

Visitors' report

Name of education provider	The University of Northampton
Programme name	MA in Social Work
Mode of delivery	Full time
Relevant part of the HCPC Register	Social worker in England
Date of visit	7 – 8 May 2015

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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 approval of the programme. This recommended outcome was accepted by the Education and Training Committee (Committee) on 27 August 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 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 part of a joint event. The education provider validated the programme. The education provider 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, outlines their decisions on the programme's status.

Visit details

Name and role of HCPC visitors	Richard Barker (Social worker in England) Michael Branicki (Social worker in England) Ian Prince (Lay visitor)
HCPC executive officer (in attendance)	Abdur Razzaq
HCPC observer	Eileen Mullan
Proposed student numbers	20 per cohort once a year
Proposed start date of programme approval	January 2016
Chair	Julie Jones (The University of Northampton)
Secretary	Vivien Houghton (The University of Northampton)
Members of the joint panel	Jeff Ollerton (Internal Panel Member) Udayan Raur-Ray (Internal Panel Member) Mathew Gough (External Panel Member) Gurnam Singh (External Panel Member)

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"/>

The HCPC did not review external examiners' reports prior to the visit as the programme is new and there is currently no external examiner in place.

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"/>
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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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 49 of the SETs have been met and that conditions should be set on the remaining nine 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 did not make any 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

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

Condition: The education provider must revisit the selection and entry criteria to ensure it is appropriate, clear and consistent.

Reason: From the documentation provided and from the meetings with the programme team and the students the visitors noted that applicants are assessed in a number of ways as part of the admissions process. The admission handbook, page 7 states, “If your application meets the set criteria, you may be invited to sit a written entrance test”. Similarly, on page 8, the admission handbook states, “The interview panel is usually made up of two panel members which may include practitioners, service users and carers and an academic”. The visitors also learnt in the programme team meeting that all potential students will need to pass the written test and the education provider will review the combination of the interview panel members to ensure a consistent approach. The visitors were concerned about the consistency of these written tests and the combination of the interview panel members. The visitors therefore require further evidence about the selection and entry criteria to ensure they are appropriate, clear and consistent. In this way the visitors will be able to consider how the programme can meet this standard.

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

Condition: The education provider must revise programme documentation to ensure it accurately reflects the current landscape of regulation for social workers, in England.

Reason: The visitors noted that the programme documentation submitted by the education provider included several instances of incorrect terminology associated with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). For example, programme specification section 13 states “To satisfy the HCPC requirements you will need to demonstrate good character and conduct by means of a declaration of criminal convictions and medical conditions and references from people who know you”. The HCPC does not specifically require applicants to demonstrate good character and medical conditions but require education providers to have admission criteria including criminal convictions checks and health requirements. The visitors also noted other instances of incorrect terminology throughout the programme documentation. It is important that students are equipped with accurate information, and the visitors considered it to be important the programme documentation accurately reflects HCPC’s role in the regulation of the profession. The visitors therefore require the education provider to revise the programme documentation to correct all instances of inconsistent and incorrect terminology, to ensure that students are not unintentionally misinformed either about the HCPC or the current landscape of regulation. In this way the visitors can determine how the resources to support student learning are being effectively used.

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

Condition: The education provider must submit programme documentation that has been revised to meet the conditions set as a result of this validation event.

Reason: Through discussion at the visit, and from the final conclusions of the internal validation panel it was clear revisions will be made to programme documentation to meet conditions set by the validation panel. In particular, the conditions set referred to amendments to module descriptors, the programme specification document and the student handbook. The visitors consider these documentation that students routinely refer to as an important resource to support student learning. To ensure the programme meets this standard the visitors need to review the revised documents to ensure the resources to support student learning are effectively used. Therefore the visitors require the education provider to submit the revised programme documentation that students routinely refer to.

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

Condition: The education provider must submit further evidence regarding the plans for service user and carer involvement within the programme.

Reason: From the documentation provided, the visitors could not determine the exact nature of the service users and carers' involvement in the programme. The programme documentation suggested service users and carers will be involved in many aspects of the programme. Also, during discussions at the visit, it was indicated service users and carers may be involved in the interview process. However, from the discussions with the programme team it was clear that formal future plans have yet to be finalised to involve service users throughout the programme. It was indicated by the service users and carers that there are plans for their further involvement in the programme, but the programme team provided limited details about how this will work. The visitors were unable to determine from the discussion and the documentation provided that a plan is in place for how service users and carers will continue to be involved in the programme. In order to determine that this standard is met the visitors require further evidence demonstrating the plans for future service user and carer involvement.

4.4 The curriculum must remain relevant to current practice.

Condition: The programme team must provide further evidence to demonstrate that curriculum is up to date and relevant to current practice.

Reason: The visitors were provided with evidence of the currency of the curriculum within the Standards of Education and Training (SETs) mapping for this programme including module specifications. The visitors were unable to find any reading lists for each module to determine if the curriculum remains up to date and relevant to current practice. Although the visitors were satisfied the programme team will ensure currency of the curriculum going forward, they require further evidence to demonstrate that this programme, as it stands, remains up to date and relevant to current practice. The education provider may wish to provide the reading lists for all modules as one of the evidence to show this programme meets this standard.

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

Condition: The education provider must submit evidence to demonstrate how they maintain the overall responsibility of placements and maintain a thorough and effective system for approving and monitoring of all placements.

Reason: In the documentation provided prior to the visit, the visitors noted that the education provider has systems in place for the regular and annual review of placements. During the meeting with the programme team, the visitors noted that the education provider has service level agreements with placement providers that ensure placements are appropriate. However, the visitors did not see those agreements with all placement providers. In addition to this, the visitors learnt through discussions that the education provider will strengthen and update the system to approve and monitor placements. Due to the placement audit systems being in development and not enough evidence, the visitors are unable to determine how this standard is met. The visitors require further evidence of how the updated system along with other mechanisms will be used to ensure the education provider maintains overall responsibility for the approval and monitoring of placements.

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 placement setting.

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) keeps a record of their practice educators and inform the education provider about them. However, NCC only provides approximately 14 placements per year. It was highlighted that many placements would provide their own placement educators. With the increase in student numbers, because of the introduction of this programme, more placements will be required and therefore more placement educators need to be available to support students. Whilst the visitors were satisfied that the current BA (Hons) in Social Work students were supported adequately by the number of placements and placement educators available, they could not be sure that this would be maintained for future students on both programmes. The visitors therefore require further clarity from the education provider on placement educators that will in place to support student cohorts (across both programmes).

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

Condition: The programme team must provide further evidence to ensure that practice placement educators have undertaken the appropriate placement educator training.

Reason: The SETs mapping referred to a standalone module that is offered to placement educators as part of their continuous professional development route for post qualification career. However, during the meeting with practice placement educators, the visitors learnt that practice educators were not aware of all the training available for practice educators and therefore did not attend training. The programme team and placement providers discussed the various practice educator training opportunities that are in place and what level of qualification is required from the practice educators for each placement. The visitors acknowledged that there were several training opportunities and workshops provided by the education provider for placement educators but were unable to see how each individual placement educator's training is

monitored, or how the requirements for training feed into partnership agreements with the providers. The visitors were also unclear about the steps taken to ensure that suitably trained placement educators were in place for students. To ensure that this standard is met, the visitors require the education provider to articulate clearly the training requirements for placement educators and the processes in place for ensuring these requirements are met and monitored in practice.

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

Condition: The programme team must ensure programme documentation clearly articulates the requirements for student progression and achievement within the programme.

Reason: From review of the programme documentation, the visitors noted that students will be offered SWKM016 and SWKM017 as elective on-line modules to enhance the chances of employability of the students. Students do not need to pass these modules to successfully complete this programme. However, the visitors noted in the appendix one of the programme specification “Students wanting to register as a Social Worker with the HCPC they must undertake and successfully complete SWKM016 and SWKM017”. During discussions with the programme team the visitors learnt the programme team will update the programme documentation to reflect the correct requirements for students to progress in this programme. Therefore the visitors require the programme team to revisit their programme documentation to ensure this information is clearly articulated to students so that they are aware of the requirements for progression.

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 revisit the programme documentation to clearly state that aegrotat awards do not confer eligibility to apply to the Register.

Reason: From the documentation provided the visitors could not determine where in the assessment regulations there was a clear statement regarding aegrotat awards. Discussions with the programme team indicated aegrotat awards would only be awarded in exceptional circumstances on a case by case basis. The visitors could not determine how the programme team ensured that students understood that aegrotat awards would not enable them to be eligible to apply to the Register. The visitors therefore require further evidence to ensure that there is a clear statement included in the programme documentation regarding the aegrotat award.

Richard Barker
Michael Branicki
Ian Prince