

Visitors' report

Name of education provider	University of Hertfordshire
Programme name	BSc (Hons) Dietetics
Mode of delivery	Full time
Relevant part of HPC Register	Dietitian
Date of visit	7 – 8 December 2011

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Executive summary

The Health Professions Council (HPC) approve educational programmes in the UK which health professionals must complete before they can apply to be registered with us. The HPC is a health regulator and our main aim is to protect the public. The HPC currently regulates 15 professions. All of these professions have at least one professional title which is protected by law. This means that anyone using the title 'Dietitian' or 'Dietician' must be registered with us. The HPC keep a register of health 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 22 February 2012. At the Committee meeting on 22 February 2012 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 HPC visited the programme at the education provider to consider major changes proposed to the programme. The major change affected the following standards - curriculum, practice placements and assessment. The programme was already approved by the HPC and this visit assessed whether the programme continued to meet the standards of education and training (SETs) and continued to ensure that those who complete the programme meet the standards of proficiency (SOPs) for their part of the Register.

This visit was part of a joint event. The education provider reviewed the programme and the professional body considered their accreditation of the programme. The visit also considered the following programmes – BSc (Hons) Physiotherapy, BSc (Hons) Paramedic Science and Foundation Degree in Paramedic Science.

The education provider, the professional body and the HPC 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 HPC's recommendations on this programme only. Separate reports exist for the other programmes. As an independent regulatory body, the HPC's recommended outcome is independent and impartial and based solely on the HPC's standards. Separate reports, produced by the education provider and the professional body, outline their decisions on the programmes' status.

Visit details

Name of HPC visitors and profession	Maureen Henderson (Dietitian) Gordon Burrow (Chiropodist)
HPC executive officer(s) (in attendance)	Ruth Wood
Proposed student numbers	30 per cohort once a year
First approved intake	September 2006
Effective date that programme approval reconfirmed from	September 2012
Chair	David Gayfer (University of Hertfordshire)
Secretary	Liz Mellor (University of Hertfordshire)
Members of the joint panel	Jane Wilson (British Dietetic Association)

Sources of evidence

Prior to the visit the HPC 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Additional information for HPC visit	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

During the visit the HPC 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"/>
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 ongoing 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 ongoing approval of the programme is reconfirmed.

The visitors agreed that 52 of the SETs have been met and that conditions should be set on the remaining 5 SETs.

Conditions are requirements that the education provider must meet before the programme can be recommended for ongoing 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 recommendation 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 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

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

Condition: The programme team must implement formal protocols to obtain informed consent when students participate as service users and for managing situations when students decline from participating as service users, in practical and clinical teaching.

Reason: The visitors noted through discussion with the students and the programme team that there were no formal protocols for obtaining informed consent from students before they participated as a service user in practical and clinical teaching. During discussion with the students it was clear informed consent was not obtained although the students felt they could opt-out from participating with no impact on their learning. The visitors noted the programme uses a range of teaching methods including role plays, practising techniques with equipment for the profession and sharing personal information. The visitors were concerned that without consent protocols in place there would be nothing to mitigate any risk involved in trainees participating as service users. The visitors could not determine how students were informed about participating within the programme, how records were maintained to indicate consent had been obtained or how situations where students declined from participation were managed with alternative learning arrangements so there would be no impact on their learning. The visitors have noted the other programmes being reviewed at this visit used consent procedures which could be adapted for this programme. The visitors therefore require the programme team implement formal protocols for obtaining informed consent from students (such as a consent form to be signed prior to commencing the programme or annually) and for managing situations where students decline from participating in practical and clinical teaching.

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 programme team must revise programme documentation to clearly identify the minimum attendance requirements for the practice placement setting and the academic setting.

Reason: The programme documentation submitted prior to the visit did not clearly specify the minimum attendance requirements for the academic setting and the practice placement setting. Discussions with the trainees indicated they knew the procedures to follow when absences were necessary however did not know the minimum requirements for attendance at the practice placement setting or in the academic setting. Discussions with the programme team indicated there was an expected attendance of 100% for all components of the programme with allowances made for reasonable absences. From the evidence received the visitors were not satisfied the minimum requirements were being fully communicated to the trainees. The visitors also noted that if trainees were not aware of the threshold requirement, it would be difficult for the education provider

to monitor and step in to take action to ensure absence does not affect a trainee's learning and development. The visitors were concerned that this could affect the meeting of the learning outcomes and therefore the standards of proficiency.

The visitors therefore require the programme documentation to be revised to communicate to trainees the minimum attendance requirements for the academic setting and the practice placement setting.

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

Condition: The programme team must ensure the programme documentation is consistent in clearly articulating for students the professional portfolio needs to be passed in order for them to be able to progress from one year to the next in the programme.

Reason: In the documentation submitted before the visit, the visitors noted a statement in the programme specification document that indicated students were expected to develop a professional portfolio through the programme, it stated "Failure to do somay affect progression" (Programme specification, Section 2 – Programme specific assessment regulations). The visitors additionally noted the Indicative Practice Placement pack had a statement that said "The production of a portfolio of your CPD is a requirement for progression across the programme. Failure to do so will be brought to the attention of the programme board of examiners" (p40). The programme team confirmed the professional portfolio was a requirement that needed to be passed in order for students to progress from one year to the next. The visitors were concerned the programme documentation was inconsistent in reference to the portfolio and that by stating it was a requirement for progression in one document but stating it "may affect progression" in another document, there was the potential for students to become confused as to their progression requirements. The visitors considered that if this was not made clear successful academic appeals could be lodged by students.

The visitors therefore require the programme team to ensure the programme documentation is consistent in clearly articulating for students that the professional portfolio needs to be passed in order for them to be able to progress from one year to the next in the programme.

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: In the documentation submitted before the visit, the visitors noted the Indicative Practice Placement pack had some information which could be confusing for students. In the placement assessment forms for placements 4, 5 and 6 there were statements that said “Part 2 carries no marks but the student’s performance must normally be satisfactory in order to pass the placement” (Indicative Placement Pack, p72, p109 and p189). In discussion with the programme team it was confirmed that both parts of the placements needed to be passed at the end of each year in order for students to progress from one year to the next. The visitors understood there may be exceptions to this which the programme team look at on a case by case basis however they were concerned the programme documentation implied that, although normally this was the case, this was not always so. The visitors considered that if the requirements for progression were not made clear, successful academic appeals could be lodged by students.

The visitors therefore require the programme team to ensure the programme placement documentation clearly articulates all the requirements for student progression within the programme, whether they are marked or otherwise and where and when compensation is allowed.

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

Condition: The programme team must amend the programme documentation to clearly articulate that none of the interim awards available provide eligibility to apply for HPC registration.

Reason: In the documentation submitted prior to the visit the visitors noted the Programme Specification detailed 5 interim awards available from the programme. There was a statement after the last interim award listed that said “This award does not entitle the recipient to register with the HPC” (Programme specification – Section 1, D Programme Structures, Features, levels, Modules, and Credits). The visitors were concerned this information was confusing for students on the programme because none of the interim awards would provide eligibility to register with the HPC.

The visitors therefore require the programme team to amend the programme documentation to clearly articulate that none of the interim awards will give eligibility to apply for registration with the HPC.

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 programme team must include a clear statement in the programme documentation that at least one external examiner for the programme will be from the relevant part of the register or that other arrangements will be agreed.

Reason: In the documentation submitted by the education provider there was insufficient detail concerning the registration status of an external examiner in the external examiner recruitment policy specific to the programme. The visitors were satisfied with the current external examiner arrangements for the programme but need to see evidence that HPC requirements regarding the external examiner on the programme have been included in the documentation to demonstrate this standard continues to be met.

Recommendations

2.6 The admissions procedures must apply selection and entry criteria, including accreditation of prior (experiential) learning and other inclusion mechanisms.

Recommendation: The visitors suggest the programme team look at how they communicate their accreditation for prior credited learning (APCL) policies.

Reason: Documentation submitted prior to the visit included information about the APCL policies in place. In discussion with the programme team it was indicated students could use the APCL policies to transfer between the programmes sharing the modules in the first year of the programme. Students could transfer onto and from the BSc (Hons) Dietetics programme. In discussion with the students they were not aware of this option being available. In light of the students comments the visitors suggest the programme team look at how they communicate their accreditation for prior credited learning (APCL) policies.

Maureen Henderson
Gordon Burrow