

Professional Liaison Group for the review of the standards of education and training, 11 September 2015

Theme: Currency of the standards

Executive summary and recommendations

Introduction

The first phase of the standards of education and training (SETs) review has comprised a range of research and engagement activities to gather the views of stakeholders on the existing standards and accompanying guidance. This feedback has been synthesised into a number of key themes.

This paper focuses on the currency of the standards, which has been identified as a theme for consideration by the PLG. It summarises the feedback received on this topic and includes suggested amendments and further questions for the group.

Decision

The PLG is invited to discuss this paper and consider the recommendations and further questions set out in sections 5 and 6.

Background information

See paper.

The current versions of the SETs and supporting guidance have been supplied separately as documents to note.

Resource implications

None

Financial implications

None

Appendices

None

Date of paper

1 September 2015

Theme: Currency of the standards

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This paper explores the theme of currency of the standards of education and training (SETs), drawing on feedback from stakeholders and developments in the regulation and education of HCPC professions. Based on the prevalence of this topic in the first phase of the review, we consider that currency of the standards warrants a specific discussion among PLG members.
- 1.2 This is a broad theme and covers a number of issues about the currency of the SETs, including applicability of the standards to new professions and non-traditional models of training; as well as the perceived need for the standards to keep up with current service requirements.
- 1.3 This paper provides background information and a summary of stakeholder feedback on this theme. The final sections set out recommendations from the Executive and some further questions for the Group to consider.

2. Background

- 2.1 Development work on the current SETs and supporting guidance took place during a review in 2007 and 2008. These documents were published in July 2009 and became effective for new education and training programmes seeking approval and those in the 'major change' process from September 2009. They were applied to the annual monitoring process from the 2010-11 academic year onwards.
- 2.2 In 2013, following public consultation, the Council approved the addition of a new standard requiring service user and carer involvement in approved programmes (SET 3.17). This standard became applicable to new programmes seeking approval from September 2014 and to all existing approved programmes from September 2015.
- 2.3 The HCPC's remit has been expanded to include regulation of three more professions since the SETs were last reviewed. Practitioner psychologists joined the Register in July 2009; hearing aid dispensers in April 2010; and social workers in England in August 2012.
- 2.4 In addition, the past several years have seen a marked change in the makeup of approved education and training programmes. In 2009, nearly all approved programmes were run wholly by higher education institutions (HEIs). As of July 2015, there were 198 education providers running approved programmes, 60 (30%) of which were non-HEI providers. Since April 2012, there has been an increase of 63% in the number of education providers, primarily attributable to the addition of social worker programmes.

3. Summary of stakeholder feedback

- 3.1 Discussions with stakeholders during the first phase of the SETs review covered a number of issues related to the currency of the standards. Some comments focused on the applicability of the standards to the newer professions and changes in current practice in education and the landscape of approved education and training programmes. Others were also concerned that the SETs remain current in light of changes in the wider health and care sector.
- 3.2 This feedback is detailed below. In order to assist the PLG in considering the various aspects of currency of the standards, stakeholder comments have been grouped under a number of subheadings.

New professions

- 3.3 Stakeholders noted the addition of three professions to the HCPC Register since the SETs were last reviewed. There was some variation in views about whether the standards remained applicable to education programmes in these professions.
- 3.4 For example, during discussion at one visitor refresher training session, some visitors stated that the SETs did remain relevant to the newer professions. Others, however, noted that certain standards were viewed by some professions as not being relevant to them; visitors cited SET 3.14 (on obtaining consent where students participate as service users in practical and clinical teaching) as one which was considered by some in the social work profession as not relevant. This is sometimes interpreted as only applying where students acting as service users would be physically manipulated by other students, rather than also applying to role play and other similar activities.
- 3.5 Some visitors were unsure whether the standards were 'future-proof' in case of further professions joining the HCPC Register or with regard to rapidly developing professions, such as paramedics.
- 3.6 The issue of applicability to new professions was also raised at the workshop held with HCPC Education Department employees. Attendees noted that the language and terminology used in the SETs was not always appropriate for all professions. They pointed in particular to SET 5 on practice placements, stating that the language needed to be re-examined in respect of hearing aid dispenser programmes.
- 3.7 Further information in relation to applicability of the SETs to new professions is below in section 4.

New providers and models of training

- 3.8 Stakeholders noted the increasing number of education and training programmes not based at higher education institutions (HEIs) as well as a shift toward new models of training, for example those involving multiple organisations working in partnership. A number of comments were about specific terminology used in the standards which are commonly understood among HEIs but perhaps less so among other types of programmes. Other discussions centred on broader issues of applicability of the standards to non-traditional models of training.
- 3.9 One attendee at the Council of Deans Summit questioned whether the standards were sufficiently robust for new providers, particularly those outside of HEIs.
- 3.10 Education Department employees pointed to SET 6 (on assessment) as being more difficult for 'non-traditional' education providers to interpret and apply to their programmes. These standards are seen to be written with the assumption that those interpreting them are HEIs. For example, the term 'assessment regulations' used in SETs 6.7 through 6.11, was considered to be HEI-specific language. The concept of an external examiner (in SET 6.11) often needs to be clarified for non-HEI programmes.
- 3.11 Members of the Education Department also discussed the increasing number of programmes which involve multiple organisations working in partnership; for example, in some employer-based training models, the employing organisation would manage admissions and placements, while an HEI would provide the curriculum. For such programmes, there is sometimes a lack of clarity about whom the requirements in the SETs actually apply to and who is ultimately responsible when something goes wrong.
- 3.12 Discussions at visitor refresher training highlighted the term 'aegrotat' in SET 6.9 as frequently misunderstood, even within some universities, although it is traditional HEI language. Visitors noted that honorary or posthumous degrees were now more commonplace and as an increasing number of education providers are not HEIs, this language should change accordingly.

Preparing the future workforce

- 3.13 Feedback from the Allied Health Professions Federation Education Leads (AHPEL), comprising representatives from AHP professional bodies, included strong views that the current SETs were now outdated and did not adequately reflect the scale and pace of current change in health and social care and public health. In particular, it was felt that the standards were not sufficiently focused on preparing students for future practice.
- 3.14 AHPEL members made the following suggestions to improve the currency of the SETs, in relation to specific standards:

- SET 4.4 should be strengthened to require that education providers ensure a programme is supportive of meeting future service user, service, workforce and practice needs.
- SET 4.7 does not reflect the increasing imperative that all health and social care professionals are able to appraise and articulate the clinical and cost-effectiveness of their contribution to service delivery. A new standard should ensure that students have skills in data collection and service evaluation.
- SET 5.2 was considered too weak, in that it does not ensure students are exposed to the range of service users, delivery models and settings in which they may practise once registered.

Practice placements

- 3.15 A number of stakeholders raised issues regarding currency of the standards around practice placements (i.e. SET 5).
- 3.16 Education providers at the Council of Deans Summit, for example, described the changing 'landscape' of practice placements, which are more and more often taking place in the third sector rather than in the NHS. Similarly, attendees at the Education Stakeholder Event stated that the standards in SET 5 had been written specifically for NHS placements and did not reflect the complexity of placements nowadays.
- 3.17 A more in-depth examination of issues relating to practice placements will be provided in a forthcoming paper.

Interprofessional education

- 3.18 Discussions with stakeholders highlighted strong views around the currency of the standards in relation to interprofessional education.
- 3.19 AHPEL representatives, attendees at the Education Stakeholder Event, and a majority of visitors at refresher training sessions all sought to strengthen SET 4.9 to include a positive requirement for interprofessional learning. These stakeholders thought that the standard was out of step with current practice, service and workforce needs.
- 3.20 A more in-depth examination of issues relating to interprofessional education will be provided in a forthcoming paper.

4. Education Department reports

- 4.1 Analysis of how programmes in the newer professions – practitioner psychologists, hearing aid dispensers and social workers in England – fared in meeting the SETs in the first few years of regulation can be found in the HCPC Education Department's reviews and annual reports.

- 4.2 A review report from November 2010, following the first year of approval visits to practitioner psychologist programmes, concluded that based on the data collected there were 'no emerging trends' specific to practitioner psychologist programmes when compared to programmes from other professions. The number of conditions set against each practitioner psychologist programme was on average only slightly higher than the average for all programmes but followed similar patterns in terms of where the majority of conditions were set.¹ Subsequent Education annual reports confirmed that while there were slight differences in the conditions being applied to practitioner psychologist programmes, none were considered 'indicative of a specific risk profile for the profession or a particular difficulty in engaging with our broad standards and flexible processes'².
- 4.3 In 2011 and 2012 the Education Department produced analysis reports on outcomes of the first two years of visits to hearing aid dispenser programmes. In 2010/11 the seven hearing aid dispenser programmes visited had on average 50% more conditions and nearly double the number of recommendations in comparison with all programmes visited during the previous year. It was acknowledged that for some hearing aid dispenser programmes, it may have been the first time an external body had scrutinised them. In 2011/12, the average number of conditions set per hearing aid dispenser programme reduced significantly and was only marginally higher than that of all programmes visited³. The 2011 Education annual report concluded that visit outcomes indicated the differences in the way hearing aid dispenser and other programmes meet our standards were minimal.
- 4.4 Reviews of social work programme visits were produced following the 2012/13 and 2013/14 academic years. During the first year of approval visits to social work programmes, the average number of conditions was found to be broadly comparable with new programmes from other professions. Many were linked to issues with programme documentation; however this was considered to reflect a common trend noted for other new professions⁴. In 2013/14 there were on average 1.8 fewer conditions per social worker programme compared with the previous year and three fewer conditions when compared with new programmes from other professions. The review report concluded this reduction was the result of seminars and other communication work aimed at social work education providers⁵. As with practitioner psychologists and

¹ Review of the process of HPC approval of practitioner psychologist pre-registration education and training programmes. <http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/100031CF20101118ETC08-PPapprovalvisitreview.pdf>

² Education annual reports 2011 and 2012 are available here: <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/education/providers/guidance/>

³ Hearing aid dispenser approval process reviews 2010–11 and 2011-12 are available here: <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/education/providers/guidance/>

⁴ Review of the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) approval visits to social work pre-registration education and training programmes in the 2012–13 academic year. <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/Assets/documents/100042FESWapprovalreview12-13.pdf>

⁵ Review of the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) approval visits to social work pre-registration education and training programmes in the 2013–14 academic year. <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/Assets/documents/10004A16SWY2approvalreport.pdf>

hearing aid dispensers, the visit outcomes for social worker programmes have not indicated any specific risk profile or difficulty in meeting the SETs⁶.

5. Executive recommendations

5.1 The Executive considers that, in light of the data from Education Department reports outlined above, there is limited evidence to suggest that the SETs or guidance require significant amendment to make them more readily applicable to practitioner psychologist, hearing aid dispenser or social worker programmes.

- In relation to SET 3.14, which is sometimes viewed as not relevant to certain professions, we would suggest that this could be clarified with additions to the guidance if needed (although note that the current guidance already mentions 'role play' and 'experiential groups'.)

5.2 Likewise, we do not consider that significant amendment is required to the SETs or guidance to make them applicable to non-HEI or other non-traditional models of training. However, we do recognise that some terminology, particularly in SET 6 (assessment), is HEI-specific and may need to be reviewed.

- The term 'assessment regulations', used in SETs 6.8 through 6.11 was highlighted as unclear to some non-HEI programmes. However, no alternative have been suggested by stakeholders. We are therefore recommending that if this term is retained, it should be added to the Glossary, including an explanation that 'assessment regulations' could refer to one or multiple documents held by the education provider.
- We will also review how these standards are written and whether it might be possible to convey requirements without specifying that they should be documented in the 'assessment regulations' as opposed to elsewhere in the programme documentation.
- The term 'aegrotat' used in SET 6.9 was also considered unclear, particularly to non-HEI programmes. Again, stakeholders did not agree on any alternatives. We therefore recommend that an explanation of the term 'aegrotat' be included in the main body of the guidance, along with examples of similar awards, such as honorary awards. The term is already included in the guidance glossary.

5.3 With regard to preparing the future workforce for changes in patient population and service delivery requirements:

- We are not proposing amendments to SETs 4.2 or 4.4 or the supporting guidance in the context of currency of the standards.
- We recommend an addition to the guidance under SET 4.7 which states that students completing an approved programme are expected to be equipped with the necessary skills to engage in evidence-based

⁶ See Education annual reports 2013 and 2014: <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/education/providers/guidance/>

practice, including, for example, systematic evaluation of their practice and contribution to service delivery.

- 5.4 The Executive's recommendations specific to SET 4.9 on interprofessional education and SET 5 on practice placements will be included in separate papers covering these themes to be considered at subsequent PLG meetings.

6. PLG considerations

- 6.1 Issues raised by stakeholders about the currency of the SETs should be considered in light of the key principles behind development and use of the standards. In particular, the SETs should:
- be set at the **threshold** level, to ensure that education and training programmes provide students with skills and understanding to practise safely and effectively and to meet the standards of proficiency⁷ for their profession;
 - be **flexible**, in that we aim to minimise prescription and to enable education providers to meet the standards in the way they consider most effective and appropriate (given institutional and professional considerations);
 - be **meaningful**, clear and useful to education providers and other stakeholders; and
 - reflect **existing provision** within education and training programmes, or, if setting a new requirement, be realistic or and reasonable.
- 6.2 As stated above, data and analysis from Education Department reports do not highlight any profession-specific issues or difficulties with engaging with or meeting the SETs.
- 6.3 Similarly, feedback on applicability to non-HEI programmes and other non-traditional models of training has been for the most part anecdotal. We do not have evidence that these programmes as a whole have more difficulty meeting the SETs than their HEI counterparts. Discussions with Education Department employees involved in approval and monitoring processes have indicated that most misunderstandings in relation to applicability of one or more SETs (whether related to the profession or the model of training) are dispelled with additional explanation of the intention of the standard in question.
- 6.4 However, the broadening of the 'market' in education and training programmes for HCPC professions has had other implications worth bearing in mind. As stated above, the current SETs were written as requirements for education providers which were on the whole embedded in the higher education system and therefore undergo quality assurance by other agencies, such as the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). Non-HEI

⁷ Standards of proficiency for each of the 16 professions can be found on the HCPC website here: <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/aboutregistration/standards/standardsofproficiency/>

programmes, on the other hand – e.g. employer-led programmes – do not necessarily undergo other external quality assurance processes apart from HCPC approval and monitoring. Therefore the SETs, and the process of assessment against them, have arguably taken on a role of increased importance with respect to some non-HEI programmes.

- 6.5 With regard to stakeholder comments about the need for education providers to ensure students are adequately prepared to join the workforce, we wish to avoid introducing guidance which is too specific in referring to students who expect to work in a particular type of role or part of the health service after qualifying. Articulation of skills needed (for example evaluation of cost-effectiveness) should be contained in the profession-specific standards of proficiency if they are considered to be necessary for entry to the profession.
- 6.6 It should be noted that the SETs and supporting guidance already include statements which speak to the education provider's responsibility to ensure students are adequately prepared for workforce and service delivery needs. The guidance under SET 4.4 states that providers should show how the design of the programme and how it is delivered 'predicts or reflects change in practice and its organisation, changes in the law, and changes in service users' needs'; 'reflects developments in a profession's research base and advances in technology'; and 'develops students' ability to respond to changes in practice'.
- 6.7 The PLG is invited to consider the Executive's recommendations in section 5 above. In addition, the PLG may wish to consider the following questions as part of their discussion on this topic:
- Are there any other factors which should be taken into account when assessing the currency of the SETs and supporting guidance?
 - Are the SETs appropriate and sufficiently robust with regard to education programmes not based within HEIs?
 - Are the SETs and supporting guidance sufficiently 'future proof' in the event that new professions come under HCPC regulation or additional models of training arise?
 - Does the PLG have any other comments, reflections or suggested amendments in relation to the currency of the SETs and supporting guidance?