hcpc health & care professions council

**Visitors' report**

| Name of education provider | University of Hertfordshire |
|---|---|
| Programme name | BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science (Life Sciences) |
| Mode of delivery | Full time |
| Relevant part of the HCPC Register | Biomedical scientist |
| Date of visit | 13 – 14 February 2013 |

Contents

## Executive summary

The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) approve educational programmes in the UK which health and care professionals must complete before they can apply to be registered with us. The HCPC is a statutory regulator and our main aim is to protect the public. The HCPC currently regulates 16 professions. All of these professions have at least one professional title which is protected by law. This means that anyone using the title 'Biomedical scientist' 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 4 July. At this meeting, the Committee approved the programme. 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 and validating body validated the programme and the professional body considered their accreditation of the programme. The visit also considered a BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science (Life Sciences) Part time 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 all the programmes and dialogue throughout the visit; this report covers the HCPC's recommendations on this programme only. A separate report exists for the other programme. As an independent regulatory body, the HCPC's recommended outcome is independent and impartial and based solely on the HCPC's standards. Separate reports, produced by the education provider and the professional body, outline their decisions on the programmes' status.

## Visit details

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of HCPC visitors and profession | Christine Murphy (Biomedical scientist) Peter Ruddy (Biomedical scientist) |
| HCPC executive officer (in attendance) | Nicola Baker |
| HCPC observer | Benjamin Potter |
| Proposed student numbers | 10 |
| Proposed start date of programme approval | September 2013 |
| Chair | Catherine Rendell (University of Hertfordshire) |
| Secretary | Liz Mellor (University of Hertfordshire) |
| Members of the joint panel | Jo Cahill (Internal Panel Member) Dominic Bygate (Internal Panel Member) Aristides Mapouras (Internal Panel Member) Melan Kurera (Internal Panel Member) Paul Watson (External Panel Member) David Parkinson (External Panel Member) Wendy Leversuch (The Institute of Biomedical Science) Jim Cunningham (The Institute of Biomedical Science) |

## Sources of evidence

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

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

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

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

The HCPC met with students from the BSc Biomedical sciences and BSc Applied Biomedical Sciences programmes as the programme seeking approval currently does not have any students enrolled on it.

## 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 42 of the SETs have been met and that conditions should be set on the remaining 15 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 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 is recommended for approval/ongoing approval. Recommendations are normally set to encourage further enhancements to the programme and are normally set when it is felt that the particular standard of education and training has been met at, or just above the threshold level.

## Conditions

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

**Condition:** The programme team must revise the programme documentation and advertising materials to ensure they clearly articulate the entry requirements, process for admission and any additional financial requirements that students may have to cover.

**Reason:** The visitors reviewed the advertising materials for the education provider's existing biomedical science programmes prior to the visit, and further draft advertising materials specific to the healthcare science programme were provided at the visit. The visitors noted that information will be provided on the university website following the programme's validation. In the meeting with the programme team the visitors were made aware that as part of the admissions process, the programme requires students to attend at least one interview, and undertake numeracy and literacy tests. Students will also be required to self-declare any health issues and anything that may show up on an enhanced criminal records bureau (CRB) check. The visitors could not determine, from the evidence provided, how applicants will be informed about the interview, the nature of the questions they will be asked when applying and the requirements around the CRB and occupational health. The visitors were also unable to determine from the documentation, who will bear the cost of any CRB checks or relevant inoculations that may be required. The visitors therefore require the programme team to revise the programme documentation and advertising materials to ensure they clearly articulate the details about the admissions procedures and any additional costs applicants may be required to cover. In this way the visitors can determine how the programme team ensures that applicants can make an informed choice about applying to the programme.

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

**Condition:** The programme team must revise the programme documentation and advertising materials to ensure they clearly articulate the progression routes through the programme.

**Reason:** The visitors reviewed the advertising materials for the education provider's existing biomedical sciences programmes prior to the visit, and further draft advertising materials specific to the healthcare science programme were provided at the visit. The visitors noted that information will be provided on the university website following the programme's validation. In the meeting with the programme team the visitors were made aware that there will be two routes on to the healthcare science programme, through direct entry or through a transfer from one of the biomedical science programmes after the completion of the first semester of year one of the programme. The visitors were also made aware that students who are direct entrants to the programme may be subjected to an additional interview at the end of semester one, alongside the students transferring from other biomedical science programmes. It was suggested that students who had directly applied to the programme may not be able to continue based on their performance at this interview and would be transferred to an

alternative biomedical science programme if required. The visitors could not determine, from the documentary evidence provided,  how applicants will be informed about the routes through the programme and the possible requirements for an additional interview at the end of semester one. The visitors therefore require the programme team to revise the programme documentation and advertising materials to ensure they clearly articulate the required details about the progression routes through the programme, to ensure that applicants can make an informed choice about applying to the programme.

### 3.6 Subject areas must be taught by staff with relevant specialist expertise and knowledge.

**Condition:** The education provider must provide further documentation showing which staff will be teaching on which modules.

**Reason:** The visitors reviewed staff curriculum vitaes and a document showing module coordinators prior to the visit as part of the education providers' documentary submission. However, the visitors could not determine from the evidence provided which members of staff would be teaching on each of the modules. As such the visitors were unable to determine if the programme was being taught by staff with relevant expertise and knowledge. In order to ensure that the teaching staff have sufficient expertise and knowledge for the modules' subject areas, the visitors require further evidence which articulates which members of staff will be responsible for teaching which modules. In this way the visitors will be able to determine if this standard can be met.

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

**Condition:** The education provider must revise the programme documentation, including advertising materials, to ensure the terminology in use is reflective of the current landscape of statutory regulation for biomedical scientists and contains accurate information about the programme.

**Reason:** The documentation submitted prior to the visit contained occurrences of incorrect or misleading information. The visitors noted that there should be more clarity around the process of registering as a biomedical scientist with the HCPC. There are frequent references to the necessity of students' completing the 'certificate of competence' in order to register as a biomedical scientist and the requirement for the completion of a 'portfolio'. The documentation also refers to registration with the 'HPC' as a 'Healthcare Science Practitioner' (student handbook, p8) and at various points in the documentation refers to 'state registration' as a biomedical scientist. The HCPC does not require the certificate of competence, or a portfolio to be completed in addition to an already approved programme in order for a student to become eligible to apply to the Register. The HCPC also does not protect the title of 'healthcare science practitioner' and does not confer 'state registration'. The health and care professions council (HCPC) has also recently changed its name from the health professions council (HPC) due to legislative requirements. The visitors require these errors in the use of terminology to be rectified in order to ensure that they do not unintentionally mislead or confuse students. The visitors also require the terminology around the use of 'portfolio' and certificate of competence to be clarified in order for students to clearly understand the requirements for successful completion of the programme.

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

**Condition:** The education provider must provide any documentation that is revised as a result of the upcoming event to validate the programme against Medical Education England's (MEE) modernising scientific careers (MSC) standards.

**Reason:** The visitors noted, in conversation with the programme team, that the programme was due to be visited by MEE to determine if the programme meets the standards required for MSC accreditation. The visitors were also aware that due to the specific requirements of MEE there may be a number of changes that will need to be made to the programme documentation to meet these additional standards. If this is the case the visitors will require further evidence of these changes to ensure that the documentation they have reviewed is the final documentation that will be used by the programme team.

**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 the visitors with a copy of the student consent form.

**Reason:** The visitors were satisfied that the education provider has a mechanism in place for obtaining student consent, but need to see an example of the form in order to ensure that all the aspects of student participation as service users in practical and clinical teaching are appropriately addressed. Therefore the visitors require a copy of the LEC2 consent form as specified in the programme documentation.  In this way the visitors can determine if this standard can be met.

**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 clarify the attendance requirements for students throughout the course of the programme.

**Reason:** The visitors noted in the documentation provided that an outline of the mechanisms that will be in place to monitor attendance was provided to students. However, the visitors were aware that while 'low attendance' for levels four or five of the programme would be dealt with through the process as articulated in the student handbook, there was no clarity about what 'low attendance' was. There was also a lack of clarity around which aspects of the programme were mandatory and carried a 100% attendance requirement. Therefore the visitors require further evidence of how the programme documentation will articulate to students the required attendance levels for the different aspects of the programme and what the consequences of missing these requirements will be on their progression through the programme.

**3.16 There must be a process in place throughout the programme for dealing with concerns about students' profession-related conduct.**

**Condition:** The programme team must clarify how professionalism issues raised at the entrance interview or on practice placements will feed into the student suitability scheme that is in place.

**Reason:** The documentation outlined that a student suitability scheme will be used to ensure that issues raised about a student's professionalism or fitness to practice would be handled fairly and effectively. The programme team also informed the visitors that an interview at application would measure the student's suitability for the programme, and that practice placement educators would report to the education provider on the student's professionalism on placements. However, the visitors could not determine how the mechanisms at interview or on placement will feed into the main suitability scheme in place for the programme. The visitors therefore require further evidence as to how these separate mechanisms for determining students' suitability will feed into each other to ensure a uniform and clear approach to dealing with concerns about students' profession-related conduct. In this way the visitors can determine if this standard can be met.

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

**Condition:** The education provider must provide further evidence that the formal processes in place for approving placements are thorough and effective.

**Reason:** The visitors noted that the documentary evidence provided for SET 5.4 was a pre-placement agreement. It asks for the Clinical Pathology Accreditation (CPA) status and Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS) clinical laboratory pre-registration training status of the placements and any upcoming dates for review, as a way of ensuring the placements are suitable. Through discussion with the programme team, it was established that visits to the placement provider by the programme team, and an audit would also assess the placement prior to approval. However, the visitors could not determine, from the evidence provided, how these processes are undertaken, recorded and monitored. The visitors therefore require further evidence demonstrating how the education provider uses the information gathered through their formal processes to ensure that approved placements are suitable for their students.

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

**Condition:** The education provider must provide further evidence of the formal processes in place which ensure that practice placements are thoroughly and effectively monitored.

**Reason:** The documentary evidence provided for SET 5.4 was a pre-placement agreement, which asks for the CPA accreditation status and IBMS clinical laboratory pre-registration training status of the placements and any upcoming dates for review, as a way of ensuring the placements are suitable. In discussion with the programme team, the visitors were also made aware that the university link tutor will be visiting the student in placement and reviewing student feedback. It was highlighted that the purpose of this visit is principally to assess the students' progress, and may highlight issues with the

placement too late for them to be effectively addressed or resolved. In the meeting with the programme team, the visitors questioned what would be done with the information provided in the pre-placement agreement. The programme team indicated that the information would feed into monitoring and that if the placement provider was under review from CPA or IBMS then this would be taken into consideration when placing students. However the visitors were not provided with evidence of formal monitoring procedures detailing, for example, what happens when difficulties arise with placements. The visitors therefore require the education provider to provide further evidence that clearly demonstrates that the education provider takes overall responsibility for the practice placements on the programme, including the measures taken to monitor 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 submit evidence which shows how they ensure practice placements have an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff.

**Reason:** For evidence against SET 5.6, the education provider referenced the pre-placement agreement with the placement provider, particularly Section 3.1.3; "The Placement Provider will support the Placement Student by: Providing adequate supervision and guidance such that the student may undertake the responsibilities required by placement." This indicates that the placement provider will determine what is deemed as 'adequate' supervision and guidance. The visitors did not see sufficient evidence to demonstrate how the education provider ensures that there is an adequate number of staff, with the relevant qualifications and experience to support the students in placements. The visitors therefore require further evidence that clearly articulates the criteria for practice placement providers, in terms of the requirements for appropriately qualified and experienced staff, and the steps taken by the education provider to check that these criteria are met by each placement provider.

### 5.7 Practice placement educators must have relevant knowledge, skills and experience.

**Condition:** The programme team must provide evidence of how they ensure the placement educators have the relevant knowledge, skills and experience needed to work with students from this programme.

**Reason:** For evidence against SET 5.7, the education provider referenced the pre-placement agreement with the placement provider. As noted in the condition against SET 5.6, the visitors were unclear about the steps taken to ensure that suitable practice placement educators were in place, including whether they have the relevant knowledge, skills and experience. To ensure that this standard is met, the visitors require the education provider to articulate clearly the criteria for placement educators, in terms of the required knowledge, skills and experience, and the steps taken to check that these criteria are met.

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

**Condition:** The education provider must provide further evidence of the initial training and refresher training that will be provided to practice placement educators, on the particular requirements of the programme.

**Reason:** The documentation (Information for practice educators document) indicates that the programme team provides a half day of training each year for new placement assessors / educators and mentors. In discussion with the programme team, it was confirmed that this would include an overview of the programme, placements, learning outcomes, the portfolio, roles of the placement staff and support structures. In addition, it will prepare the placement staff for undertaking assessments and supervising projects. It was unclear from the documentation if this would also act as annual refresher training for placement educators who were already involved with the programme. As practice placement educators are involved in assessing student performance it is imperative that all practice placement educators are orientated towards the programme and its requirements. The visitors were unsure from the evidence provided how the programme team covered the breadth of information in the identified half day of training, particularly given the criteria for assessments and the complexities of level six students' project supervision will need to be covered. The visitors therefore need further evidence to show how the programme team will ensure that all practice placement educators are appropriately trained in advance of receiving students. In addition, the visitors require clarification regarding what refresher training requirements there are for established placement educators. In this way the visitors can determine if this standard can be met.

**5.9 Practice placement educators must be appropriately registered, unless other arrangements are agreed.**

**Condition:** The education provider must articulate clearly in programme documentation how they check that placement educators are HCPC registered and, where this is not the case, the steps that will be taken to ensure that appropriate arrangements are agreed.

**Reason:** As for the condition against SET 5.6, the evidence provided for this standard is the pre-practice agreement with the placement provider. Through discussion with the programme team, it was indicated that the practice placement staff will be checked for HCPC registration. However, the pre-practice agreement and the Information for practice educators document do not clearly outline the requirements for staff acting as practice placement educators. The visitors were also unclear about this from evidence provided at the visit as there was no clear articulation of the system that would be used by the education provider to ensure that practice placement educators are appropriately registered. Therefore, the visitors require further evidence of the process that will be in place to ensure that this standard can be met.

**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 detail of the expected placement experience at each stage of the programme, and how this information is provided to fully prepare practice placement educators to supervise students.

**Reason:** The visitors reviewed the documentation provided to placement providers in preparation for placements. The visitors also heard from the programme team about the broad set of competencies that a student will be expected to have met after each placement block. As noted in the condition against SET 5.9, the visitors did not see sufficient evidence to demonstrate how the current proposed communications and training provided to placement educators will provide them with sufficient understanding of the placement learning outcomes and assessments. The visitors therefore require further evidence to demonstrate how the programme team will ensure that practice placement educators will have a full understanding of the requirements and assessment procedures for each placement block prior to taking students. In this way the visitors can determine if this standard can be met.

**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 detail of the how the information about assessment procedures on placement, including the implications of failure to progress at each stage, is provided to students to fully prepare them.

**Reason:** The visitors reviewed the documentation provided to students which is provided to prepare them for placements. The visitors also heard from the programme team about the broad set of competencies that a student will be expected to have met after each placement block. It was made clear during this meeting that if a student fails to achieve competencies during the placement weeks, this may have implications on their progression, and may result in them not having a full summer vacation as they undertake further assessments to demonstrate all competencies. The visitors also noted that, particularly for the level 5 placement, there is a very small window for students to re-sit their placement in cases where all competencies have not been met within the fifteen weeks, due to the proximity to the exam board. The visitors could not

see where in the documentation the requirements for successful completion of each placement are highlighted to students. They could also not identify where the detail about how the relative achievement, or failure, to meet the required competencies at each stage will affect students' progression. Further evidence is therefore required to demonstrate that students are made aware of the requirements for each placement and implications for them of any failure to meet the required competencies within the time allocated for placement.

## 6.2 All assessments must provide a rigorous and effective process by which compliance with external-reference frameworks can be measured.

**Condition:** The education provider must provide further evidence of how the external verification process for the assessment students' practical experiences will work in practice.

**Reason:** At the visit, the programme team confirmed to the visitors that the external verification process for the assessment of their practical experience will be managed by the education provider towards the end of level six. However, from the documentation provided, the visitors could not determine how and when the process around external verification process would be carried out. The visitors were also unclear about what this process for engaging external verifiers entails and how it is managed to ensure that any external verification dovetails with relevant examination boards at the education provider, to ensure that students can progress and graduate in good time. The programme team must therefore provide further evidence that the process for external verification is rigorous and effective, clearly stating the timing and details for external verification.

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

**Condition:** The education provider must revise the programme documentation to articulate clearly the requirements for student progression, the timings for assessments and procedures for a failing student throughout the programme.

**Reason:** From reading the education provider-wide academic regulations the visitors were clear that students must pass 120 credits at each year of an undergraduate degree in order to progress to the next year and graduate in year three. However, from the documentation provided and in discussion with the programme team, the visitors were made aware that there were 135 credits associated with the first year of this programme. The programme team clarified that students would be able to progress with 120 credits, if they miss 15 credits from elsewhere in the first year. However the visitors were unclear which credits these could be, which modules could be failed and how this would affect a student's ability to progress through the programme and meet all of the learning outcomes required. In discussion with the programme team, further details were given on the procedures and timings for re-assessing students who have not met all of the required competencies in placements. The visitors noted that, particularly for the level 5 placement, there is a very small window for students to 're-sit' their placement in cases where all competencies have not been met within the fifteen weeks, due to the proximity to the exam board. The visitors were unsure how students on the programme were informed about the requirements for achievement and progression in these cases and in particular what impact the failure to meet certain competencies may have on their ability to graduate. The visitors therefore require further evidence which

demonstrates that the criteria for progression and achievement throughout the programme is clearly articulated in the programme documentation. This should include the procedures that will be used to deal with failure, relevant step-off points for students, what chances are available to re-sit or complete further practice placement experience and how these feed into the timings of examination boards throughout the programme. In this way the visitors can determine if the programme can meet this standard.

**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 education provider must provide further information to demonstrate how the criteria for appointing external examiners for the programme ensures that at least one will be appropriately experienced, qualified and on the HCPC Register.

**Reason:** The programme specification (p14) states that an external examiner will be appointed who is a registered biomedical scientist. The visitors require further evidence of the policies for appointing external examiners in order to ensure that the requirements guarantee that the external examiner is appropriately experienced and qualified.

## Recommendations

**3.2 The programme must be effectively managed.**

**Recommendation:** The education provider are reminded to inform the HCPC if there are significant changes to student recruitment to the programme.

**Reason:** The visitors' recommendation for approval of the programme is based on an expected cohort of ten students, where they are satisfied that this standard can be met. However, the education provider should keep the HCPC informed through the major change process if the actual recruitment to the programme is significantly higher or lower than ten students in order for the programme's ability to continue to meet the SETs under the new conditions to be considered.

**6.2 All assessments must provide a rigorous and effective process by which compliance with external-reference frameworks can be measured.**

**Recommendation:** The education provider should consider adjustments to the external verification process for students' placement experiences, to more evenly distribute the verification throughout the programme.

**Reason:** During the visit, the programme team confirmed to visitors that the external verification process will be managed by the education provider at a point near the end of level six of the programme. In discussion, the visitors highlighted that this could uncover issues with the students' placement experiences too late in the programme for them to be addressed effectively. The visitors therefore recommend that the education provider consider dispersing the external verification process throughout the duration of the programme.

Christine Murphy
Peter Ruddy