

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 design quality assurance assessments, and assess evidence and information relevant to the assessment. Visitors make recommendations to the Education and Training Committee (ETC). Education providers have the right of reply to the recommendation. If an education provider wishes to, they can supply 'observations' as part of the process.

The ETC make the 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 takes decisions through different levels depending on the routines and impact of the decision, and where appropriate meets in public. Their decisions are available to view [on our website](#).

The assessment panel for this review

We appointed the following panel members to support a review of this education provider:

Claire Langman	Lead visitor, Hearing aid dispenser
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Robert MacKinnon	Lead visitor, Clinical scientist; Hearing aid dispenser
Sheba Joseph	Service User Expert Advisor
John Archibald	Education Quality Officer
Christine DePlacido	Advisory visitor, Hearing aid dispenser

We encourage reflections through portfolios to be made at the institution level wherever possible. The performance review process does not always require profession level scrutiny which requires all professionals to be represented in the assessment panel. Rather, the process considers how the education provider has performed at institution level, linked to the themes defined in section 1. Lead visitors have the option to appoint additional advisory partners where this will benefit the assessment, and / or where they are not able to make judgements based on their own professional knowledge.

In this assessment, the lead visitors provided professional expertise across all professional areas delivered by the education provider. We decided to ask a support visitor to focus on sections related to how the education provider embedded both the HCPC standards of conduct, performance, and ethics across professions and the HCPC standards of proficiency.

Section 2: About the education provider

The education provider context

The education provider currently delivers two HCPC-approved programmes across one profession. It is a private provider and has been running HCPC approved programmes since 2013. All learners are full-time employees of Hidden Hearing Limited upon joining the programmes. The education provider is a wholly owned subsidiary of Demant, a global healthcare provider. Academic delivery takes place in Buxton, Derbyshire with the programmes being residential for approximately a third of the time.

The education provider does not run their programmes to a standard academic year. For the purposes of this review:

- Cohort 12 started January 2022 and finished March 2023;
- There was no cohort 13 for reasons of sensitivity about the number;
- Cohort 14 started October 2022 and finished December 2023;
- Cohort 15 started January 2023 and finished March 2024; and
- Cohort 16 started October 2023 and had not finished in the period under review.

One of the approved programmes is a degree apprenticeship. This programme mirrors the direct entry programme run at the education provider. Practice-based learning is located within a branch of the education provider. All practice educators

are hearing aid dispensers employed by the education provider within the same management structure as learners.

The education provider engaged with the approval review process in the model of quality assurance in 2024 for the Award in Hearing Aid Dispensing Competence (Apprenticeship), WBL (Work based learning) programme. At the meeting in June 2024 the Education and Training Committee agreed there was sufficient evidence to demonstrate our standards were met, and the programme was approved.

The education provider engaged with the performance review process in the model of quality assurance in 2022/23. At the meeting in December 2021 the Education and Training Committee agreed there was sufficient evidence the standards continued to be met, and the programme remain approved. The recommendation for the next engagement was based on several factors. The education provider engaged with various stakeholders, including learners, external examiners, and practice educators, to ensure quality assurance and enhancement. They also considered input from professional bodies and government departments, such as the Department for Health and the Department of Education, to improve their provision. However, the education provider had not yet established a method for supplying quality and performance data points equivalent to those available externally. This necessitates frequent engagement, at least once every two years, to understand and mitigate risks. The data reviewed internally by the education provider was used to inform positive changes in their quality assurance processes. Due to the lack of externally verified data, the recommendation was to monitor the education provider every two years, with four specific areas referred to this performance review process.

Practice areas delivered by the education provider

The education provider is approved to deliver training in the following professional areas. A detailed list of approved programme awards can be found in [Appendix 2](#) of this report.

	Practice area	Delivery level		Approved since
Pre-registration	Hearing Aid Dispenser	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate	<input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate	2013

Institution performance data

Data is embedded into how we understand performance and risk. We capture data points in relation to education provider performance, from a range of sources. We compare education provider data points to benchmarks, and use this information to inform our risk based decisions about the approval and ongoing approval of institutions and programmes¹.

¹ An explanation of the data we use, and how we use this data, is available [here](#)

Data Point	Bench-mark	Value	Date of data point	Commentary
Learner number capacity	70	70	2024 - 25	<p>The benchmark figure is data we have captured from previous interactions with the education provider, such as through initial programme approval, and / or through previous performance review assessments. Resources available for the benchmark number of learners was assessed and accepted through these processes. The value figure was presented by the education provider through this submission.</p> <p>The education provider is recruiting learners at the benchmark.</p> <p>We reviewed the education provider's documentation to ensure there are enough resources provided for the programmes. We were satisfied with the information from the education provider and had no further questions.</p>
Learner non-continuation	3%	N/A	2020-21	Through this review, the education provider started the work to provide data points equitable to those we receive from HESA and NSS. They supplied data points for some cohorts that had been externally verified. We will continue to take forward this work, in order to establish a regular supply of data.
Outcomes for those who complete programmes	92%	N/A	2020-21	Through this review, the education provider started the work to provide data points equitable to those we receive from HESA and NSS. They supplied data points for some cohorts that had been externally verified. We will continue to take forward this work, in order to establish a regular supply of data.
Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) award	N/A	N/A	2023	There is no data available for this data point.

Learner satisfaction	N/A	N/A	2025	There is no data available for this data point. Through this review, the education provider started the work to provide data points equitable to those we receive from HESA and NSS. They supplied data points for some cohorts that had been externally verified. We will continue to take forward this work, in order to establish a regular supply of data.
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Section 3: Performance analysis and quality themes

Portfolio submission

The education provider was asked to provide a self-reflective portfolio submission covering the broad topics referenced in the [thematic areas reviewed](#) section of this report.

The education provider's self-reflection was focused on challenges, developments, and successes related to each thematic area. They also supplied data, supporting evidence and information.

Data / intelligence considered

We also considered intelligence from others (eg prof bodies, sector bodies that provided support) as follows:

- NHS England did not have concerns about this education provider and their programmes.

Quality themes identified for further exploration

We reviewed the information provided, and worked with the education provider on our understanding of their portfolio. Based on our understanding, we defined and undertook the following quality assurance activities linked to the quality themes referenced below. This allowed us to consider whether the education provider was performing well against our standards.

Section 4: Findings

This section provides information summarising the visitors' findings for each portfolio area, focusing on the approach or approaches taken, developments, what this means for performance, and why. The section also includes a summary of risks, further areas to be followed up, and areas of good practice.

Overall findings on performance

Quality theme: Institution self-reflection

Findings of the assessment panel:

- **Admissions procedures –**
 - The education provider underwent some challenges in the review period. For example, candidates considered the recruitment process to have too many stages. This had the effect that candidates felt overwhelmed. The education provider's response was to change the online assessment provider for quicker screening. They also replaced video interviews with preliminary MS Teams interviews with Regional Managers. The impact of these was better candidate feedback, more informed decisions by applicants, and increased workload for Regional Managers.
 - The education provider also undertook developments. For example, they implemented earlier face-to-face interaction between themselves and candidates. This improved candidate retention and engagement. The education provider considered this personalised approach aligned well with the interpersonal nature of the role.
 - We were satisfied with how the education provider is performing in this area.
- **Resourcing, including financial stability –**
 - The education provider is financially secure and fully funded by Hidden Hearing Ltd and its parent company, Demant. The programmes are strategically important for business growth through increasing employee numbers. The programme team is well-resourced with five full-time trainers, a part-time trainer, and additional support staff. Annual budgeting activities ensure continued sustainability.
 - The programme team has stabilised. All five core trainers are now full-time. Previously one trainer had a split role and retained other HAD duties. This has strengthened team cohesion and improved curriculum delivery. An additional group of 12 experienced hearing aid dispensers support training delivery and assessments.
 - The education provider explained financial and operational stability ensures uninterrupted programme delivery. The staffing structure and support improve training quality and learner's experience. Strategic planning and resource allocation reflect the organisational commitment to the programmes.
 - We were satisfied with how the education provider is performing in this area.

- **Staff development –**

- The education provider enhanced teaching standards as the programme team sought further development to improve teaching effectiveness. For example, they attended a reflective session to focus on communication styles and learner processing. The programme team gained insights into how delivery affects learner understanding. The training also encouraged reflection on teaching methods. The session was well-received and beneficial.
- The education provider informed us they had several successes. For example:
 - implementation of structured development reviews via People Central, Denant's HR tool;
 - engagement with external expertise to enhance teaching practice. For example the programme team had an online session with an experienced teacher of over 40 years' experience. The teacher developed a session based around how words and delivery affect people differently, depending on their processing preferences and other variables such as age; and
 - strong internal communication and knowledge-sharing across modules.
- We were satisfied with how the education provider is performing in this area.

- **Academic quality –**

- The education provider underwent its first OFSTED inspection in October 2024. The inspection was triggered by the education provider's new status as a government-funded apprenticeship provider.
- The inspection focused on three key areas: quality of provision, training outcomes, and safeguarding. The education provider received the highest possible judgement in all three areas. Inspectors praised the quality of teaching, safeguarding policies, and the overall academic standard. The education provider received constructive feedback, including a recommendation to broaden teaching qualifications among staff. The inspection validated the programmes' quality and boosted internal confidence. It also highlighted areas for future development, particularly in teaching qualifications and peer review practices.
- When availability allows, peer reviews are conducted using a structured template to provide constructive feedback. Five peer reviews were logged during the review period. The education provider explained this indicated underuse. Peer reviews foster a culture of self-improvement and collaboration. Plans are in place to increase the number of staff with Level 3 teaching qualifications in 2025, enhancing the quality of peer feedback. Peer reviews are a useful tool for maintaining standards, but the education provider explained their limited use suggests a need for more consistent implementation.

- We were satisfied with how the education provider is performing in this area.
- **Quality of practice-based learning –**
 - Learners gain practical experience across three key settings:
 - Hidden Hearing clinics;
 - Visiting sites, managed by regional coordinators; and
 - Domiciliary appointments.
 - These environments are integral to the curriculum and are strategically embedded throughout the programmes.
 - The education provider's structured, rotational model ensures comprehensive exposure to all key practice environments. Regular feedback loops (for example observations, and reviews) support continuous development. The programmes can adapt practice-based learning to business needs while maintaining educational quality.
 - The education provider stated this strategic scheduling and variety of practice-based learning provides learners with experience which supports their academic development and readiness for real-world practice as Hearing Aid Dispensers.
 - We were satisfied with how the education provider is performing in this area.
- **Learner support –**
 - The education provider introduced eight-to-ten weekly reviews using an Individual Learning Plan (ILP). This was to track learner's progress, set targets, and provide feedback. This required coordination across teams. An ILP template was created to document milestones, and open discussions. Training was delivered to the programme teams, and communications were sent to the wider business to ensure awareness and engagement.
 - The IPL strengthened relationships between learners, trainers, and managers. It created a protected space for celebrating progress and addressing concerns, as well as enabled the sharing of best practice across the business when common themes emerged. The education provider stated the ILP review process has become a valuable support mechanism, enhancing communication, transparency, and learner's development. It is now embedded in the programmes, with evaluation to ensure effectiveness.
 - Due to the residential nature of the programmes, the education provider has a heightened duty of care to support learners' wellbeing and mental health. Learners have access to TELUS Health, an independent Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). This offers a confidential, external support option that learners have used effectively. Information about TELUS is shared during induction and displayed in bedrooms, communal areas, and on the intranet. A Training Centre Coordinator (TCC), who is a trained counsellor, provides on-site, confidential wellbeing support. The combination of TELUS and the TCC's has also created a strong, multi-layered wellbeing framework.

- We were satisfied with how the education provider is performing in this area.
- **Interprofessional education –**
 - An IPE unit was introduced in 2021 in response to HCPC guidance, aiming to expose learners to other healthcare professionals and adult social care systems. However, consistent access to interprofessional environments (e.g., visiting sites) has been limited, and engagement from other professionals has been difficult to secure.
 - The education provider has developed their provision and encouraged interactions with care staff in nursing homes and residential settings. Monthly reflective essays are used to assess these experiences. A guest speaker delivers a session where they offer practical insights into care planning, safeguarding, and professional conduct in domiciliary settings. Role plays have been added to simulate multidisciplinary team collaboration and decision-making.
 - Learners now demonstrate a stronger understanding of holistic, patient-centred care. Reflections show an increased awareness of how collaboration with other professionals improves outcomes (e.g., care plan updates for hearing aid maintenance). Role play has enhanced teamwork, empathy, and communication skills, while reinforcing the importance of the hearing aid dispenser's role in broader care contexts. Learners report greater confidence in engaging with other professionals and signposting service users. There have been fewer questions from learners about safeguarding and referrals, indicating improved autonomy and understanding.
 - The education provider informed us IPE has become a valuable and impactful part of the curriculum, enriching both learners' development and service user outcomes. The education provider was undertaking ongoing work by the Professional Practice Lead to further expand structured exposure to healthcare professionals.
 - From seeking clarification with the education provider, they informed us all learners are placed in settings where they have regular and deliberate interactions with other healthcare professionals. The education provider plans to continue developing IPE to reflect changes in adult social care, as well as expanding guest speaker involvement to include a wider range of healthcare professionals. The visitors noted this and therefore considered the education provider should reflect on the implementation of their plans to enhance interprofessional education through their next engagement with our performance review process.
- **Service users and carers –**
 - From seeking clarification with the education provider, they informed they wanted to broaden the pool of service users contributing to the curriculum and learner's experience. The education provider recruited a local hearing aid user to join the Curriculum Development Group (CDG). They also invited a service user to deliver a session and

enhanced their Open Day to include more service user engagement. These additions provided real-world insights into living with hearing loss. Feedback from these sessions has been positive and impactful. Learners gained a deeper understanding of the emotional and practical challenges faced by service users. The education provider stated service user involvement has improved learners' experience and further expansion of this involvement is planned.

- The education provider determined they needed direct feedback from patients. They implemented two feedback tools:
 - Trainee Consent and Feedback Form; and
 - Customer Services Feedback Requests
- Customer service feedback is more candid and dependable due to its independent nature. Trainee Consent and Feedback Forms offer useful insights but may be biased due to the learner's presence when being completed. Managers and the programme teams review feedback to identify individual or group development needs. Low scores trigger follow-up work to explore improvements. The education provider concluded both feedback methods have limitations, but together they provide a well-rounded view of how patients perceive learners. This feedback is a valuable tool for continuous improvement.
- The education provider informed us service users are fully integrated into programmes. For example, they participate in the Curriculum Development Group (CDG).
- The education provider acknowledged there had previously been an over-reliance on one individual and has since recruited an additional service user. The education provider explained a new initiative proposes contacting a sample of service users post-appointment to gather targeted feedback. If approved, this will launch with the July 2025 cohort and aims to enhance curriculum development and service user care. The visitors noted this and therefore considered the education provider should reflect on the implementation of their plans to enhance service user and carer involvement through their next engagement with our performance review process.
- **Equality, diversity, and inclusion –**
 - The education provider explained no specific issues were identified in this area. The programme teams aimed to ensure continued inclusivity and equal treatment for all learners. They developed pre-programme overview sessions and open days which helped candidates assess the training environment before committing.
 - HR-led recruitment follows strict equality and diversity policies, supported by the “Dignity at Work” policy. Group-mixing strategies during training prevent cliques and encourage broader peer interaction. Eight-to-ten-week reviews include policy awareness checks to ensure learners feel valued and supported.
 - The education provider informed us they have a strong, inclusive culture, with learners interacting positively across age, gender, race, and background. The programme teams work with HR to address any

emerging concerns promptly. The current approach is effective, with no identified risks. The inclusive environment is supported by policy, practice, and culture, and is monitored through structured reviews and informal engagement.

- We were satisfied with how the education provider is performing in this area.

- **Horizon scanning –**

- The programme team is actively involved in research trials, aligning with global developments. For example, the team has completed Audio Contrast Threshold training and is prepared to integrate it into the curriculum if adopted. The programme team's involvement in trials ensures future-readiness and means they can adapt the curriculum based on trial outcomes.
- A tympanometry trial is planned for 2025 to assess its potential inclusion in standard consultations. Tympanometry is already taught and assessed in the programmes. The programme team will use trial outcomes to enhance curriculum content. Regardless of the business decision, tympanometry will remain in the curriculum, with updated insights from the trial enriching learning.
- The 'HAD Pool' is a pipeline for developing future trainers from within the organisation. The pool includes hearing aid dispensers who have shown interest in training and are gaining experience. This approach ensures continuity and quality in the programme team. The HAD Pool is a strategic success, offering a sustainable way to grow the training team with experienced, internally developed professionals.
- We were satisfied with how the education provider is performing in this area.

Risks identified which may impact on performance: None.

Outstanding issues for follow up: The education provider informed us all learners are placed in settings where they have regular and deliberate interactions with other healthcare professionals. The education provider plans to continue developing IPE to reflect changes in adult social care, as well as expanding guest speaker involvement to include a wider range of healthcare professionals. The visitors this and therefore considered the education provider should reflect on the implementation of their plans to enhance interprofessional education through their next engagement with our performance review process.

The education provider informed us service users are fully integrated into programmes. For example, they participate in the Curriculum Development Group (CDG). The provider acknowledged there was an over-reliance on one individual and has since recruited an additional service user. The education provider explained a new initiative proposes contacting a sample of service users post-appointment to gather targeted feedback. If approved, this will launch with the July 2025 cohort and aims to enhance curriculum development and service user care. The visitors noted this and therefore considered the education provider should reflect on the

implementation of their plans to enhance service user and carer involvement through their next engagement with our performance review process.

Quality theme: Thematic reflection

Findings of the assessment panel:

- **Embedding the revised Standards of Proficiency (SOPs) –**
 - Although the programme team believed the existing curriculum already aligned well with the revised SOPs, a full review and mapping exercise was undertaken to ensure full compliance. Each module lead reviewed and updated their content using previous mapping documents.
 - Each module was reviewed to ensure the revised SOPs were fully embedded. The final assignment ensures learners can evidence their readiness for registration, reinforcing the programmes' alignment with professional standards.
 - All cohorts receive comprehensive safeguarding training from the company's Safeguarding Lead as part of the Professional Practice module. Training includes promoting public health, delivered through face-to-face sessions, e-learning, and annual assessments. The existing policies and curriculum effectively support physical and mental health promotion, empowering both service users and staff to engage in preventative care.
 - While the existing curriculum already addressed communication and service user needs, the programme team sought to further improve provision considering the revised SOPs. The Psychology and Communication module was reviewed and updated during the period. Communication with hearing-impaired individuals is also covered in the Counselling and Rehab module. Learners engage with service users of varying hearing levels, including socially active individuals with moderate to severe hearing loss.
 - A Connectivity session was introduced which explored assistive technologies (e.g., TV adapters) and emphasised patient-centred care and shared decision-making. The new session significantly enriched the curriculum by offering real-world insights into the lived experience of hearing loss. It deepened learners understanding of how holistic, user-led solutions can improve outcomes and mental wellbeing, further strengthening the programmes' alignment with SOP expectations.
 - The revised SOPs place greater emphasis on mental health, not just physical health. The training team reviewed existing provision to ensure this was fully integrated. Mental health is addressed through items such as safeguarding training delivered by the company's Safeguarding Lead.
 - No specific changes were needed, as the programmes already aligned well with digital skills and new technologies. However, the programme team reviewed provision to ensure it remained current and compliant. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliance is embedded

through training on confidentiality and consent, including digital platforms.

- The programmes are responsive to technological advancements, with learners encouraged to reflect on emerging tools in their Personal Development Portfolio. The programmes support the development of digital competencies and ensure learners are well-prepared for evolving practice environments.
- No changes were needed to meet the leadership theme, as it was already deeply embedded. Learners receive face-to-face sessions which models leadership and reinforce its importance in patient care. Group assignments and peer-led activities foster collaborative leadership. Activities allow learners to demonstrate initiative, communication, and team coordination. The programmes provide multiple, meaningful opportunities for learners to develop and demonstrate leadership. It fully supports the SOPs' emphasis on autonomy and leadership at all levels of practice.
- We were satisfied with how the education provider is performing in this area.
- **Embedding the revised HCPC standards of conduct, performance, and ethics across professions –**
 - The education provider ensured the revised SCPEs were fully integrated in the programmes for the relevant cohorts. The Professional Practice module and wider curriculum were reviewed and updated to reflect the revised SCPEs.
 - Learners were updated with a combination of Dispenser Development Days within the business, additional communications, and the updated Professional Practice module, including a dedicated SCPE session.
 - The education provider's internal policies (e.g., Equality and Dignity at Work) and ongoing training further reinforce the SCPE themes. The programme is now fully aligned with the revised SCPEs, ensuring all learners are prepared for professional registration and ethical practice.
 - We were satisfied with how the education provider is performing in this area.
- **Impact of workforce planning –**
 - As part of Hidden Hearing Ltd, the education provider's learner intake is directly influenced by business needs, rather than national workforce planning. The number of cohorts per year and their size are determined by market demand and internal workforce requirements.
 - While broader workforce initiatives may increase interest in hearing care careers, the education provider's intake remains proportionate to its operational needs. They have ample capacity for practice-based learning, with over 80 clinics, more than 280 visiting sites, and a large domiciliary patient base. Staffing levels are expected to remain stable, with no significant expansion beyond historical highs.
 - We were satisfied with how the education provider is performing in this area.

- **Use of technology: Changing learning, teaching, and assessment methods –**
 - Learners struggled to apply theoretical knowledge of ear disorders in real-world scenarios. In response, the education provider introduced a simulation head device to visually demonstrate various ear conditions using a standard otoscope. This was integrated into classroom teaching, revision, and summative practical exams. It improved learners' ability to recognise and respond appropriately to ear disorders in practice, enhancing patient safety and referral accuracy.
 - Some learners were reluctant to request help, even when struggling with programme content. The education provider introduced Plickers, an anonymous feedback tool using Quick Response-coded cards. This is used at the end of each lecture to assess learner confidence and understanding. It enabled targeted support for individuals and cohorts, improved engagement, and allowed trainers to adapt teaching based on real-time feedback.
 - We were satisfied with how the education provider is performing in this area.
- **Apprenticeships in England –**
 - Following approval from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) in late 2023 and HCPC approval of the apprenticeship programme in June 2024, the programme began delivering for English-based learners.
 - The existing programme was adapted to meet the apprenticeship requirements. The programme team, senior management, and HR engaged in upskilling activities (e.g., webinars, workshops) to understand and implement ESFA processes.
 - The rollout led to an initial increase in workload but also strengthened internal collaboration. The education provider envisages processes to streamline with each cohort. The degree apprenticeship programme will be monitored by ESFA and OFSTED.
 - The apprenticeship programme has been recently launched. The team remains initiative-taking in addressing emerging challenges and is committed to refining delivery as the programme evolves.
 - We were satisfied with how the education provider is performing in this area.

Risks identified which may impact on performance: None.

Outstanding issues for follow up: None.

Quality theme: Sector body assessment reflection

Findings of the assessment panel:

- **Other professional regulators / professional bodies –**
 - The Professional Practice lead is responsible for ensuring programmes reflect updates from regulatory and professional bodies such as the British School of Audiology (BSA), and the British Society of Hearing Aid Audiologists (BSHAA). These updates often occur mid-cohort, creating challenges in ensuring timely integration and learner understanding.
 - Recent updates have included BSA guidance on tympanometry, tuning fork tests, and aural care, and BSHAA referral guidance.
 - Updates were communicated via a variety of methods. For example, online sessions for relevant cohorts, and updated assignments and case-based assessments.
 - The education provider stated timely updates are critical to ensure safe and compliant practice. Learners demonstrated understanding through Objective Structured Practical Examinations (OSPEs) and SOP / SCPE assignments.
 - The programme team recognised the need to inform learners of upcoming changes earlier, even before formal implementation, to reduce disruption and improve preparedness. The education provider therefore plans to introduce regulatory changes earlier in the programme timeline. They aim to develop a Fitness to Practise exam to assess understanding of professional standards. Continued collaboration with the education provider's Compliance Officer ensures timely updates and alignment with best practice.
 - The programme team is committed to maintaining up-to-date, compliant, and responsive programme content. While mid-cohort changes present challenges, initiative-taking planning, early communication, and structured assessments ensure learners are well-prepared and aligned with evolving professional expectations.
 - We were satisfied with how the education provider is performing in this area.

Risks identified which may impact on performance: None.

Outstanding issues for follow up: None.

Quality theme: Profession specific reflection

Findings of the assessment panel:

- **Curriculum development –**
 - The CDG meetings are used to review and justify curriculum changes or continuity. Key areas of focus included updates to OSPE

procedures, evaluation of assignment briefs and scheduling, and debates on the use of screening devices.

- Learners now have access to otoscopes during audiometry assessments to improve flow and realism, based on learner and examiner feedback. The otoscope addition improved learner performance and confidence during OSPEs.
- A PowerPoint presentation was created to compare old and new SOPs, highlighting clearer, more active language and increased focus on mental health, equality, diversity and inclusion, and sustainability. The SOP changes were well received, with learners appreciating the clearer language and focus on registrant wellbeing.
- The CDG meetings now include external professionals and service users, offering broader perspectives. A service user highlighted the importance of assistive listening devices, prompting plans to increase their emphasis in training. Plans include the earlier introduction of regulatory changes, and more frequent assessments to evaluate understanding.
- The CDG meetings are a vital mechanism for ongoing curriculum improvement, ensuring the programmes remain aligned with industry standards and learner needs. They foster innovation, responsiveness, and help produce well-rounded, reflective, and competent hearing aid dispensers.
- We were satisfied with how the education provider is performing in this area.
- **Capacity of practice-based learning (programme / profession level) –**
 - Practice Educators reported 'grading days', where they observe learners and give them advice and support, lacked sufficient appointment variety, making it harder to provide meaningful feedback as learners became more confident and efficient. In response, annual test appointments were added to every other grading day. A new observation form was created to support structured feedback. Additional training on the annual test structure was integrated into the programme content to prepare learners.
 - Learners appreciated the broader appointment exposure. Practice Educators found it easier to provide feedback. The change aligns with the education provider's wider training initiatives, ensuring consistency across the business. The inclusion of the annual test appointments has enhanced grading day feedback, improved learner preparedness.
 - We were satisfied with how the education provider is performing in this area.

Risks identified which may impact on performance: None.

Outstanding issues for follow up: None.

Quality theme: Stakeholder feedback and actions

Findings of the assessment panel:

- **Strategic approach to feedback –**
 - OFSTED's New Provider Monitoring Visit determined the apprenticeship programme as low risk, delaying further inspection until 2026.
 - The education provider enjoys strong relationships with BSHAA and BSA through key individuals. External examiner involvement ensures adherence to best practices and provides regular feedback. External examiner feedback led to clarification of moderation processes and reaffirmed commitment to transparency. The education provider aims to continue leveraging external relationships for curriculum input and feedback, as well as maintain current moderation policy and prepare for the future OFSTED review in 2026.
 - There has been feedback from internal stakeholders too. Learners reported insufficient practical sessions and limited exposure to varied hearing aid products. There were also concerns raised from them about preparedness for certain appointment types and practical job aspects. In response, a pre-practice question and answer session led by a qualified dispenser, and additional face-to-face product training have been added. Anecdotal feedback and initial grading reports from learners suggest improvements in confidence and patient experience. The education provider plans to continue to enhance curricula.
 - We were satisfied with how the education provider is performing in this area.
- **Learners –**
 - Learners raised concerns about the OneNote system being incomplete or inconsistent with lecture notes. OneNote was found useful for assignments but less effective for revision purposes. Module leads reviewed and updated all OneNote content, ensuring consistency with lecture slides and other resources. Initial feedback from learners indicated satisfaction with OneNote, suggesting the issues raised have been addressed. Ongoing monitoring and updates to OneNote will continue as needed.
 - Learners also suggested the need for an assignment timetable to help with time management and prioritisation. An assignment timetable was created and has been implemented.
 - The education provider explained how their initiative-taking response to feedback demonstrated a commitment to continuous improvement and responsiveness to learners' needs.
 - We were satisfied with how the education provider is performing in this area.
- **Practice educators –**
 - To meet business needs, two cohorts were run in close succession. This required a new role of Assistant Practitioner to bridge the gap

between theory and practice. The role ensures learners gained real-world experience with limited responsibilities, enhancing their confidence and practical skills before full patient-based learning. While the Assistant Practitioner period was beneficial, feedback indicated ten weeks was too long. It was shortened to three weeks, which proved successful and is now standard.

- The education provider stated there has been a positive impact of the Assistant Practitioner role. Practice Educators reported improved learner readiness, communication skills, and confidence. The restructure was widely praised. The Assistant Practitioner model is now a permanent feature of the training programme, with a refined duration based on stakeholder feedback.
 - The education provider have created a new role called 'Clinical Support Hearing Aid Dispensers' (CSHADs). These are registered hearing aid dispensers who will support the learners in the PE role and also have a wider mentoring role supporting other registered hearing aid dispensers. For example, to improve commercial skills. CSHADs will have a day every week allocated to this job. The impact of CSHADs will be assessed via learner surveys and steering committee reviews to ensure the role enhances learner's experience.
 - We were satisfied with how the education provider is performing in this area.
- **External examiners –**
 - External examiner feedback highlighted the need for a clearly documented moderation policy. Although a consistent internal process existed, it was not formally recorded. A comprehensive moderation document was created and published in April 2024, detailing the criteria and procedures, with a review date set for April 2027. The moderation policy is now transparent and externally verifiable.
 - They also suggested adding otoscopy to the OSPEs to improve realism. Otoscopy is now a mandatory part of the OSPE and enhances the quality of practical assessments. This change has improved learner's performance and confidence.
 - We were satisfied with how the education provider is performing in this area.

Risks identified which may impact on performance: None.

Outstanding issues for follow up: None.

Data and reflections

Findings of the assessment panel:

- **Learner non continuation:**
 - Across the three cohorts which form the intakes for the review period, 24% of learners left the programme. 11% were due to self-removal and

13% were removed by the education provider. Reasons for leaving included:

- academic difficulty, especially among older learners with limited recent study experience;
 - disciplinary issues and exam failures; and
 - personal circumstances.
- Some learners who failed assessments were retained as Hearing Care Assistants and successfully rejoined later cohorts. Internal candidates who left the programme were often retained and redeployed within the company, showing flexibility in career development.
- 76% of learners completed the programme during the review period. Leaver data is reviewed at steering committee meetings and verified by the external examiner, ensuring transparency and continuous improvement.
- We were satisfied how the education provider is performing relating to this area.
- **Outcomes for those who complete programmes:**
 - No significant challenges were noted in this area, but it builds on previous reflections regarding retention and completion rates.
 - All learners who successfully complete either programme are eligible for HCPC registration as Hearing Aid Dispensers (HAD). Upon registration, learners move from a Trainee HAD contract to a Registered HAD contract with Hidden Hearing.
 - Every learner who completes either programme is employed full-time by Hidden Hearing as a Hearing Aid Dispenser. Graduates do not continue with further study within Hidden Hearing; they transition directly into professional roles.
 - We were satisfied how the education provider is performing relating to this area.
- **Learner satisfaction:**
 - End-of-programme surveys revealed that 24% of learners felt marking criteria were unclear. This prompted a review and update of assignment briefs to improve transparency.
 - Learners had provided positive overall feedback. Most responses affirmed that the programme structure and delivery are effective and well-received.
 - We were satisfied how the education provider is performing relating to this area.
- **Proposal for supplying data points to the HCPC:**
 - The education provider's training schedule does not align with traditional academic years, making standardised reporting more complex.
 - The education provider proposes they submit data annually in January, covering the previous calendar year. This captures the most complete data, as most cohorts finish within that time.

- Data can be provided via a narrative Word document or Excel spreadsheet, with openness to other formats preferred by HCPC. Learner satisfaction and completion data can be externally verified by the External Examiner, with supporting documentation. The proposal reflects an initiative-taking approach to maintaining high standards and accountability. By formalising and streamlining data reporting, the education provider seeks to be considered for longer intervals between HCPC reviews. We will continue to take forward this work, in order to establish a regular supply of data.
- **Programme level data:**
 - No major challenges were identified in this area, though it reflects the importance of aligning recruitment with business needs and programme structure.
 - The education provider recruited 20 learners for Cohort 16, meeting business targets for the academic year for the apprenticeship programme. Recruitment for this cohort followed apprenticeship eligibility criteria, improving candidate quality and suitability for the programme.
 - Of the 20 learners in Cohort 16, 19 progressed indicating high retention and performance. Recruitment numbers and outcomes aligned well with the education provider's operational and budgetary goals.
 - We were satisfied how the education provider is performing relating to this area.

Risks identified which may impact on performance: None.

Outstanding issues for follow up: None.

Section 5: Issues identified for further review

This section summarises any areas which require further follow-up through a separate quality assurance process (the approval or focused review process).

Referrals to next scheduled performance review

The following areas should be referred to another HCPC process for assessment:

- The education provider should reflect on the implementation of their plans to enhance interprofessional education through their next engagement with our performance review process.
- The education provider should reflect on the implementation of their plans to enhance service user and carer involvement through their next engagement with our performance review process.

Section 6: Decision on performance review outcomes

Assessment panel recommendation

Based on the findings detailed in section 4, the visitors recommend to the Education and Training Committee that:

- The education provider's next engagement with the performance review process should be in the 2026-27 academic year
- The issues identified for referral through this review should be conducted in accordance with the details contained in section 5 of this report

Reason for next engagement recommendation

- Internal stakeholder engagement
 - The education provider engages with a range of stakeholders with quality assurance and enhancement in mind. Specific groups engaged by the education provider were Hearing Dogs for Deaf People, OFSTED, ESFA, BSA, and BSHAA.
- External input into quality assurance and enhancement
 - The education provider engaged with two professional bodies. They considered professional body findings in improving their provision.
 - The education provider engaged with OFSTED for the development of their apprenticeship programme. They considered the findings of OFSTED in improving their provision.
 - The education provider considers sector and professional development in a structured way.
- Data supply
 - Through this review, the education provider started discussions to establish how they will supply quality and performance data points which are equivalent to those in external supplies available for other organisations. The education provider will report every January for the previous calendar year. The data will be submitted via a narrative word document with an accompanying reflection by the education provider. We will continue to take forward this work, in order to establish a regular supply of data.
- What the data is telling us:
 - From data points considered and reflections through the process, the education provider considers data in their quality assurance and enhancement processes and acts on data to inform positive change.
- In summary, the reason for the recommendation of a two year monitoring period is:
 - The following areas should be referred to another HCPC process for assessment. The education provider should reflect on their performance regarding:
 - interprofessional education, and their plans for enhancing it, through their next engagement with our performance review process; and

- service user and carer involvement, and their plans for enhancing it, through their next engagement with our performance review process.
- Through this review, the education provider started the work to provide data points equitable to those we receive from HESA and NSS. They supplied data points for some cohorts that had been externally verified. We will continue to take forward this work, in order to establish a regular supply of data.

Education and Training Committee decision

Education and Training Committee considered the assessment panel's recommendations and the findings which support these. The education provider was also provided with the opportunity to submit any observation they had on the conclusions reached.

Based on all information presented to them, the Committee decided that:

- The education provider's next engagement with the performance review process should be in the 2026-27 academic year
- The issues identified for referral through this review should be conducted in accordance with the details contained in section 5 of this report

Reason for this decision: The Panel agreed with the visitors' recommended monitoring period, for the reasons noted through the report.

Appendix 1 – summary report

If the education provider does not provide observations, only this summary report (rather than the whole report) will be provided to the Education and Training Committee (Panel) to enable their decision on the next steps for the provider. The lead visitors confirm this is an accurate summary of their recommendation (including their reasons) and any referrals.

Education provider	Hidden Hearing Limited		
Case reference	CAS-01554-M9F3J4	Lead visitors	Claire Langman, Robert MacKinnon
Review period recommended	Two years		
Reason for recommendation			
<p>The education provider should next engage with monitoring in two years, the 2026-27 academic year, because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The education provider engages with a range of stakeholders with quality assurance and enhancement in mind.• The education provider considers sector and professional development in a structured way.• Through this review, the education provider started the work to provide data points equitable to those we receive from HESA and NSS. They supplied data points for some cohorts that had been externally verified. We will continue to take forward this work, in order to establish a regular supply of data.• From data points considered and reflections through the process, the education provider considers data in their quality assurance and enhancement processes and acts on data to inform positive change.			
Referrals			
<p>The following areas should be referred to another HCPC process for assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The education provider should reflect on the implementation of their plans to enhance interprofessional education through their next engagement with our performance review process.• The education provider should reflect on the implementation of their plans to enhance service user and carer involvement through their next engagement with our performance review process.			

Appendix 2 – list of open programmes at this institution

Name	Mode of study	Profession	Modality	Annotation	First intake date
Award in Hearing Aid Dispensing Competence	WBL (Work based learning)	Hearing aid dispenser			01/10/2013
Award in Hearing Aid Dispensing Competence (Apprenticeship)	WBL (Work based learning)	Hearing aid dispenser			29/06/2024