hcpc health & care professions council

Visitors' report

Name of education provider	The University of Northampton
Programme name	BA (Hons) in Social Work
Mode of delivery	Full time Work based learning
Relevant part of the HCPC Register	Social worker in England
Date of visit	22 – 23 October 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. 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 26 March 2015. 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 the social work profession came onto the register in 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 reviewed the programme and the professional body considered their accreditation of the programme. The education provider, 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 the programme and dialogue throughout the visit; this report covers the HCPC's recommendations on the programme only. As an independent regulatory body, the HCPC's recommended outcome is independent and impartial and based solely on the HCPC's standards. A separate report, produced by the education provider and the professional body outlines their decisions on the programme's status.

Visit details

Name and role of HCPC visitors	David Childs (Social worker in England)
	Paula Sobiechowska (Social worker in England)
	Kathleen Taylor (Lay visitor)
HCPC executive officer (in attendance)	Hollie Latham
HCPC observer	Jamie Hunt
Proposed student numbers	50 per year
Proposed start date of programme approval	1 September 2015
Chair	John Sinclair (The University of Northampton)
Secretary	Vivien Houghton (The University of Northampton)
Members of the joint panel	Caroline Hickman (The College of Social Work)
	Helen Keville (The College of Social Work)
	Ivna Reic (The University of Northampton)
	Rachel Dubsky (The University of Northampton)
	Alison Ewing (The University of Northampton)
	Shelley Briggs (University of central Lancashire)
	Lee Quinney (University of Wolverhampton)

	Sue Beacock (University of Hull) Jo Webb (MIND) Sam Dunkerley (Northamptonshire County Council) Natalie Campioin (The University of Northampton) Hannah Brighton (The University of Northampton)

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	☒	☐	☐
Service users and carers	☒	☐	☐
Learning resources	☒	☐	☐
Specialist teaching accommodation (eg specialist laboratories and 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 ten 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 submit further evidence to show how applicants to the programme are accurately advised on current bursary circumstances and allocations.

Reason: Prior to the visit the visitors were guided to the course fact sheet. The visitors noted that the fact sheet states "A NHS Social Work bursary is available to support successful applicants during the course of their study" (page 1). However in a meeting with the programme team is was stated that 27 out of 29 students in the most recent cohort received bursaries and those who were not eligible received a grant from the university. The university grant is £1500 per year and therefore not equivalent to the bursaries received from the department of health which currently stand at £4862.50 (subject to variable tuition fees). The visitors noted that this information could be misleading to potential applicants leading to the assumption that all students would receive a comparative bursary. The visitors also consider this to be important information to allow potential applicants to make an informed choice about whether to take up or make an offer of a place on a programme. Therefore the visitors require the education provider to revisit and update admissions materials to accurately reflect the current circumstances and allocation of social work bursaries and grants.

2.7 The admissions procedures must ensure that the education provider has equality and diversity policies in relation to applicants and students, together with an indication of how these will be implemented and monitored.

Condition: The education provider must submit further evidence to show how their equality and diversity policies are consistently implemented throughout the admissions process.

Reason: Documentation provided to support this standard referred to the education providers' equality and diversity policy. The visitors were satisfied that the content of the policy was adequate to ensure equality and diversity in the admissions procedures, however, the visitors were unable to see how the policy was consistently applied in the interview process for applicants to the programme. In particular, the visitors noted that section 8.3 of the equality and diversity policy states "Ensuring that specific training and guidance is provided to those responsible for carrying out specific functions e.g. staff recruitment and selection or student admissions" (page 14). However, in a meeting with the programme team it was stated not all those involved in the admissions interviews had received equality and diversity training, in particular members of the service user and carer group. Therefore the visitors require the education provider to revisit the current equality and diversity training provided to all those involved in applicant interviews and provide further evidence on how the policy is implemented and monitored.

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

Condition: The education provider must submit further evidence to show how they act on information gathered through their monitoring and evaluation systems.

Reason: To evidence this standard, the visitors were directed to a number of documents showing ways in which the education provider monitored the programme and gathered feedback from students, stakeholders and service users and carers. The visitors noted the systems in place to gather feedback, however, could not see how the information gathered through feedback was acted on and fed back into the programme. In a meeting with students it was highlighted that feedback was often given to the programme team, however, students were unable to see how their feedback had been acted on and how it had informed the content of the programme. For example, it was noted that students voiced the benefits of having a lecture hosted by a service user in year two of the programme and consequently requested more contact with service users and carers. However, the students had not received any further contact with service users and were not aware of any plans to involve them further in the programme. The visitors therefore require further evidence on the mechanisms in place to ensure the education provider acts on feedback provided through monitoring and evaluation processes.

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

Condition: The education provider must provide evidence that there are appropriate protocols in place to obtain students' consent when they are acting as service users in role play situations.

Reason: From the SETs mapping document provided prior to the visit, the visitors noted that students would be informed about their right to confidentiality in the classroom and group work settings. However, in discussions with the programme team and students the visitors noted that there was not a formal process by which students would be able to give their consent when acting as service users in role plays, and other practical teachings. Also, the visitors could not see how students understood the risk of emotional distress through participating in role plays, and any impact on their academic progression if they chose to opt out of participating. The visitors therefore require further evidence of how students on the programme will be able to give informed consent to participate in role play activities, when they 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 education provider must provide further evidence on how attendance policies and monitoring mechanisms are clearly communicated to students.

Reason: The visitors noted in the documentation provided that students are expected to attend a minimum 80 per cent of academic lectures. In discussion with the students it was highlighted that there is an attendance policy and that students are aware of when attendance is mandatory. However the students were not clear on the process used to record their attendance, or what repercussions there may be should their attendance

fall below the required threshold. In a meeting with the programme team it was stated that registers were taken in every lecture and that students who missed two consecutive lectures would be contacted to discuss their circumstances and reasons for missing lectures. The visitors were satisfied with the processes stated by the programme team, however, could not be satisfied that the process was being consistently applied and clearly communicated to students. Therefore the visitors require further evidence to demonstrate how attendance policies are consistently applied, and, how students are made aware of how attendance is recorded and the repercussions should their attendance fall below the required threshold.

5.2 The number, duration and range of practice placements must be appropriate to support the delivery of the programme and the achievement of the learning outcomes.

Condition: The education provider must provide further information on how the programme will continue to provide an appropriate number of placements for the number of students on the programme at any one time**.**

Reason: In discussions with the programme team and practice educators, the visitors heard that one of the education providers' main placement providers, Northamptonshire County Council (NCC), was currently in special measures following recent Ofsted inspections. This has led to NCC currently not offering children and family practice placements to students. It was highlighted that this had an impact on the number of placements available to the programme and subsequently, to students. The visitors heard that the programme team had reduced student numbers in recent cohorts in order to ensure enough placements were available. The most recent cohort currently has 29 students in comparison to the proposed 50. Whilst the visitors were satisfied that the current cohort were supported adequately by the number of placements available, they could not be sure that this would be maintained for future cohorts of 50 students per year. The visitors therefore require further clarity from the education provider on further placements that will be secured to support a 150 student cohort (across three years), or amendments to the proposed student numbers going forward.

5.6 There must be an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff at the practice placement setting.

Condition: The education provider must provide further information on how the programme will continue to provide an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff at the placements setting for the number of students on the programme at any one time**.**

Reason: In discussions with the programme team and practice educators, the visitors heard that one of the education providers' main placement providers, Northamptonshire County Council (NCC), was currently in special measures following recent Ofsted inspections. This has led to NCC currently not offering children and family practice placements to students. It was highlighted that many placements would provide their own placements educators, meaning that a reduction in placements also meant a reduction in placement educators available to support students. The visitors heard that the programme team had reduced student numbers in recent cohorts in order to ensure enough placements were available. The most recent cohort currently has 29 students in comparison to the proposed 50. Whilst the visitors were satisfied that the current cohort were supported adequately by the number of placements and placement educators

available, they could not be sure that this would be maintained for future cohorts of 50 students per year. The visitors therefore require further clarity from the education provider on further placements and placement educators that will be secured to support a 150 student cohort (across three years), or amendments to the proposed student numbers going forward.

5.8 Practice placement educators must undertake appropriate practice placement educator training.

Condition: The education provider must revisit the current policy around refresher training for practice educators and the monitoring systems in place.

Reason: The documentation provided prior to the visit directed visitors to the placement calendar within the placement guidance document which highlights a recall day for practice educators. The visitors noted that this is one way for the programme to ensure its placement educators are undertaking appropriate training. The calendar states that "…is it advisable for Practice Teachers and/or On-site Supervisors to attend the recall day" (page 41). Further to this, in discussions with the programme team and practice educators, it was stated that recall days were not compulsory and there was currently no mechanism in place for recording attendance. The visitors could not identify any other opportunities for practice placement educators to take part in some form of refresher training as appropriate to their role. Therefore, the visitors were unable to identify how the programme team would ensure that all practice educators were up to date and ensured parity in training and assessment of students in the placement setting. The visitors therefore require further information to evidence that all practice placement educators will partake in some form of refresher training as appropriate to their role. The visitors also need to see what mechanisms will be in place to monitor placement educators' engagement with the training, including clear policies about non-engagement.

5.11 Students, practice placement providers and practice placement educators must be fully prepared for placement which will include information about an understanding of:
- **the learning outcomes to be achieved;**
- **the timings and the duration of any placement experience and associated records to be maintained;**
- **expectations of professional conduct;**
- **the assessment procedures including the implications of, and any action to be taken in the case of, failure to progress; and**
- **communication and lines of responsibility.**

Condition: The education provider must provide further evidence of how students are fully prepared for practice placements.

Reason: To evidence this standard the visitors were directed to specific modules within the curriculum that prepared students for the placement setting. However, in a meeting with students the visitors heard that there was inconsistency in the information provided to students in preparation for placements. In particular it was stated that students did not feel well supported on placement and felt that they were often put into situations which they were not prepared for. For example, students expressed concern in the level of responsibility they were given in the early stages of their placements. They felt that they had not been prepared for such a steep learning curve and had not expected to be

in such a position of power. In a meeting with the programme team the visitors heard that students are advised of what to expect in placement through the curriculum content and in specific placement preparation lectures. The visitors were satisfied that the material to prepare students for practice placements contained relevant information, but, could not be certain that information around practice placement preparation was being adequately communicated to, and understood by students. Therefore the visitors require further information on the mechanisms in place to ensure that students are well informed about what is expected of them, their responsibilities during a placement, and, how the programme team ensure that this information has been understood.

6.8 Assessment regulations, or other relevant policies, must clearly specify requirements for approved programmes being the only programmes which contain any reference to an HCPC protected title or part of the Register in their named award.

Condition: The education provider must revisit the step off award titles to ensure that approved programmes are the only programmes which contain any reference to the protected title or part of the Register in their named award.

Reason: From documentation provided prior to the visit, the visitors noted that the programme contains three exit routes as follows: PGCert Social Work, PGDip Social Work and BA Social Work. In meeting the programme team it was highlighted that a request has been made to the Deputy Director of Student and Academic Services to implement a supplementary regulation that ensures the protected title of social work is not in any exit award titles that do not lead to eligibility to apply for registration. However this has not yet been implemented or confirmed. The visitors note that the use of "social work" in exit award titles could be misleading to applicants and students. The visitors therefore require the education provider to revisit the titles of exit awards to ensure that approved programmes are the only programmes which contain any reference to an HCPC protected title.

Recommendations

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.

Recommendation: The education provider should consider reviewing the application process, specifically the e-mail application, to enable the programme team to make an appropriate decision about whether to offer the applicant a place on the programme.

Reason: The visitors noted that as part of the recruitment process, applicants are required to submit a written exercise via e-mail. Whilst the visitors were satisfied that the content of the written exercise was appropriate, it was noted that there was no way of identifying if the applicant was the author of the application. The visitors were satisfied that, following the e-mail application, there were other mechanisms in the selection process to appropriately inform the education providers decision to ensure suitable applicants were offered a place on the programme. However, they recommend the programme team reconsiders the use of an e-mail application to further enable them to make an appropriate decision about whether to offer the applicant a place on the programme.

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

Recommendation: The visitors suggest that the education provider considers reviewing the programme specification to ensure consistency throughout the programme.

Reason: The visitors were provided and number of documents to support this standard which showed that the programme resources to support student learning are effectively used. They also spoke with students on the programme who stated that they felt well supported by the available resources on the programme. The visitors were therefore satisfied that this standard is met. However, the visitors noted that the programme specification had an inconsistency in the way in which it displayed key skills for the programme. In particular, key skill C1 states "Make decisions, set goals and construct specific plans to achieve these, taking into account relevant factors including legislation and ethical guidelines" (page 5). However, in the same document, key skill C1 states "Key Skill 1 e.g. Communication Skills" (page 17). The visitors consider that whilst current students felt well informed on the curriculum, an inconsistency in the ways in which key skills are stated presents a risk to the accurate teaching of key skills for future cohorts. Therefore the visitors recommend that the education provider revisits the programme specification to ensure that the resources to support student learning in all settings continue to be effectively used.

3.13 There must be a student complaints process in place.

Recommendation: The education provider should consider reviewing how the whistleblowing policy is communicated to students.

Reason: The visitors could see that there was an appropriate whistleblowing policy in place that was accessible to students, and were therefore satisfied that this standard is met. However, the visitors noted that, whilst the student handbook mentions

whistleblowing as a responsibility for students, there is no guidance on the process to take should a student need to raise a complaint. Further to this, in a meeting with students, it was highlighted that students were aware of the policy but not necessarily aware of how to implement it should the need arise. The visitors therefore recommend that the programme team review the process used to communicate the policy to students and the steps they should take if needed.

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

Recommendation: The education provider should consider reviewing the current provision of service user and carer representatives for the programme.

Reason: The visitors noted that there is a small number of service users and carers involved in the programme. In addition to this, it was highlighted that service users and carers were primarily involved in the recruitment process which required the involvement of four service users and carers at any one time. The visitors were satisfied that this involvement ensures the standard is met, however, considered there to be a risk to this form of involvement with such a small provision of service users and carers. Therefore the visitors recommend that the education provider considers expanding the current provision of service users and carers for the programme and consider alternative mechanisms for their involvement.

5.2 The number, duration and range of practice placements must be appropriate to support the delivery of the programme and the achievement of the learning outcomes.

Recommendation: The education provider should consider reviewing the current range placement provisions for the programme.

Reason: The visitors met with students and placement educators who advised of the range of placements students were currently and had previously undertaken. Whilst concern was raised about the limited number of placements in children's services, it was stated that there were some placements available in this area and the visitors were therefore satisfied that the current range of placements was appropriate. However, in a meeting with the programme team, it was highlighted that one of the education providers' main placement providers, Northamptonshire County Council (NCC), was currently in special measures following recent Ofsted inspections. It was also highlighted that this placement provider was the main provision of placements in children's services leaving the programme with a limited range of placements to offer students. The visitors consider there to be a risk to the range of placements the education provider can offer students. Therefore the visitors recommend that the education provider expands the placement provision, particularly in children's services, to ensure there continues to be an appropriate range of placements to support the delivery of the programme and the achievement of the learning outcomes.

<div align="right">

David Childs
Paula Sobiechowska
Kathleen Taylor

</div>