

Visitors' report

Name of education provider	South Essex College of Further and Higher Education
Validating body / Awarding body	University of Essex
Programme name	BSc (Hons) Social Work
Mode of delivery	Full time
Relevant part of the HCPC Register	Social worker in England
Date of visit	30 – 31 January 2014

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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. We are a statutory regulator and our main aim is to protect the public. We currently regulate 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 15 May. At the Committee meeting, the ongoing approval of the programme was re-confirmed. This means that the education provider has met the condition(s) 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 an HCPC only visit. The education provider and validating body did not validate or review the programme at the visit and the professional body did not consider their accreditation of the programme. The education provider supplied an independent chair and secretary for the visit.

Visit details

Name of HCPC visitors and profession	Jane McLenachan (Social worker) Dorothy Smith (Social worker)
HCPC executive officer (in attendance)	Nicola Baker
Proposed student numbers	30 per year
First approved intake	May 2006
Effective date that programme approval reconfirmed from	September 2014
Chair	Allan Hildon (University of Essex)
Secretary	Rachel Brown (University of Essex)

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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Descriptions of the modules	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mapping document providing evidence of how the education provider has met the SETs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mapping document providing evidence of how the education provider has met the SOPs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practice placement handbook	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student handbook	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Curriculum vitae for relevant staff	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
External examiners' reports from the last two years	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Programme team	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Placements providers and educators/mentors	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Specialist teaching accommodation (eg specialist laboratories and teaching rooms)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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 51 of the SETs have been met and that conditions should be set on the remaining six 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

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

Condition: The programme team must provide further evidence that the resources provided to support students through the programme accurately reflect the current setting of regulation for social workers in England.

Reason: From a review of the programme documentation submitted by the education provider prior to the visit, the visitors found references to the HCPC and professional body were not consistently accurate. For example, the module descriptor for SW111 states, “All trainee social workers are required to register with the HCPC.” This is a requirement of the previous regulator. Admissions information also referred to the previous regulator in referencing the “National Occupational Standards”, and stated the HCPC is involved in addressing placement shortages. This inaccurate information in the documentation requires correcting. The visitors also noted the module descriptor for SW319 refers to the “HCPC professional capabilities framework”. This is the professional body’s framework and should not be associated with the HCPC. This SET requires the resources supporting students through the programme to be correct and consistent, including programme documents. The visitors therefore require the documentation to be reviewed to remove any instances of inaccurate or out-of-date terminology. In this way the visitors can ensure any potential confusion for students between the regulatory body and the professional body is avoided.

3.15 Throughout the course of the programme, the education provider must have identified where attendance is mandatory and must have associated monitoring mechanisms in place.

Condition: The programme team must provide further evidence that the attendance policies are communicated clearly to students, and implemented consistently.

Reason: The visitors noted a lack of clarity in the programme documentation’s description of the attendance policy, particularly regarding any resulting implications for absences. In the programme handbook page 6, it states all classes are compulsory, and indicates what circumstances could reasonably be accepted for absence (such as serious illness). It does not include what would happen if the 100 per cent attendance target is not achieved. The practice placement handbook states on page 31, “If your attendance falls below 90% within a review period (as per the policy) you will be subject to the colleges academic performance procedures.” However, the visitors could not find further detail of the policy referred to or the ‘academic performance procedures’. The programme team stated that they would follow up any unexplained absences with students, and that the education provider has processes in place if attendance falls below 90 per cent. Discussions with students indicated they were aware they should attend all classes wherever possible, but there was some confusion as to what level of absence would be followed up (80 or 90 per cent), and what the implications would be. They also highlighted some discrepancies in the monitoring of attendance, as registers were inconsistently taken. The visitors noted the students understood the set number of days required for placements. However, ambiguity in aspects of how the attendance policy is applied in the academic setting may affect students’ attendance records, or lead to their missing large parts of the curriculum’s delivery. The visitors therefore require the programme team to provide further evidence as to how they ensure students

are informed of the attendance policies applicable and how they are implemented and monitored.

6.1 The assessment strategy and design must ensure that the student who successfully completes the programme has met the standards of proficiency for their part of the Register.

Condition: The programme team must provide further clarity in the documentation as to the core modules which need to be passed throughout the programme, in order to demonstrate that the student who successfully completes the programme has met the standards of proficiency for social workers in England (SOPs).

Reason: The visitors noted from the Programme Specification the programme will follow the Rules of Assessment as set out by the validating body (University of Essex). The Rules of Assessment outline the requirements for the final award. The visitors noted students can graduate with 330 credits, without passing all 360 credits, providing all core modules are passed. However, the visitors were unable to find detail within the module descriptors or programme specification as to which modules are core for this programme and need to be passed. They were therefore unable to determine whether a student graduating from the programme with 330 credits will have been assessed as meeting all of the standards of proficiency for social workers in England (SOPs). The visitors also noted there was limited information in the module descriptors to indicate whether all assessment elements must be passed where there are multiple assessments within a module, or whether an aggregate mark would be taken. Where there are assignments which do not need to be passed in order to complete the module, the visitors require information as to the justification for this to ensure that the assessment of all SOPs is not compromised. They therefore require further clarity as to the final award requirements for the programme, in order to ensure that all SOPs will be met by students upon graduation.

6.7 Assessment regulations must clearly specify requirements for student progression and achievement within the programme.

Condition: The education provider must submit further evidence to demonstrate that the assessment regulations and programme documentation clearly specify requirements for student progression and achievement for the programme.

Reason: The visitors noted from the Programme Specification the programme will follow the Rules of Assessment as set out by the validating body (University of Essex). The Rules of Assessment outline the requirements for student progression through the programme and for the final award. As stated in the condition against SET 6.1, the visitors noted students can progress from year to year and to graduation without passing all attempted credits, providing all core modules are passed. However, the visitors were unable to find detail within the module descriptors or programme specification as to which modules are core for this programme and need to be passed. They were therefore unable to determine the progression and achievement requirements. The visitors also noted that there was limited information in the module descriptors to indicate whether all assessment elements must be passed where there are multiple assessments, or if the aggregate mark would be taken. They therefore require further clarity of the progression and achievement arrangements for the programme, and evidence that any module or programme-specific requirements, or

variations to the Rules of Assessment are communicated clearly to students on this programme.

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 ensure students understand the requirements for an aegrotat award not to provide eligibility for admission to the HCPC Register.

Reason: The visitors were referred to the education provider's extenuating circumstances policy as evidence for this SET, which states, "In the case of severe extenuating circumstances affecting the final months of a final year student's studies there is provision for a Board to consider the award of an aegrotat degree." The SETs mapping also states that this aegrotat award is an unnamed award that does not provide eligibility for access to the HCPC Register. 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 that aegrotat awards would not lead to 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.

6.11 Assessment regulations must clearly specify requirements for the appointment of at least one external examiner who must be appropriately experienced and qualified and, unless other arrangements are agreed, be from the relevant part of the Register.

Condition: The programme team must submit further evidence that there will be at least one external examiner who will be appropriately experienced and qualified and, unless other arrangements are agreed, be from the relevant part of the Register.

Reason: The visitors were satisfied with the current external examiner arrangements. However, the visitors noted in the documentation submitted by the education provider there was insufficient detail concerning the recruitment of external examiners to this programme. This standard requires the assessment regulations to clearly articulate the requirements for the appointment of at least one external examiner who must be appropriately experienced and qualified and, unless other arrangements are agreed, be appropriately registered with the HCPC. The visitors therefore require evidence that HCPC requirements regarding the appointment of external examiner to the programme have been included in the relevant documentation to ensure that this standard will continue to be met.

Recommendations

4.9 When there is interprofessional learning the profession-specific skills and knowledge of each professional group must be adequately addressed.

Recommendation: If the programme introduces interprofessional learning opportunities as discussed at the visit, they must notify the HCPC through the major change process to ensure that the profession-specific skills of social workers are addressed.

Reason: From discussions with the programme team, the visitors were satisfied that this standard is met under current arrangements. However, the visitors were informed of the potential to incorporate interprofessional learning opportunities for various areas including mental health, counselling, early years and special education. If this development occurs the visitors recommend that the programme team inform the HCPC of this change at the earliest opportunity through the major change process. In this way the HCPC can ensure that the profession-specific skills and knowledge of each professional group is being adequately addressed through this interprofessional learning and that this standard continues to be met.

Dorothy Smith
Jane McLenachan