

HCPC approval process report

Education provider	University of the West of England, Bristol
Name of programme(s)	PGDip Social Work, Full time accelerated
Approval visit date	22 May 2018
Case reference	CAS-12253-G5V2Y4

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Executive Summary

We are the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), a regulator set up to protect the public. We set standards for education and training, professional knowledge and skills, conduct, performance and ethics; keep a register of professionals who meet those standards; approve programmes which professionals must complete before they can register with us; and take action when professionals on our Register do not meet our standards.

The following is a report on the approval process undertaken by the HCPC to ensure that programme(s) detailed in this report meet our standards of education and training (referred to through this report as 'our standards'). The report details the process itself, the evidence considered, and recommendations made regarding programme approval.

Section 1: Our regulatory approach

Our standards

We approve programmes that meet our education standards, which ensure individuals that complete the programmes meet proficiency standards. The proficiency standards set out what a registrant should know, understand and be able to do when they complete their education and training. The education standards are outcome focused, enabling education providers to deliver programmes in different ways, as long as individuals who complete the programme meet the relevant proficiency standards.

Programmes are normally [approved on an open-ended basis](#), subject to satisfactory engagement with our monitoring processes. Programmes we have approved are listed [on our website](#).

How we make our decisions

We make independent evidence based decisions about programme approval. For all assessments, we ensure that we have profession specific input in our decision making. In order to do this, we appoint [partner visitors](#) to undertake assessment of evidence presented through our processes. The visitors make recommendations to the Education and Training Committee (ETC). Education providers have the right of reply to the recommendation of the visitors, inclusive of conditions and recommendations. If an education provider wishes to, they can supply 'observations' as part of the process.

The ETC make decisions about the approval and ongoing approval of programmes. In order to do this, they consider recommendations detailed in process reports, and any observations from education providers (if submitted). The Committee meets in public on a regular basis and their decisions are available to view [on our website](#).

HCPC panel

We always appoint at least one partner visitor from the profession (inclusive of modality and / or entitlement, where applicable) with which the assessment is concerned. We also ensure that visitors are supported in their assessment by a member of the HCPC executive team. Details of the HCPC panel for this assessment are as follows:

David Ward	Social worker
Ian Hughes	Lay
Niall Gooch	HCPC executive

Other groups involved in the approval visit

There were other groups in attendance at the approval visit as follows. Although we engage in collaborative scrutiny of programmes, we come to our decisions independently.

Jane Roscoe	Independent chair (supplied by the education provider)	University of the West of England
Lisa Connors	Secretary (supplied by the education provider)	University of the West of England

Section 2: Programme details

Programme name	PG Dip Social Work
Mode of study	FTA (Full time accelerated)
Profession	Social worker in England
First intake	01 January 2016
Maximum learner cohort	Bristol delivery – Up to 26 Plymouth delivery – Up to 20
Intakes per year	1
Assessment reference	APP01824

The education provider submitted a major change form describing their plan to run a version of the programme at a new site. We decided that an approval visit was the most appropriate way to assess the possible resulting changes in how the programme met the standards.

The programme notified us of a planned January 2018 start date for delivery at the new site, in August 2017. The HCPC normally requires a six month lead-in to approval visits, and does not normally allow new programmes to start before a visit has taken place. In this case, the education provider is running a version of their existing programme, and therefore we were able to visit following the changes being implemented, in line with normal HCPC requirements.

We undertook this assessment via the approval process, which involves consideration of documentary evidence and an onsite approval visit, to consider whether the programme continues to meet our standards. We decided to assess the programme via the approval process due to the outcome of a previous assessment.

Section 3: Requirements to commence assessment

In order for us to progress with approval and monitoring assessments, we require certain evidence and information from education providers. The following is a list of evidence that we asked for through this process, and whether that evidence was provided. Education providers are also given the opportunity to include any further supporting evidence as part of their submission. Without a sufficient level of evidence, we need to consider whether we can proceed with the assessment. In this case, we decided that we were able to undertake our assessment with the evidence provided.

Required documentation	Submitted
Programme specification	Yes
Module descriptor(s)	Yes
Handbook for learners	Yes
Handbook for practice based learning	Yes
Completed education standards mapping document	Yes
Completed proficiency standards mapping document	Yes
Curriculum vitae for relevant staff	Yes
External examiners' reports for the last two years, if applicable	Yes

We also expect to meet the following groups at approval visits:

Group	Met
Learners	Yes
Senior staff	Yes
Practice education providers	Yes
Service users and carers (and / or their representatives)	Yes
Programme team	Yes
Facilities and resources	Yes

Section 4: Outcome from first review

Recommendation of the visitors

In considering the evidence provided by the education provider as part of the initial submission and at the approval visit, the visitors' recommend that there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate that our standards are met at this time, but that the programme(s) should be approved subject to the conditions noted below being met.

Conditions

Conditions are requirements that must be met before programmes can be approved. We set conditions when there is insufficient evidence that standards are met. The visitors were satisfied that a number of the standards are met at this stage. However, the visitors were not satisfied that there is evidence that demonstrates that the following standards are met, for the reasons detailed below.

We expect education providers to review the issues identified in this report, decide on any changes that they wish to make to programmes, and then provide any further evidence to demonstrate how they meet the conditions. We set a deadline for responding to the conditions of 18 July 2018.

4.1 The learning outcomes must ensure that learners meet the standards of proficiency for the relevant part of the Register.

Condition: The education provider must demonstrate how the programme learning outcomes ensure that learners meet the current standards of proficiency for social workers (in England).

Reason: The visitors reviewed the evidence provided for this standard. This included a reference to the Practice Learning Handbook, in which the HCPC standards of proficiency (SOPs) for social workers in England were mapped against the learning outcomes from the programme. These learning outcomes are based on the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) issued by the British Association of Social Workers. The visitors noted that this mapping exercise had used the 2012 version of the HCPC SOPs, and not the most up-to-date version. They were therefore unable to determine whether these learning outcomes would ensure that learners meet the revised SOPs. They therefore require the education provider to demonstrate how the learning outcomes ensure that learners meet the current HCPC standards of proficiency for social workers (in England).

4.9 The programme must ensure that learners are able to learn with, and from, professionals and learners in other relevant professions.

Condition: The education provider must demonstrate how they will ensure that learners are able to learn with, and from, professionals and learners in other relevant professions.

Reason: The visitors reviewed the evidence provided for this standard. The education provider mentioned in their SETs mapping that learners on the programme have contributions from practising social workers who are specialists in particular fields, and from a police specialist. They also stated that the skills days available to learners involve practising social workers. However, the visitors could not see how these activities would give learners an opportunity to learn with professionals and learners in other professions. The police specialist appeared to be giving a one-off lecture, so although learners may learn from a police staff member, they would not learn with this profession. In discussions, the programme team suggested that learners would have opportunities for learning with and from learners and professionals in other relevant professions while on practice-based learning. The visitors considered that while this could be an appropriate way to meet the standard, it was not clear how learners' participation in inter-professional education during practice-based learning would be quantified, recorded, or would happen in all cases. In particular, they could not see what opportunities might be available anywhere on the programme for learners to learn with and from learners from other professions. Therefore, they were unable to determine whether the programme could ensure that learners are able to learn with and from professionals and learners in other relevant professions.

Recommendations

We include recommendations when standards are met at or just above threshold level, and where there is a risk to that standard being met in the future. Recommendations do not need to be met before programmes can be approved, but they should be considered by education providers when developing their programmes.

5.3 The education provider must maintain a thorough and effective system for approving and ensuring the quality of practice-based learning.

Recommendation: The education provider should consider reviewing how the system for approving and ensuring the quality of practice-based learning is integrated into the overall management structure of the programme.

Reason: The visitors were satisfied that the standard was met at threshold, as there was a system in place for approving practice-based learning and ensuring quality on an ongoing basis. They were able to discuss how this system worked with practice educators, the programme team and representatives of the consortium. A database, holding records of placement audits, was managed by the consortium as a result of an agreement with the education provider, and there is a staff member at the education provider who holds the responsibility for liaison between the consortium and the education provider on matters related to audit. However, the visitors could not see how this role was formally integrated into the management structure of the programme. They considered that there was a risk that if the staff member was no longer available for any reason, the system for approving and ensuring the quality of practice-based learning would no longer be thorough and effective. They therefore recommend that the

education provider consider developing this role so that it has a clearer and more permanent status within the programme management.

5.7 Practice educators must undertake regular training which is appropriate to their role, learners' needs and the delivery of the learning outcomes of the programme.

Recommendation: The education provider should considering reviewing how they ensure that placement partners fulfil their contractual responsibilities around practice educator training.

Reason: The visitors were satisfied that the standard was met at threshold, as the education provider had a contract in place with all partners who provided practice-based learning requiring that practice educators were appropriately trained. From discussions with the programme team, practice educators, learners, and the consortium there did not appear to be any issues with the appropriateness or regularity of training received by practice educators. The visitors did note, however, that the education provider did not seem to have a clear process in place for ensuring that their partners were fulfilling their contractual responsibilities around training. The education provider relied on the contracts, on the professionalism of placement partners, and on long-standing personal relationships with placement partners. They therefore recommend that the education provider keep under review their methods for ensuring that practice educators are receiving appropriate training in line with the contracts.

Section 5: Outcome from second review

Second response to conditions required

The education provider responded to the conditions set out in section 4. Following their consideration of this response, the visitors were not satisfied that the following condition was met, for the reasons detailed below. Therefore, in order for the visitors to be satisfied that the following conditions are met, they require further evidence.

4.1 The learning outcomes must ensure that learners meet the standards of proficiency for the relevant part of the Register.

Condition: The education provider must demonstrate how the programme learning outcomes ensure that learners meet the current standards of proficiency for social workers (in England).

Reason condition not met at this time: In response to the condition, the education provider directed the visitors to the Practice Learning Handbook. In the "Response to HCPC conditions and recommendations" document it states the "revised version of the Practice Learning Handbook, [maps to] the new SOPS against the programme learning outcomes". However, in the Practice Learning Handbook, the visitors noted that the standards of proficiency (SOPs) for social workers in England were mapped to the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and not the learning outcomes of the programme. The visitors were therefore unable to determine how the learning outcomes of the programme would ensure that learners meet the SOPs.

Suggested documentation: Evidence to demonstrate how the learning outcomes ensure that learners meet the HCPC standards of proficiency for social workers (in England).

Section 6: Visitors' recommendation

Considering the education provider's response to the conditions set out in section 4, and the request for further evidence set out in section 5, the visitors are satisfied that the conditions are met and recommend that the programme(s) are approved.

This report, including the recommendation of the visitors, will be considered at the 23 August 2018 meeting of the ETC. Following this meeting, this report should be read alongside the ETC's decision notice, which are available [on our website](#).