Visitors' report

Name of education provider	Buckinghamshire New University
Programme name	MSc Social Work
Mode of delivery	Full time
Relevant part of the HCPC Register	Social worker in England
Date of visit	23 – 24 April 2014

Contents

Executive summary

The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) approve educational programmes in the UK which health and care professionals must complete before they can apply to be registered with us. The HCPC is a statutory regulator and our main aim is to protect the public. The HCPC currently regulates 16 professions. All of these professions have at least one professional title which is protected by law. This means that anyone using the title 'Social worker' in England must be registered with us. The HCPC keep a register of health and care professionals who meet our standards for their training, professional skills, behaviour and health.

The visitors' report which follows outlines the recommended outcome made by the visitors on the ongoing approval of the programme. This recommended outcome was accepted by the Education and Training Committee (Committee) on 26 August 2014. At the Committee meeting, the ongoing approval of the programme was re-confirmed. This means that the education provider has met the conditions outlined in this report and that the programme meets our standards of education and training (SETs) and ensures that those who complete it meet our standards of proficiency (SOPs) for their part of the Register. The programme is now granted open ended approval, subject to satisfactory monitoring.

Introduction

The HCPC visited the programme at the education provider as the Social work profession (in England) came onto the register on 1 August 2012 and a decision was made by the Education and Training Committee to visit all existing programmes from this profession. This visit assessed the programme against the standards of education and training (SETs) and considered whether those who complete the programme meet the standards of proficiency (SOPs) for their part of the Register.

This visit was part of a joint event. The education provider did not review the programme, but the professional body considered their accreditation of the programme. The visit also considered the BSc Social Work. The professional body and the HCPC formed a joint panel, with an independent chair and secretary, supplied by the education provider. Whilst the joint panel participated in collaborative scrutiny of all the programmes and dialogue throughout the visit; this report covers the HCPC's recommendations on this programme only. A separate report exists for the other programme. As an independent regulatory body, the HCPC's recommended outcome is independent and impartial and based solely on the HCPC's standards. Separate reports, produced by the professional body, outline their decisions on the programmes' status.

Visit details

Name of HCPC visitors and profession	Michael Branicki (Social worker)
	Teresa Rogers (Social worker)
HCPC executive officers (in attendance)	Nicola Baker
Proposed student numbers	20 per year
Proposed start date of programme approval	September 2014
Chair	Barbara Dexter (Buckinghamshire New University)
Secretary	Vicki Main (Buckinghamshire New University)
Members of the joint panel	Robert Johns (The College of Social Work)
	Helen Keville (The College of Social Work)

Sources of evidence

Prior to the visit the HCPC reviewed the documentation detailed below, sent by the education provider:

	Yes	No	N/A
Programme specification	☒	☐	☐
Descriptions of the modules	☒	☐	☐
Mapping document providing evidence of how the education provider has met the SETs	☒	☐	☐
Mapping document providing evidence of how the education provider has met the SOPs	☒	☐	☐
Practice placement handbook	☒	☐	☐
Student handbook	☒	☐	☐
Curriculum vitae for relevant staff	☒	☐	☐
External examiners' reports from the last two years	☒	☐	☐

During the visit the HCPC saw the following groups or facilities:

	Yes	No	N/A
Senior managers of the education provider with responsibility for resources for the programme	☒	☐	☐
Programme team	☒	☐	☐
Placements providers and educators/mentors	☒	☐	☐
Students	☒	☐	☐
Learning resources	☒	☐	☐
Specialist teaching accommodation (eg specialist laboratories and teaching rooms)	☒	☐	☐

Recommended outcome

To recommend a programme for approval, the visitors must be assured that the programme meets all of the standards of education and training (SETs) and that those who complete the programme meet our standards of proficiency (SOPs) for their part of the Register.

The visitors agreed to recommend to the Education and Training Committee that a number of conditions are set on the programme, all of which must be met before the programme can be approved.

The visitors agreed that 54 of the SETs have been met and that conditions should be set on the remaining three SETs.

Conditions are requirements that the education provider must meet before the programme can be recommended for approval. Conditions are set when certain standards of education and training have not been met or there is insufficient evidence of the standard being met.

The visitors have also made a recommendation for the programme.

Recommendations are observations on the programme or education provider which do not need to be met before the programme is recommended for approval. Recommendations are normally set to encourage further enhancements to the programme and are normally set when it is felt that the particular standard of education and training has been met at, or just above the threshold level.

Conditions

2.1 The admissions procedures must give both the applicant and the education provider the information they require to make an informed choice about whether to take up or make an offer of a place on a programme.

Condition: The education provider must provide further evidence that the APCL policy is clearly communicated to applicants to the programme through the admissions procedures.

Reason: The visitors reviewed the programme documentation related to admissions prior to the visit, including the webpages containing information for potential applicants. They were unable to find reference to the inclusion mechanisms, such as Accredited Prior Certificated Learning (APCL), which are available for applicants to the programme. The programme team confirmed the process for APCL at the visit, and how it is used within the programme. The visitors were confident that the policy and procedures for agreeing and awarding credits are in place, but were unable to determine how potential applicants find out about it and the details of the process specific to this programme. The visitors also noted that when questioned, the students present at the visit were not aware of any inclusion mechanisms that were available. The visitors therefore require the programme team to provide further evidence to demonstrate that applicants are given the full information required in order to make an informed choice as to whether to apply to the programme.

2.1 The admissions procedures must give both the applicant and the education provider the information they require to make an informed choice about whether to take up or make an offer of a place on a programme.

Condition: The education provider must provide further evidence that the information provided on fees for the programme is sufficient to enable applicants to make an informed choice as to whether to apply or take up an offer of a place for the programme.

Reason: The visitors reviewed the programme documentation related to admissions prior to the visit, including the webpages containing information for potential applicants. They noted that information on fees for Home and EU students was provided on the webpage in the form of a downloadable tuition fee grid. However, this grid has varied figures determined by 'fee bands'. The visitors could not find a key or further explanation as to what the fee band codes represented and were therefore unable to determine how applicants would work out the fee they will pay for the programme. The visitors therefore require further evidence that applicants will be provided with the information they require on fees, prior to taking up an offer of a place on the programme.

3.8 The resources to support student learning in all settings must be effectively used.

Condition: The resources to support student learning must be reviewed to ensure they accurately reflect the exit awards for the programme and what awards will lead to eligibility to apply to the HCPC Register.

Reason: The visitors were provided with the assessment regulations for the programme, including the appendix specific to social work programmes. This document outlines the exit awards for the programme, as confirmed at the visit. However, the Student handbook for the programme also has a section which outlines the exit awards for the programme (page 37). This section refers to the Postgraduate Diploma as the final award, rather than the MSc Social Work, which is not mentioned in this section. The visitors also noted that the exit awards are titled 'Social Studies' rather and do not refer to the protected title of Social Work, but could not find a clear statement that the exit awards will not confer eligibility for registration as a Social Worker with the HCPC. The information in the Student handbook could therefore be misleading to students. The visitors therefore require the programme team to review the information provided to support students to ensure that it clearly states the exit awards applicable to the programme, and which awards will confer eligibility to apply to the HCPC Register.

3.8 The resources to support student learning in all settings must be effectively used.

Condition: The programme documentation to support student learning at the University and in the practice setting must be reviewed to ensure it is clear, and accurately reflects the programme and the current setting of social work regulation.

Reason: The documentation provided as part of the submission included the Student handbook and Practice curriculum document, which support students through their learning on the programme. The Practice curriculum document is also provided to practice placement educators. The visitors received versions of the documentation which were incorrectly paginated, and appeared to be in the incorrect order in places, out of sync with the contents page. These documents may therefore prove difficult to navigate for students and placement educators. The visitors also noted instances of incorrect or misleading information. Both documents frequently refer to the PG Dip programme, rather than the MSc. They also frequently refer to a 'HCPC Code of Conduct and Ethics' for students (for example, page 8 of the Practice curriculum and page 16 of the Student handbook). The use of incorrect terminology in relation to the HCPC's guidance could mislead students as to the HCPC's remit and guidance regarding social work students. Page 18 of the Practice curriculum also states: "In accordance with HCPC regulations, all students must undertake 70 days of assessed practice in the first academic year and 100 days in their final year of study." This is not an HCPC requirement. The visitors therefore require the programme documentation to be reviewed to ensure it accurately reflects the programme and the current setting of Social Work regulation.

6.9 Assessment regulations must clearly specify requirements for an aegrotat award not to provide eligibility for admission to the Register.

Condition: The education provider must provide further evidence that the assessment regulations clearly specify the programme-specific arrangements for aegrotat credits or awards not to provide eligibility for admission to the HCPC Register.

Reason: The visitors were informed at the visit that aegrotat awards were not offered for this programme. On page 12 of the University Academic Framework and Assessment Regulations, it states, "Credits can be achieved by any of the following means:…aegrotat pass of untaken credits…", as detailed in the Programme Specification. However, from the evidence provided the visitors could not determine

where there was a clear statement in the programme documentation or assessment regulations that aegrotat awards would not provide eligibility to apply to the HCPC Register. The visitors could therefore not determine how the programme team ensured that students understood the programme's arrangements for aegrotat awards or credits, and if offered, the requirement for them not to provide eligibility to register as a social worker in England. The visitors therefore require further evidence as to where the policy for aegrotat awards in relation to professional registration is laid out, and how students are informed about this.

Recommendations

4.8 The range of learning and teaching approaches used must be appropriate to the effective delivery of the curriculum.

Recommendation: The programme team are advised to review the mechanisms in place to support and monitor active participation in guided independent study, to ensure consistency in the approach.

Reason: The visitors discussed the approach taken to guided independent study on the programme with the programme team and with students at the visit. Guided independent study forms a large proportion of the notional hours in the delivery of the curriculum, and the students highlighted that there was some inconsistency in the way different tutors approach the setting and monitoring of work for independent study. Where some lecturers will set defined reading material or activities on the virtual learning environment and follow the activity up at the following sessions, others take a less structured or directive approach. Given the importance of the guided independent study in ensuring that the curriculum is being delivered in this programme, the visitors therefore advise the programme team to revisit the way in which the programme team monitor and support this study, to ensure the parity and consistency of student experience and the effective delivery of the curriculum.

Michael Branicki
Teresa Rogers