

Education and Training Committee – 8 September 2011

Adaptations for approval and monitoring of hearing aid dispenser aptitude tests

Executive summary and recommendations

Introduction

In the majority, the approved programmes leading to eligibility to apply to our Register are designed to train and assess individuals with limited previous experience or training of a profession. These programmes deliver academic and practical training as well as assess individuals against the standards required for safe and effective practice.

In some cases, programmes are designed to only assess individuals who hold prior qualifications or experience relevant to the profession. In some of these cases the programmes are structured very differently from the more traditional approved programmes.

Depending on the particular programme concerned the education provider may deliver very little or no academic or practical content. Instead the education provider will rely upon candidates to submit their previously acquired academic and practical experience. This experience is then evaluated either in admission to a “top-up” route or in a gateway assessment process which then leads to the achievement of an award leading to eligibility to apply to our Register.

One currently approved programme (the Association of Clinical Scientists’ Certificate of Attainment) is designed as a gateway assessment of this kind. In the lead up the approval visit, the Education and Training Committee agreed, given the structural differences, that the visitors reviewing the programmes were able to make a recommendation that particular standards of education and training were not applicable in ensuring individuals achieving the award met the standards of proficiency.

In the transfer of approved programmes from the Hearing Aid Council to HPC, we accepted two “aptitude tests” which are designed to enable individuals with prior experience and education in audiology to be eligible for registration as hearing aid dispensers. This unusual situation occurs for this profession because statutory regulation only extends to hearing aid dispensers in the independent sector and not to hearing aid audiologists working in the NHS.

We are still to visit the aptitude test programmes, but our understanding is that structurally there will be limited delivery of learning outcomes, little or no

placement components integrated into the programme, and a greater reliance on assessment of individual prior experience and qualifications.
This paper sets out proposals for the Committee's approval on adaptations to the approval process for hearing aid dispenser aptitude test programmes or equivalents in the same profession.

Decision

The Committee is asked to agree the suggested adaptations to the approval process as outlined in section five of the substantive paper.

Background information

'Hearing Aid Dispensers – list of approved programmes', Education and Training Committee, 10 March 2010

Resource implications

The Committee's decisions will need to be communicated to affected education providers and visitors in specific correspondence which will require a small amount of employee time.

Financial implications

None

Appendices

None

Date of paper

18 August 2011

Adaptations for approval and monitoring of hearing aid dispenser aptitude tests or equivalents for the profession

1.0 Hearing aid dispensers

1.1 Regulation of hearing aid dispensers includes both a protection of title and protection of function. This means that the following tasks are 'controlled acts' which only a registered hearing aid dispenser can perform:

- assessing or testing a person's hearing; or
- prescribing a hearing aid for a person;

with a view to a hearing aid being supplied to or provided for that person by way of retail, sale or hire.

1.2 Audiologists working in the NHS do not need to be registered as hearing aid dispensers as they are not engaged in the retail supply of hearing aids. If an NHS audiologist also worked in the independent sector and was engaged in retail supply, they would need to be registered with the HPC as a hearing aid dispenser.

1.3 An "aptitude test" was introduced by the Hearing Aid Council that enabled those with relevant qualifications and work experience to become eligible for registration as a hearing aid dispenser. The test was primarily aimed at those currently dispensing in the NHS or abroad and who wished to work in the independent sector. Prior to the transfer of regulatory functions from the Hearing Aid Council to HPC, the aptitude test routes were approved for delivery by Anglia Ruskin University and De Montfort University.

1.4 At the point of transfer, the aptitude tests were accepted as approved programmes by HPC. The Education Department is in the process of visiting all approved programmes which were approved by the Hearing Aid Council at the point of the register transfer. The visits for the two existing aptitude tests are planned for the 2011/12 academic year.

1.5 The Education Department has also received a new programme visit request form for an aptitude test proposed for delivery by Aston University. This visit is also planned for the 2011/12 academic year. There may be further programmes of this type proposed for approval in future.

2.0 Summary of the aptitude test routes and equivalents for the profession

- 2.1 Aptitude test routes rely on the previous qualifications and practical experience of applicants. These routes generally apply entry criteria which require individuals to hold qualifications and experience required to work as audiologists in the NHS.
- 2.2 In some cases, entry requirements may also allow individuals with overseas qualifications and / or experience to apply to the programme.
- 2.3 In some cases, entry requirements may also allow individuals who are working in the broad field of audiology but not as a hearing aid dispenser to “up skill” to gain access to a protected title.
- 2.4 The aptitude test route assessment strategy is based on the similarity between the roles of audiologists in the NHS and hearing aid dispensers. The modules and assessments focus only on the difference between the roles resulting from:
 - the separate statutory requirements for hearing aid dispensers, and
 - working in a retail setting.
- 2.5 In some cases, this may mean that aptitude test routes will not contain practice placements as part of the learning, teaching and assessment strategy. The basis for this is that individuals will already hold the required practical skills as a result of their prior training and experience as audiologists in the NHS.
- 2.6 Where there are differences in the practice of hearing aid dispensers and audiologists in the NHS, clinical simulation rather than live practice is used to build upon existing skills and assess them.

3.0 Approval process

- 3.1 The approval process will be the first opportunity for our visitors to engage in a detailed review of individual aptitude tests and each programme will be dealt with on a case by case basis.
- 3.2 Both the documentation submitted prior to the visit and the information from the visit itself will be required by the visitors to make recommendations to the Education and Training Committee.
- 3.3 In the lead up to the approval visit, the education provider will be advised that there is an expectation that all standards of education and training will be met for approval to be granted. However the education provider may make the case for standards under SET five (practice placements) which they feel do not apply to the

particular programme as a result entry requirements for prior qualifications and experience as an audiologist working in the NHS. All other standards of education and training must be evidenced in the documentary submission and at the approval visit. Education providers will be advised that the decision not to provide evidence against any standard may lead to conditions being placed on approval.

- 3.4 The visitors will be required to assess programmes against all standards of education and training and formulate recommendations for the overall outcome of the approval process. The overall recommendation will include any conditions, recommendations and commendations placed on approval. Additionally, the visitors may make recommendations that a number of standards under SET five (practice placements) are not applicable to a programme as a result of entry requirements for prior qualifications and experience as an audiologist working in the NHS. The visitors will be expected to make all other standards of education and training requirements for approval to be granted and formulate their overall recommendation accordingly.
- 3.5 Visitors will consider the profile of applicants and the admissions processes for determining equivalency to hearing aid dispenser standards of proficiency. If required, the visitors may either set conditions to amend admissions procedures or require additional training and experience as part of the programme in the form of practice placements for particular applicant groups.
- 3.6 If conditions are applied which require practice placements for particular applicant groups, then all the standards under SET five will need to be met by the programme.
- 3.7 The visitors will submit their report to the education provider who will be given 28 days to provide observations. Any observations and the report from the visitors will be reviewed by the Education and Training Committee.
- 3.8 The Education and Training Committee, acting by Panel, will make the final decision on approval in the usual way. In doing so, the Panel will decide whether to accept, reject or amend any recommendations that standards of education and training for practice placements are not applicable.

4.0 Annual monitoring and major change processes

- 4.1 If a programme is approved on the basis that SET five does not apply, the resulting monitoring activities will not review the programme against these standards directly. The education provider will be advised to provide at least nine months' notice of any intention to introduce practice placements because a full approval visit will be required to review the programme.

- 4.2 In the annual monitoring process, the visitors reviewing audits will be informed of the decisions of the Education and Training Committee. The visitors will be expected to review the documentation in the usual way to make a recommendation on the continued approval of the programme. Additionally, the visitors will be asked to confirm that no changes to the programme have occurred to introduce placement learning. If changes have occurred which introduce placement learning, it is expected that the visitors will recommend that a visit takes place as soon as possible.
- 4.3 Major changes to programmes will be reviewed in the normal way, but it is expected that a visit will be recommended, to take place as soon as possible, if there are indications of the introduction of practice placements to the programme.

5.0 Summary of recommendations for adaptations to approval and monitoring processes

- 5.1 Education providers of aptitude tests or equivalents for the profession will be informed of the initial expectation to meet all of the standards of education and training to gain approval for a programme. However, education providers will be able to express a rationale that some standards under SET 5 are not applicable because of the admission criteria for the programme.
- 5.2 Visitors will review programmes in the approval process in the normal way, but may make recommendations that some standards under SET 5 are not applicable for the rationale outlined in 4.1 and the robust nature of the admissions process of the programme.
- 5.3 The Education and Training Panel will review reports in the normal way but may make decisions to grant approval without all standards under SET 5 being met as a result of the rationale outlined in 4.1 and the robust nature of the admissions process of the programme.
- 5.4 After approval is granted for and such programmes, affected education providers will be informed that HPC must be notified of the intent to introduce practice placements into programmes with a minimum of nine months' notice before implementation. An approval visit will be required to review changes to the programme.
- 5.5 The annual monitoring process will operate in the usual way. However, it is expected that visitors will recommend that a visit takes place as soon as possible if information comes to light that practice placements have been introduced into an affected programme.
- 5.6 The major change process will operate in the usual way. However, it is expected that a recommendation will be made for a visit to take place as soon as possible if information comes to light that practice placements have been, or are intended to be, introduced into an affected programme.