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Education and Training Committee, 10 March 2020

Reviewing our approach to quality assuring Higher and Degree Apprenticeships from 2018-19

Executive summary and recommendations

## **Introduction**

This paper follows a [report](#) to the Education and Training Committee in March 2019 which reviewed our approach to quality assuring Higher and Degree Apprenticeship programmes in the previous academic year. We have now completed a review for the academic year 2018-19 and this paper summarises our findings. Similarly to the previous paper, we considered:

- What our approach to these assessments was;
- The proportionality and effectiveness of our assessment methods, including identifying key trends; and
- Our approach to this work in the future.

In general, the findings confirmed in this period reflect those from the previous year, particularly around the key trends coming through requests for additional evidence (major change) and conditions (approvals). Therefore this paper does not contain the same level of detail about the findings found in both reviews, rather it summarises these findings, where appropriate, and concentrates on the differences identified.

## **Decision**

None.

## **Background information**

None

## **Resource implications**

None.

## **Financial implications**

None.

## **Date of paper**

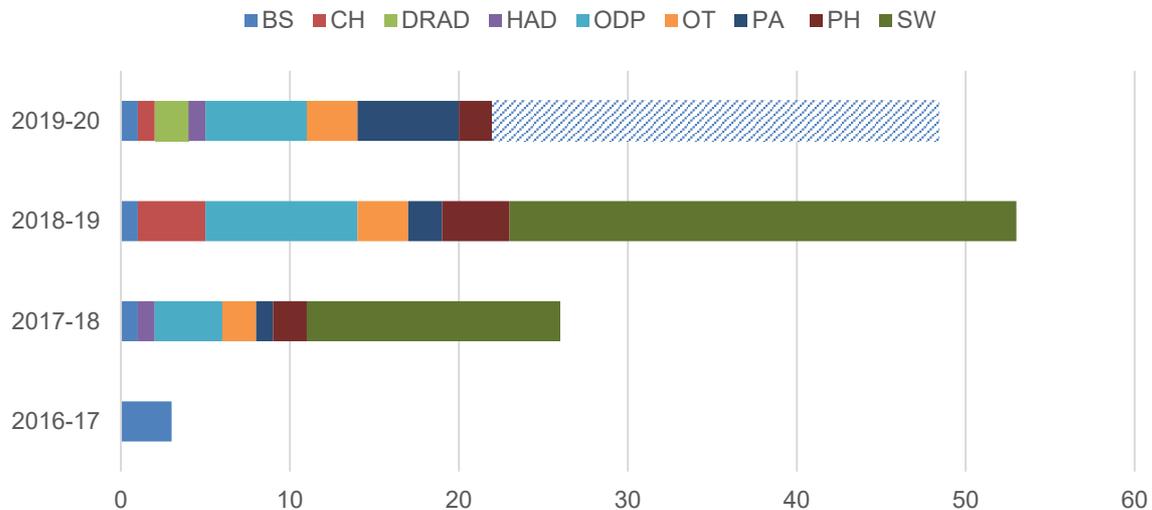
31 January 2019

## **Reviewing our continued approach to quality assuring Higher and Degree Apprenticeships**

### **1. Our approach to these assessments**

- 1.1 A key learning point of the previous report was to loosen the ‘general principles’ for the method of assessment. Therefore, in this period, case by case judgements were made based on the merits of the individual programme. If the education provider already ran an approved programme, this meant it was a risk based judgement about how similar a proposed apprenticeship route was to the existing approved programme in the same profession. If there was sufficient similarities, evidence could be reviewed via documentary means and the risk was low, we assessed these via the major change process. If there were few similarities, visitors needed to meet stakeholders, and the risk was higher, we reviewed the programme via the approvals process.
- 1.2 For programmes developed by education providers not already running an approved programme in that profession, the normal approval process applied. This meant that programmes needed to be approved before apprentices could start their training. It also meant that the normal timescales applied – six months lead in time to the visit, with the aim of completing the process within three months of the visit.
- 1.3 Over the past two years, the range of professions pushing forward with the development of apprenticeship standards continued to grow so we have now visited apprenticeship programmes from eight professions. In the current academic year, we will be visiting the first diagnostic radiography apprenticeship programmes.
- 1.4 From the beginning of 2016-17 and the year to date, the number of requests received to approve degree apprenticeship programmes has risen seven fold. This does not take into consideration the projected requests from February 2020. If these indicative figures should transpire, there will be a sixteen fold increase in submissions from the beginning of 2016-17.

## Number of requests to approve DA programmes, by profession and academic year



1.5 In this period, visits to social work apprenticeship programmes dominated. With the transfer of social work programmes to Social Work England (SWE) on the 2 December 2019, the HCPC will no longer approve these apprenticeship programmes.

## 2 Understanding the proportionality and effectiveness of our assessment methods

### Operational processes

2.1 We received slightly more requests to approve apprenticeship programmes through the major change process (32) in this period than via the approvals process (29). These figures are comparable to the previous year.

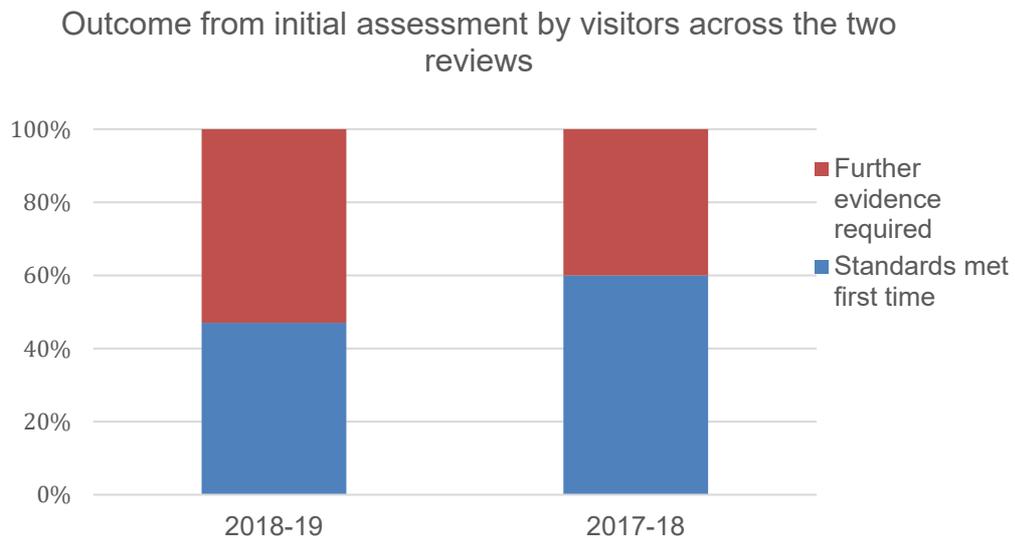
#### Major change process

2.2 Only 14 per cent of the requests through the major change process in this period were referred to the approval process after their initial assessment by the Executive. This was a marked change from the previous year when approximately a third of major changes went to the approval process after their initial assessment by the Executive. This was a direct impact of the loosening of the 'general principals' for the method of assessment and one which was expected.

2.3 Of the major changes in this period which were referred to the approval process after their initial assessment by the Executive, three have been

concluded and one was cancelled by the education provider.

- 2.4 Another key learning point from the previous year asked apprenticeship programmes for additional evidence within their submission. This continued to demonstrate how the education provider had considered how our standards might be impacted by the introduction of the programme. This in turn assisted our partner visitors and the Executive when reviewing the submissions.
- 2.5 Of the changes which went through the full major change process, a larger percentage of apprenticeship programmes (53 per cent) required additional documentation than all other programmes (35 per cent). As can be seen from the graph below, this is a higher percentage than the previous year. This was to be expected as more programmes were assessed via the major change process as this was the first full year of the revised 'general principals' to determine the assessment method.



- 2.6 Considering that these assessments were proposals that were different from existing provision in fundamental ways, it is not surprising that we saw more issues with apprenticeship programmes meeting the standards at the first time of asking.
- 2.7 On average, visitors asked for additional documentation regarding seven reasons. One education provider received a disproportionately high number of requests (which they demonstrated they met through the process). When we remove this education provider from the analysis, visitors, on average, asked for additional documentation regarding four reasons.
- 2.8 These requests were mainly within the areas of programme admissions (SET 2), programme governance, management and leadership (SET 3) and practice-

based learning (SET 5) and covered a range of standards. Themes identified through these requests are outlined in section 3 and are linked to the findings from the previous year. No themes relating to the professions which submitted major changes could be identified.

- 2.9 Although visitors asked for more additional documentation in this period, there are no suggestions of any fundamental issues with how the programmes are able to meet the standards through the major change process.

#### Approval process

- 2.10 Over this period, the number of visits to apprenticeship programmes dropped. This was in part due to a slightly lower number of visit requests (26 in this period and 30 in the last review) and a reduction in the number of major changes referred to the approval process after the Executives first review (as outlined in section 2.2).

- 2.11 On average, we set 10 conditions (1 less than the previous year) on apprenticeship programmes, compared to an average of 11 (1 more than the previous year) for all other programmes in this period. As the figure is broadly similar across all programmes, this demonstrates that our approach to determining the method of assessment for apprenticeship programmes is appropriate and there are no fundamental issues with these programmes meeting our standards.

- 2.12 Slightly more visits were cancelled in this period than previously. However, the reasons for these continued to be mainly out of our control. For example, education providers wishing the visit to take place once the profession specific apprenticeship standards had been finalised. We will continue to monitor this and advise education providers accordingly about our requirements for a visit.

- 2.13 One education provider withdrew from the approval process upon receipt of the visitors' report. Due to the nature of the conditions placed on the programmes approval, the visitors recommended a revisit to assess how the conditions had been met. The education provider choose to withdraw and restart the approval process at a later date.

### **3 Findings from the assessment of the programmes**

#### Partnership arrangements

- 3.1 When visitors reviewed the detail of how education providers intended to set up or change their partnership arrangements with employers, the issues they

found focused around:

- strategic positioning of the various groups involved in partnership arrangements, including ownership of the training;
- formal commitment from employers to supply apprentices (and therefore funding) to the programme; and
- how operational responsibilities for elements of the programme (e.g. admissions decisions, allocation of practice experience) would work and how the employer and education provider would work together to ensure clarity for apprentices (e.g. around whose policy to use in a particular setting).

3.2 Through the major change and approval assessments, education providers were able to satisfy our visitors that their partnership arrangements were reasonable to meet our standards. Often, providers put in place draft agreements focusing on the areas flagged in this section, subject to winning tenders and regulatory approval. We were satisfied with this approach, with the expectation that if something significant changed, this would alter the proposal and therefore providers would need to engage with the regulator once more.

### Programme resources

3.3 All but four apprenticeship programmes (58 proposals in total) were proposed by providers with existing provision. This is a similar figure to the previous year.

3.4 Therefore for the majority of programmes, the visitors considered how the apprenticeship programme would work with, or alongside, the existing provision. This sometimes led to an increase in the overall number of learners (including apprentices) within the suite of programmes in that profession for an education provider. The issues the visitors found focused around:

- availability of, and access to, resources by apprentices while in their place of work or elsewhere if other formal 'placements' took place (e.g. online resources, health and wellbeing services); and
- formal commitment from the employers and the education provider to ensure appropriate levels of resources to deliver the apprenticeship programme (e.g. appropriately numbers of qualified and experienced staff and practice educators).

### Curriculum and assessment

3.5 Visitors required a small number of education providers (four) to submit additional documentation relating to the End Point Assessment (EPA) in this period. This led to requests for additional documentation about how:

- Information about progression onto the EPA was communicated;
- the EPA appropriately and effectively assessed the learning outcomes; and
- how the EPA ensured an objective, fair and reliable assessment.

3.6 Due to the small number of requests relating to the EPA, we suspect that education providers better understand how this can be embedded within programmes and how it can be delivered in accordance with the Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA) regulations and our standards. This knowledge seems to be benefiting subsequent professions going through the development stage and providing greater clarity for education providers when they start to develop apprenticeship programmes.

3.7 The main issue the visitors focused on was how learners learn, with and from, other learners and professionals from different professions. This was a new standard in September 2017 and is not an issue particularly for apprenticeship programmes as this we have also seen within requests for additional documentation / conditions for other professions.

3.8 We produced guidance for education providers about the new and amended standards which is available on our [website](#), including a [webinar](#) delivered in September 2019. While there is nothing to suggest the apprenticeship programmes are unable to meet these standards, we should consider how we can assist education providers understand the requirements of the new and amended standards.

## 4 Looking to the future

### Future operational work

4.1 The following is an overview of where each of the HCPC professions are in terms of development, correct as of 19 February 2020.

Profession	Stage	Operational interactions with HCPC
Arts therapists	Approved for delivery – 5 April 2019	None
Healthcare Science Practitioner (Biomedical scientists)	Approved for delivery – 31 March 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 programmes approved</li> </ul>
Podiatrists (Chiropodists / podiatrists)	Approved for delivery – 14 May 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 programmes approved</li> <li>• 1 assessment in progress</li> </ul>
Clinical scientists	Development – proposal in progress	None
Dietitians	Approved for delivery – 3 July 2019	None

Hearing aid dispensers	Approved for delivery – 15 March 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 programme approved</li> <li>• 1 assessment in progress</li> </ul>
Occupational therapists	Approved for delivery – 7 December 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 programmes approved</li> <li>• 3 assessments in progress</li> </ul>
Operating department practitioners	Approved for delivery – 28 June 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11 programmes approved</li> <li>• 3 assessments in progress</li> </ul>
Orthoptists	N/A	None
Paramedics	Approved for delivery – 8 August 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 programme approved</li> <li>• 5 assessments in progress</li> </ul>
Physiotherapists	Approved for delivery – 18 December 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 programmes approved</li> <li>• 2 assessment in progress</li> </ul>
Practitioner psychologists	N/A	None
Prosthetists / orthotists	Approved for delivery – 31 October 2018	None
Radiographers Diagnostic radiographer (DRAD) Therapeutic radiographer (TRAD)	DRAD, Approved for delivery – 5 April 2019 TRAD, Approved for delivery – 15 April 2019	DRAD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 programme approved</li> <li>• 1 assessment in progress</li> </ul> TRAD – none
Speech and language therapists	Approved for delivery – 3 July 2019	None

4.2 Since the last report, five professions have had apprenticeship standards approved for delivery. We are still to receive requests to approve programmes from dietitians and speech and language therapy programmes, however, we expect to receive requests shortly. In addition, the standards for clinical scientists are now in development.

4.3 We can continue to reasonably expect apprenticeship programmes to be proposed to us at any time from when professions are approved for delivery, and from professions at the latter stages of the development phase. In terms of considering future work for the Department, these professions are more likely to generate work along a shorter timescale due to the continued trend that the majority of submissions are received from education providers already running programmes within the profession. As such it is likely that these programmes will be assessed via the major change process.

## 5 Conclusions and recommendations

- 5.1 More issues were noted through the assessment of apprenticeship programmes, but not so many to suggest there were any fundamental issues with meeting our regulatory requirements through the major change process. This is reinforced by the successful conclusion of the approval process for those apprenticeship programmes who went through the full process. The sector continues to adapt quickly to deliver apprenticeship programmes, and the application of our standards has been a reasonable regulatory burden, whilst enabling change and ensuring public protection.
- 5.2 The following learning points were identified in the previous report and as identified again in this period, should continue:
- the current advice around treating each assessment on a case by case basis to reach a risk based judgement (as outlined in section 1.1); and
  - monitoring cancellations and ensure we work closely with providers around the readiness of their proposals, so we do not commit resources unnecessarily (as outlined in section 2.10).

#### Resources for education providers

- 5.3 As similar key findings have been found in this period, we should consider developing communication resources (e.g. case studies of best practice, webinars) specifically for education providers developing apprenticeship programmes. Any such resources would be available on the [education provider hub](#).
- 5.4 These communication resources should focus on preparing education providers sufficiently around:
- the detail of their partnership arrangements with employers, including strategic positioning, formal commitments to supply apprentices and therefore funding, and operational responsibilities; and
  - the programme resources, including the availability and access to in all places and formal commitment to ensure appropriate levels to deliver the programme.

#### New professions

- 5.5 So far, all the professions which have engaged with the major change or approvals process, deliver qualifications at a Bachelor degree with honours level. However, the arts therapist degree apprenticeship standards were approved last year and the clinical scientist standards are in development. Both of these professions deliver qualifications at a level above a Bachelor degree with honours and may mean the programmes are delivered with different training models. Based on our findings over the two reviews, we are confident that our approach to reviewing and assessing apprenticeship programmes will

remain appropriate for these programmes when they engage with us.

- 5.6 We should continue to be mindful of the remaining few professions to enter the development stage and the profession currently going through the process, to consider the potential impact on our overall workload. To this end, we will continue to review our work in this area and provide an update report in the future.