

Visitors' report

Name of education provider	The Open University
Programme name	Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work
Mode of delivery	Flexible
Relevant part of the HCPC Register	Social worker in England
Date of visit	27 – 28 September 2016

Contents

Executive summary	2
Introduction.....	3
Visit details	3
Sources of evidence	4
Recommended outcome	5
Conditions.....	6
Recommendations.....	12

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 approval of the programme. This recommended outcome was accepted by the Education and Training Committee (Committee) on 9 February 2017. At the Committee meeting, the programme was approved. 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 it was a new programme which was seeking HCPC approval for the first time. 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 and role of HCPC visitors	Gerry Mulcahy (Social worker in England) David Ward (Social worker in England) Sid Jeewa (Lay visitor)
HCPC executive officers (in attendance)	Ben Potter Tamara Wasylec
Proposed student numbers	100 per cohort, 1 cohort per year
Proposed start date of programme approval	1 January 2018
Chair	Freda Wolfenden (The Open University)
Secretary	Clare Wailes (The Open University)

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 type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Student postal induction pack	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information regarding the library services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The HCPC did not review the external examiners reports for the last two years prior to the visit as there are currently no external examiners as the programme is new and has not yet run.

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"/>
Placement 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"/>
Service users and carers	<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 type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

The HCPC met with students and placement providers and educators / mentors from the BA (Hons) Social Work, as the programme seeking approval currently does not have any students enrolled on it.

The HCPC did not see any specialist teaching accommodation as the nature of the programme does not require any specialist laboratories or teaching rooms.

Recommended outcome

To recommend a programme for approval, the visitors must be satisfied 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 the relevant 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 48 of the SETs have been met and that conditions should be set on the remaining 10 SETs.

Conditions are requirements that the education provider must meet before the programme can be approved. 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 number of recommendations for the programme.

Recommendations are observations on the programme or education provider which do not need to be met before the programme can be approved. Recommendations are made to encourage further enhancements to the programme, normally 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 evidence of what admissions information applicants will be provided with to ensure that they can make an informed choice to take up a place on the programme.

Reason: In scrutinising the evidence provided prior, and through discussion at the visit, the visitors understood that the admissions information that will be provided to potential applicants for this programme has yet to be finalised and published. As such the visitors were shown exemplar information relating to the education provider's current undergraduate social work programme and a postgraduate qualification in healthcare. However, they were made aware that the information that would be created and made available to potential applicants for this programme would be different to the information that was provided. Therefore, the visitors did not see what information an applicant would be provided with and as such could not determine how the education provider will ensure that applicants will have all of the information they require to make an informed choice about taking up a place on the programme. Because of this the visitors require further evidence about what admissions information will be produced and how this information will ensure that applicants can make an informed choice about taking up a place on 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 evidence as to how the criteria for evaluating prior, relevant experience will be communicated to applicants.

Reason: In scrutinising the evidence provided prior to the visit, the visitors noted that in order to be offered a place on the programme applicants would need to have achieved a 2.1 in their undergraduate degree. However, if an applicant had not achieved this they could still be offered a place on the programme if they had achieved a 2.2 and could provide evidence of recent, relevant experience. In discussion with the programme team the visitors were informed that the exact criteria that would be used to evaluate any relevant experience was still being finalised. Therefore the visitors could not see, from the evidence provided, what information an applicant would be provided with about how their relevant, recent experience would be evaluated to determine if they would be offered a place on the programme. Because of this the visitors could not determine how the programme team will ensure that applicants will have all of the information they require to make an informed choice about applying to the programme. As such the visitors require further evidence of the information applicants will receive about the required entry criteria around recent, relevant experience and how their experience will be assessed.

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 evidence as to how applicants to the programme will be made aware of the different regulatory requirements for social workers in the UK and how they will be affected depending on where they wish to work.

Reason: In scrutinising the evidence provided prior, and through discussion at the visit, the visitors were made aware that the admissions information that will be provided to potential applicants has yet to be finalised and published. The visitors were also made aware that this programme will be able to be studied by students from any part of the UK. The HCPC is the regulatory body for social workers in England only and as such students may be subject to different regulatory body requirements if they study and undertake their practice placement experience in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. If graduates also wanted to work in these countries when they graduate and use the title 'social worker' they would have to register with the relevant regulatory body which may have different registration requirements to the HCPC. As such the visitors were unclear, from the evidence provided, how the education provider will ensure that applicants to the programme have all of the relevant information they require about the regulatory body requirements in the four UK home countries. Therefore the visitors require further evidence of the information that will be provided to applicants to ensure that those applicants are able to make an informed choice about taking up a place on the programme.

2.5 The admissions procedures must apply selection and entry criteria, including appropriate academic and / or professional entry standards.

Condition: The education provider must provide further evidence as to what professional entry standards an applicant will need to meet in order to be offered a place on this programme.

Reason: In scrutinising the evidence provided prior to the visit the visitors noted that in order to be offered a place on the programme applicants would need to have achieved a 2.1 in their undergraduate degree. However, if an applicant had not achieved this they could still be offered a place on the programme if they had achieved a 2.2 and could provide evidence of recent, relevant experience. In discussion with the programme team the visitors were informed that the exact criteria that would be used to evaluate any relevant experience was still being finalised. It was also articulated that criteria were being developed that may be applied if an applicant didn't meet any of the academic criteria. Therefore the visitors were unable to determine, from the evidence provided, what entry criteria will be applied to evaluate applicants' ability, how the criteria will determine the relevance of recent experience and as such who will be offered a place on the programme. Because of this the visitors were unable to determine how the admissions procedure applies appropriate academic and/or professional entry standards. Therefore the visitors require further evidence of the criteria that the education provider will use to evaluate applicants and applicants' relevant experience when they have not met the relevant academic criteria.

2.6 The admissions procedures must apply selection and entry criteria, including accreditation of prior (experiential) learning and other inclusion mechanisms.

Condition: The programme team must provide further evidence as to their policy on the accreditation of prior (experiential) learning for this programme.

Reason: In scrutinising the evidence provided prior to the visit the visitors were clear that no accreditation of prior experiential learning (AP(E)L) policy had been provided but noted that the education provider does have a policy on recognition of prior learning. In discussion with the programme team it was clarified that no applicant would be able to use the recognition of prior learning policy as evidence to meet learning outcomes on this programme. However, the visitors could not determine, from the evidence provided, where this is clearly articulated in the programme documentation to ensure that no applicant or student could access this policy. The visitors therefore require further evidence to demonstrate how the programme documentation will clearly articulate that the recognition of prior learning policy of the education provider is not applicable for any applicant to, or student of, this programme.

3.3 The programme must have regular monitoring and evaluation systems in place.

Condition: The programme team must provide further evidence as to how the regular monitoring and evaluation systems in place ensure that information flows as required and issues, when raised, are addressed appropriately in a timely manner.

Reason: From the evidence provided during and prior to the visit the visitors noted the quality monitoring mechanisms that will be in place for this programme. The visitors also noted that there were several members of the wider programme team responsible for different aspects of this monitoring process, including associate lecturers, practice educators, agency co-ordinators, staff tutors, module tutors and programme tutors. In their reading of the documentation, the visitors noted a comment in Peter Nelson's external examiners' report dated 1 December 2015, which asked questions of how the team were managing to handle any variability in assessment standards in the practice placement settings. The visitors could not see a response to this question and in discussion with the programme team identified how the team would deal with this issue. However it was unclear, from the evidence provided, as to how the regular monitoring and evaluation system that will be in place for this programme will ensure that issues like this would be identified and addressed by the appropriate person. As such the visitors require further evidence as to what roles and responsibilities the programme team have in regard to the regular monitoring and evaluation of the programme and how these roles ensure that the monitoring information reaches the relevant people to address issues as they arise.

3.14 Where students participate as service users in practical and clinical teaching, appropriate protocols must be used to obtain their consent.

Condition: The programme team must provide further evidence to demonstrate how appropriate protocols are in place to obtain students' consent when they participate as service users in practical teaching sessions.

Reason: From discussions with the students the visitors noted that students on this programme will participate as service users in practical teaching at workshops. The visitors also noted that a formal process for gaining students' consent when they act as service users was presented in the documentation prior to the visit. However, in their discussions with students the visitors noted that students were unaware that there was a formal process for obtaining their consent and did not remember signing consent forms. In discussions with the programme team it was stated that at workshops verbal consent, including the creation of a shared set of rules, was obtained from students but

that the formal process for gaining their consent at workshops was not used. As such the visitors are unclear, from the evidence provided, what policies and processes the programme team use to ensure that students' consent is always obtained where they participate as service users in practical and clinical teaching. The visitors therefore require the programme team to provide further evidence of the policies and processes they will enact to obtain students consent and how they will ensure that these processes are used in all settings where students are acting as service users.

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 of what attendance requirements students must meet and what consequences students will face if they do not attend the mandatory elements of the programme.

Reason: From a review of the documentation, the visitors noted that there are no general attendance requirements for students, but that students will be required to attend workshops and a residential weekend. However, the visitors could not determine what procedures are in place to manage any non-attendance and what level of non-attendance would trigger any action from the programme team. In discussion with the programme team the visitors were made aware that while attendance was expected at all workshop days the method for recording attendance would be dependent on the staff tutors who would be responsible for the workshops. The visitors were also made aware that students may not attend a workshop and that they could instead complete alternative work to mitigate against the non-attendance. As such the visitors were unclear as to the absolute requirements for student attendance, what monitoring mechanisms are in place to record attendance and what consequences students face if they do not attend when required. Therefore, the visitors require further evidence of how the programme team articulate to students when attendance is mandatory, how the team monitor attendance and how the team ensure that students will face the stated consequences if they fail to attend.

5.4 The education provider must maintain a thorough and effective system for approving and monitoring all placements.

Condition: The programme team must provide further evidence as to how they ensure that if individual issues at the placement setting occur they are adequately dealt with by the appropriate person and the issues are reported appropriately.

Reason: From the evidence provided in advance of the visit the visitors noted the different roles in the central programme team, responsible for the creation and administration of the programme, and the wider programme delivery team. In scrutinising this documentation, and after clarification at the visit, the visitors were aware that module tutors, programme tutors, placement educators and agency co-ordinators may all have a role in ensuring the quality of a students' placement. The visitors also noted the formal approval and monitoring process that the university has to ensure the quality of students' practice placements. However, due to the number of different roles involved the visitors were unclear as to which individuals would have responsibility for identifying issues that students may have on a placement and who would ensure that these issues were resolved. In discussion with the practice placement providers and educators it was clear that responsibility for identifying any

potential issues and addressing them varied depending on the organisation that provided the placement. As such the visitors were unclear, from the evidence provided, how the systems that the education provider will have in place will work to monitor and identify issues with placements, how issues could be reported and dealt with consistently. Therefore, the visitors require further evidence as to how the systems that will be in place will provide a thorough and effective monitoring of all placements to allow any potential issues to be consistently identified and addressed.

5.13 A range of learning and teaching methods that respect the rights and needs of service users and colleagues must be in place throughout practice placements.

Condition: The programme team must provide further evidence as to how they ensure that students, while on placement, introduce themselves appropriately and that service users and carers are appropriately informed of any students' role in their care.

Reason: From a review of the programme documentation the visitors noted that a number of students would be using their current place of employment as at least one of their practice placement providers. In discussion with the students the visitors were made aware that there were variable experiences as to how they 'transitioned' between being an employee to becoming a student. Some students would continue in their role but be released for blocks of time while other students had clear arrangements which meant that while they were at their place of work they were student or trainee social workers. The visitors also learned that there was the potential for some students to come into contact with service users and carers both as a student or trainee social worker and in their different role as an employee of their placement provider. From the evidence provided the visitors were unclear as to how the education provider manages these situations to ensure that service users and carers are aware of the capacity in which students on this programme are working with them. In particular, the visitors could not identify how the education provider ensures that students identify themselves as students to service users and carers in all practice placement settings. Therefore the visitors require further evidence as to the processes that the education provider has in place to ensure that the rights and needs of service users and carers are respected throughout all practice placements.

6.6 There must be effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in place to ensure appropriate standards in the assessment.

Condition: The programme team must provide further evidence as to how the monitoring and evaluation systems in place ensure that information flows as required to ensure that appropriate standards in the assessment of students are maintained.

Reason: In scrutinising this documentation, and after clarification at the visit, the visitors were aware that module tutors, programme tutors and placement educators may all have a role in assessing a student while on placement. In discussion with the practice placement providers and educators it was made clear that there were differences in the roles depending on the practice placement settings and the areas in which the practice placement is delivered. Despite the differences in the roles however, all students were assessed using the same documentation and the same processes, which were moderated in the relevant areas and then reported back to the education provider. But, because of the number of different roles involved the visitors were unclear as to which individuals would have overall responsibility for the assessment of students, how a view

across a cohort can be taken and how any issues with assessment can be identified and addressed. The visitors were also unclear, from the evidence provided, who was responsible for the moderation of assessment, the identification of any potential issues with assessment and for reporting this back to the relevant members of the central programme team. Because of this the visitors could not identify, from the evidence provided, how the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that will be in place will ensure that the standards in assessment are comparable across every practice placement setting. Therefore, the visitors require further evidence of how the monitoring and evaluation mechanism that will be in place will ensure that standards in assessment are comparable across all practice placements that issues with assessment standards can be identified and addressed.

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

Condition: The programme team must provide further evidence as to how they inform students about their ability to progress and achieve should they fail to complete any part of the programme.

Reason: In their reading of the programme documentation the visitors could not identify how many times a student would be able to fail or complete any aspect of the programme. In their discussion with students and practice placement educators the visitors noted that there was no consensus view regarding how many times a student may fail or repeat any aspect of the programme. The visitors were also made aware that a student may not be able to repeat a placement if the contractual agreement with a placement provider did not allow for this. In discussion with the programme team it was clarified that the academic regulations of the institution would apply but that the programme would have to be subject to some exemptions, which were yet to be determined. As such the visitors could not identify, from the available evidence, how many times a student would be able to repeat any aspect of the programme or how this information will be communicated to students. Therefore, the visitors require further evidence as to how students can progress through the programme, what implications there may be for failure on any element of the programme and how this information will be communicated to students.

Recommendations

3.5 There must be an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff in place to deliver an effective programme.

Recommendation: That the education provider keeps the number of HCPC registrants on the core, and wider, programme teams under review to ensure that there is appropriate input from HCPC registered social workers

Reason: In scrutinising the documentary submission for this programme the visitors noted that there were a number of HCPC register social workers on the programme team. As such they feel that this standard is met. However they also noted that there are only two members of the central team that are HCPC registered and that not all areas had input from an HCPC registrant at module tutor level. Therefore the visitors recommend that the education provider monitors the input from HCPC registered social workers into the programme. In this way, the education provider can ensure that there continues to be a sufficient input from regulated professionals into the programme.

3.7 A programme for staff development must be in place to ensure continuing professional and research development.

Recommendation: That the education provider considers what staff development opportunities are offered to associate lecturers.

Reason: In scrutinising the documentation provided and in discussions at the visit the visitors noted the personal development and academic development opportunities that are provided to staff at the education provider. As such they feel that this standard is met. However, in discussions with the practice placement educators and the programme team it was highlighted that the same opportunities are not provided to associate lecturers on the programme. Therefore, the visitors recommend that the education provider considers providing similar opportunities to associate lecturers who are responsible for a number of elements of the programme. In this way, the education provider may be better able to ensure that they can continue to attract well trained and motivated staff to fill the associate lecturer roles.

3.17 Service users and carers must be involved in the programme.

Recommendation: The programme team keeps under review the process for ensuring that employers, when interviewing applicants to the programme, involve service users and carers in the admissions process.

Reason: In discussion with the programme team the visitors were made aware that service users and carers are involved in a number of aspects of the programme. As such the visitors are content that this standard is met. However, in discussions at the visit the visitors were made aware that while it is the expectation of the education provider that service users and carers are involved in all admissions interviews, this was not always the case when interviews were carried out by employers. Therefore the visitors recommend that the programme team keeps under review the guidance and information it provides to employers so that where possible each admissions interview involves service users and carers. In this way the programme team may be better able to directly compare applicants through a greater consistency in interview delivery.

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.

Recommendation: The education provider should keep the current requirement under review to ensure that the specific requirements for the education provider to appoint at least one HCPC registered external examiner are adhered to.

Reason: In the documentation provided the visitor noted that there is a statement in the academic regulations which requires external examiners to adhere to the requirements of the relevant professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. As such the visitors are content that this standard is met. However, the visitors recommend that the education provider should keep this under review to ensure that the specific requirements of the HCPC are taken into account when recruiting external examiners. In this way the education provider may be better able to ensure that the regulatory requirements continue to be met.

David Ward
Gerry Mulcahy
Mohammed Jeewa