Visitors' report

Name of education provider	University of Hertfordshire
Programme name	Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work (Step Up to Social Work)
Mode of delivery	Full time
Relevant part of the HCPC Register	Social worker in England
Date of visit	10 – 11 September 2013

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Executive summary

The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) approve educational programmes in the UK which health and care professionals must complete before they can apply to be registered with us. We are a statutory regulator and our main aim is to protect the public. We currently regulate 16 professions. All of these professions have at least one professional title which is protected by law. This means that anyone using the title 'social worker' in England must be registered with us. The HCPC keep a register of health and care professionals who meet our standards for their training, professional skills, behaviour and health.

The visitors' report which follows outlines the recommended outcome made by the visitors on the ongoing approval of the programme. This recommended outcome was accepted by the Education and Training Committee (Committee) on 3 December 2013. At the Committee meeting, the ongoing approval of the programme was re-confirmed. This means that the education provider has met the condition(s) outlined in this report and that the programme meets our standards of education and training (SETs) and ensures that those who complete it meet our standards of proficiency (SOPs) for their part of the Register. The programme is now granted open ended approval, subject to satisfactory monitoring.

Introduction

The HCPC visited the programme at the education provider as the social work, in England, profession came onto the register in August 2012 and a decision was made by the Education and Training Committee to visit all existing programmes from this profession. This visit assessed the programme against the standards of education and training (SETs) and considered whether those who complete the programme meet the standards of proficiency (SOPs) for their part of the Register.

This visit was part of a joint event. The education provider validated the programme. The visit also considered the MSc Social Work (Step up to Social Work). 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 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. A separate report produced by the education provider outline their decisions on the programmes' status.

Visit details

Name of HCPC visitors and profession	Michael Branicki (Social Worker) Christine Stogdon (Social Worker)
HCPC executive officer (in attendance)	Ruth Wood
Proposed student numbers	35
Proposed start date of programme approval	January 2014
Chair	Petros Khoudian (University of Hertfordshire)
Secretary	Liz Mellor (University of Hertfordshire)
Members of the joint panel	Jan Bowyer (Internal Panel Member) Laura Beard (Internal Panel Member) Keith Popple (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	☒	☐	☐
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	☒	☐	☐

The HCPC reviewed the practice placement portfolio and other placement documentation prior to the visit; the practice placement handbook was viewed at the visit.

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 graduates from the transitionally approved MSc Social Work (Step up to Social Work) programme.

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 48 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 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. 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 education provider (University of Hertfordshire) must provide relevant advertising materials for the programme.

Reason: Documentation and discussion indicated the application process for this programme is a two stage process. Applicants apply through the Department for Education (DfE) for shortlisting and then are subject to the programme application process managed by the West London Alliance (WLA). Once this has been completed those who have received an offer are then subject to the University of Hertfordshire's application and registration requirements. Because of this non-direct entry route, the University of Hertfordshire public website does not host any materials for this programme. Potential applicants can find information on their local authority and DfE websites about this programme. Discussion at the visit indicated the education provider felt it to be appropriate that programme materials be created and hosted by University of Hertfordshire too. In light of this action the visitors are required to review the programme materials to ensure they provide information that allows potential applicants to make an informed choice about whether to apply or take up a place on the programme. The visitors considered it important for the programme materials to include information about the application process (how to apply, application procedures, minimum requirements, requirements for DBS and Occupational Health, equality and diversity policies) and information about the arrangements between the WLA and University of Hertfordshire (delivering the programme, commissioning, delivery site, placement arrangements). The education provider must therefore provide relevant advertising materials for the programme.

3.2 The programme must be effectively managed.

Condition: The education provider must provide evidence to demonstrate the premises service agreement will be agreed before the next cohort commences.

Reason: Documentation submitted for this visit indicated the programme was delivered offsite with premises agreements in place. Discussion at the visit indicated the current agreement was under negotiation to ensure its relevancy and clarifications to what the agreement holds. The visitors considered this programme's next cohort is due to commence in January 2014 and the agreement will need to be in place by then to ensure the offsite delivery arrangements are secure and appropriate and consequently the programme is being effectively managed. The visitors therefore require further evidence to demonstrate the premises service agreement will be agreed before the next cohort commences.

3.2 The programme must be effectively managed.

Condition: The education provider must ensure students are fully informed about the management and implementation of regulations and procedures.

Reason: Documentation provided prior to the visit indicated students are employed under a trainee contract at the West London Alliance (WLA) for the duration of the programme. The documentation also indicated the University of Hertfordshire and the WLA have separate procedures and policies to be applied for fitness to practise procedures, complaints procedures and whistleblowing policies. Students stated they were not clear whose procedures to follow and they would discuss anything with the group of supporting individuals from both WLA and University of Hertfordshire before using the policies. The visitors are aware that students are registered with University of Hertfordshire and so are subject to those policies and procedures, they are also aware that whilst working with the WLA they will be subject to the policies and procedures there too. In discussion at the visit it was indicated it would be looked at on a case by case basis to see whose policies to defer to however as a general rule academic matters would go to University of Hertfordshire and employment matters would go to the WLA. The visitors considered it to be important that the policies and procedures available are clearly communicated to students along with information as to when each party's policies and procedures should be followed. The visitors therefore require the education provider to submit evidence to demonstrate how they ensure students are fully informed about the management and implementation of regulations and procedures.

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

Condition: the education provider must submit finalised programme documentation.

Reason: The visitors noted the documentation submitted prior to the visit were draft versions. It was highlighted this programme is part of a suite of social work programmes and at the visit it was indicated documents would be rewritten to ensure programme specific information is clear. The visitors noted some areas that need to be taken into account when amending documents so they effectively support student learning. The programme specification document (page 12) states "As specified by the HCPC, no compensation for failed modules is permitted". This is incorrect; the HCPC has no such specifications. The visitors note it will be important to accurately state the programme leads to eligibility to apply to the HCPC Register. The visitors additionally noted the importance of referring to the current situation of social work, in particular noting the General Social Care Council (GSCC) and the GSCC Code of Practice no longer exist and the National Occupational Standards (NOS) have been replaced by the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) from 2012. The visitors require the education provider to submit the finalised programme documentation so they can be assured it will effectively support students learning.

3.11 There must be adequate and accessible facilities to support the welfare and wellbeing of students in all settings.

Condition: The education provider must provide further evidence to demonstrate students are able to access the facilities in place to support their welfare and wellbeing particularly considering reasonable adjustments.

Reason: Documentation and the tour of resources demonstrated facilities are in place to support the welfare and wellbeing of students. The students highlighted that whilst they could use these facilities, it is unpractical for them to access these facilities in person as they are too far away from the University of Hertfordshire campus. The

visitors had some information about the provisions for disability services which help provide reasonable adjustments for those who need it. The visitors noted this service may be difficult to access for offsite students who are located some distance away and in the middle of their studies. The visitors heard during the visit there are online resources and other ways to gain the support or reasonable adjustments that did not require on-campus presence. The visitors considered this information to be pertinent for students on this programme and therefore require further information about these resources and options to be clearly articulated within the programme documentation for students. Therefore the education provider must submit further evidence to demonstrate students are able to access the facilities in place to support their welfare and wellbeing particularly considering reasonable adjustments.

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 ensure students are fully informed about consenting to participate within the programme and how to manage any potential emotional distress.

Reason: Documentation and discussion with students and the programme team indicated that consent was discussed verbally whenever necessary through the programme. The visitors noted the programme uses a range of teaching methods including participation in role-plays and disclosing and reflecting on personal experience when considering social work practice. The visitors considered these activities could potentially lead to emotional distress and subsequent disruption in learning. There was no information within the programme documentation regarding the expectation to participate within the programme, consenting to participate, or how situations where students declined from participation were managed. To ensure this standard is met the visitors therefore require the education provider to ensure students are fully informed about consenting to participate in the programme and how to manage any emotional distress that may be caused.

4.2 The programme must reflect the philosophy, core values, skills and knowledge base as articulated in any relevant curriculum guidance

Condition: The education provider must submit information of the service user strategy in place for this programme.

Reason: From the documentation provided prior to the visit the visitors could not determine how the programme incorporated service user involvement within the programme management or delivery. Discussion at the visit indicated service users were used within the programme at the instigation of the West London Alliance (WLA); however there was no clearly defined role for them. The visitors considered service user involvement to be a fundamental aspect of social work and heavily integrated into the philosophy and core values of the social work profession. The visitors could not determine how the programme could reflect the philosophy, core values, associated skills and knowledge base of social work without formal service user involvement. Further discussion indicated there is a faculty-wide strategy for service user involvement which would include this programme; however there was no information of how this programme is engaged with the strategy. The visitors therefore require further evidence about the service user strategy in place for this programme to ensure this standard is 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 to demonstrate they maintain a thorough and effective system for approving and monitoring all placements.

Reason: Documentation and discussion at the visit indicated there were different systems in place for the approval and monitoring of placements. The University of Hertfordshire uses the Quality Assurance in Practice Learning (QAPL) audit tool. The audit is undertaken by the staff from the University of Hertfordshire and outcomes are not shared with the placement co-ordinators at West London Alliance (WLA). The WLA has an approval and monitoring system whereby the suitability of each placement location is assessed by WLA placement co-ordinators and outcomes are not shared with staff at the University of Hertfordshire. It was highlighted by both parties that if there were serious concerns about a placement it would be discussed and a solution reached. At the visit further discussion indicated the education provider was looking to change the auditing system to the ARC Placement Tool. The visitors considered the two auditing systems currently in place to work well in their role however were concerned the two parties undertook their own placement approval and monitoring and had little interaction with each other. The visitors could not determine how the education provider (University of Hertfordshire) could maintain overall responsibility for all placements without interacting with the WLA internal auditing system. The visitors considered it to be beneficial for both systems to provide outcomes to each other so decisions can be made jointly and that both parties are aware of each other's decisions. The visitors had received no information about the change of system from QAPL to ARC so were unable to determine whether this system would be appropriately used. The visitors therefore could not determine that the education provider maintains a thorough and effective system for approving and monitoring all placements and require further evidence to demonstrate this standard is 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 ensure students and practice placement educators are fully informed about the assessment procedures and associated policies for practice placements.

Reason: Documentation and discussion at the visit indicated there was some ambiguity around the assessment procedures and policies particularly relating to the practice placement elements of the programme. Firstly, from the documentation and discussion with the students, it was unclear as to whether or not students would be able to progress onto a following placement without completing the previous placement. The visitors were aware of the short timeframe within which students need to complete this

programme and therefore considered it to be important that progression policies are clearly articulated.

Secondly, from the documentation and discussion at the visit, the procedures to follow when a placement is failed were unclear. The University of Hertfordshire assessment regulations indicate that placements can be re-taken up to a certain number of times. The professional nature of the programme and the programme timeframe however would not accommodate this. Discussion with the programme team indicated this would be looked at and programme specific regulations may be required. The visitors consider the re-sit policies to be important information for students and so should be clearly articulated.

Thirdly, from the documentation provided for the visit, it was unclear how the competencies to be demonstrated at placement would be appropriately assessed for development and achievement. The competency marking system is a range of capability of how the student meets each professional capability framework domain (No evidence of capability / Some evidence of capability / Sufficient evidence of capability / Good and varied evidence of capability). The visitors had not seen any assessment criteria and so were unable to determine how practice placement educators would be able to determine capabilities. The visitors additionally were unclear as to what level the competencies had to be marked at in order for the student to be able to pass the placement and then progress to the next placement. The visitors considered it to be important for students to understand the competency assessment processes in order for them to understand their practice placement assessment.

In light of these ambiguities, the visitors require the education provider to clearly articulate for students and practice placement educators the assessment procedures and associated policies for practice placements to ensure they are fully prepared for placement.

6.5 The measurement of student performance must be objective and ensure fitness to practise.

Condition: The education provider must provide further information about the assessment of module Risk, Reflection and Resilience (7HSK0048).

Reason: The visitors noted from documentation and discussion that one of the assessment methods for module 7HSK0048 is a courtroom presentation and reflective summary. The visitors considered this assessment method to be particularly pertinent assessment tool to enable students to be able to formally act in a courtroom setting, present to court and to understand how the court system works. The visitors are aware this is an essential part of a social worker’s role and links to the Standards of Proficiency (SOPs) for social workers and fitness to practise. The visitors have not seen any assessment criteria for the courtroom assessment and were therefore unable to determine whether this assessment method contributes to ensuring fitness to practise effectively. The visitors therefore require the education provider to submit further information about the courtroom assessment within module 7HSK0048.

Recommendations

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

Recommendation: The visitors suggest the education provider include further information about the Fitness to Practise policy within the student handbook.

Reason: The visitors noted there was a faculty wide Fitness to Practice policy in place at the education provider. They have also noted the condition under SET 3.2 related to policies in place that students on this programme are subject to. The visitors noted the student handbook refers to the faculty wide Fitness to Practise policy and indicates where this can be found. The visitors were therefore content this standard was met. The visitors felt there could be some further information about the policy and how it works in regards to the outcomes of any Fitness to Practise procedure and how the Fitness to Practise panels are formed and how they work. The visitors felt this information would be useful to students who are considering the Fitness to Practise policy.

4.3 Integration of theory and practice must be central to the curriculum.

Recommendation: The visitors suggest the programme team consider how they emphasise the generic approach to social work competencies.

Reason: The visitors were satisfied the programme ensures all Standards of Proficiency (SOPs) for Social Workers in England are linked to the integration of theory and practice within the programme and so considered this standard to be met. The visitors noted there is a three stage framework of "think child, think parent, think family" for the programme. However, the programme team need to be careful not to lose the holistic approach to the adult perspective and orientation in social work as is required from the generic SOPs. The visitors feel the current focus of the programme may detract from other service user needs that are not linked to the adult / parent / child focus. The visitors recommend the programme team consider how they emphasise the generic approach within the programmes conceptional framework to ensure students are able to fully integrate the programme theory to all social work practice.

Michael Branicki
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