
How we work with professional bodies when approving education and training programmes

Executive Summary

This paper provides an overview of how our approach to education and training programme approval works in conjunction with the role of professional bodies, with particular focus on our standards and the approval process.

Whilst it is common, it is not always the case that professional bodies perform an accreditation role, alongside HCPC’s own approval of programmes. For some professions the relevant professional bodies do not routinely provide an accreditation function, and for those professional bodies that do, education providers may simply choose not to pursue it. This can sometimes mean professional bodies are concerned about the quality of the programmes being proposed for approval with us.

In this context, the paper is intended to aid the Council’s understanding of our approach in this area, and how it supports our continued effective engagement with professional bodies as one of our key stakeholder groups, whilst maintaining our own effectiveness and independence in the delivery of a core statutory function.

Previous consideration	None
Decision	The Council is invited to discuss the paper.
Next steps	The Education and Training Committee will be invited to approve a position statement which explains our approach to working with professional bodies in education and training. This will be tabled at the next scheduled meeting in March 2020.
Strategic priority	Strategic priority two – Ensure our communication and engagement activities are proactive, effective and informed by the views of our stakeholders.
Risk	Strategic risk one – failure to deliver effective regulatory functions The risk appetite for this area of regulation is minimal. We should be committed to working collaboratively with stakeholders, whilst being clear about the importance maintaining independence in exercising our statutory functions, which must operate in accordance with legislation.

Financial/resource
implications

None

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How we work with professional bodies when approving education and training programmes

- 1.1 This paper sets out how we work in conjunction with professional bodies when assessing programmes through our education approval process.

Introduction

- 2.1 The Health and Care Professions Order 2001 requires the Education and Training Committee to approve programmes which meet the required education standards deemed necessary to ensure individuals meet the standards of proficiency at the conclusion of an approved programme. It is on this basis that the successful completion of an approved programme provides individuals with eligibility to apply for registration with us.
- 2.2 The Education and Training Committee appoints Visitors (registrants with expertise of the profession and education and training) to undertake an assessment of a programme on their behalf, and report back their findings and recommendations. The Education and Training Committee make any final decisions regarding the approval of a programme.
- 2.3 The legislation requires that any decision made by the Committee to approve, not approve or withdraw approval from a programme can only be made with reference to the standards the HCPC have set, that being those necessary to ensure individuals are safe, effective and fit to practice.
- 2.4 As professional body accreditation is voluntary, education providers may choose not to pursue this, in conjunction with HCPC approval. Regardless of the choice education providers take in this regard, our approval approach (as outlined in this paper) means we are able to carry out our regulatory responsibilities effectively and independently to fulfil our role in upholding effective public protection. We also structure our standards and approval process to support and facilitate the role of professional bodies, where the Committee have deemed it appropriate to do so.
- 2.5 From time to time, professional bodies do raise concerns to us about the approval of particular programmes. This can be resulting from their lack of direct involvement as an accrediting body, or on the basis of the outcomes of their own accreditation related activities.
- 2.6 We can consider information provided by a professional body in our decision making processes (in the same way we would reasonably consider credible information received from any third party source). Where this is the case, we must be careful to ensure an education provider is clear about the information being relied upon to inform any HCPC findings. We must also ensure this information is given to the education provider, and that they are afforded an

opportunity to provide a response to the Visitors, or where necessary, directly to the Committee.

The role of the regulator and professional bodies in education and training

- 3.1 Professional bodies have an important role in promoting and representing their professions. They shape their profession's knowledge and skills. In particular, professional bodies may develop the learning and curriculum frameworks for their profession.
- 3.2 This compliments our own role to provide public protection through effective statutory regulation of health and care professions. However, it is important to note that professional bodies are uniquely focused on representing their professions' and members' interests. In the area of education, this extends to developing and promoting the capabilities of their workforce to meet current and future needs of health and care services. This often means professional bodies set requirements and expectations which sit above the thresholds set by our own standards.

How we work alongside professional bodies in education and training

Our standards

- 3.3 Our standards of education and training (SETs) are designed to reflect the role professional bodies have within the sector, by specifically tying in with each profession's curriculum guidance or frameworks. Specifically, our standards require education providers to ensure programmes '*...reflect the philosophy, core values, skills and knowledge base as articulated in any relevant curriculum guidance.*' (SET 4.3).
- 3.4 If programmes propose to not adhere to curriculum guidance, we expect them to show how learners can still practise safely and effectively when they have finished the programme. This is in keeping with our flexible approach to standards, which focuses on outputs, so that they can be met in a variety of ways. This approach allows for and purposefully supports continued innovation in the provision of education and training within the sector, whilst enabling us to be assured that our own standards continue to be met.
- 3.5 Our approach to standards means we do not specifically produce curriculum guidance or frameworks for the fifteen professions and post-registration areas of practice that we regulate. Instead, we believe that this is best owned and developed by the profession itself (alongside other sector related bodies working to support and develop good practice and academic quality, e.g. Quality Assurance Agency, Health Education England, NHS Education for Scotland).
- 3.6 This separation in functions between us, professional bodies and the wider sector means that most curriculum guidance or frameworks can and do go beyond the threshold standards we set, and include new areas of practice, as

well as examples and expectations of best practice. In practical terms this means being more explicit around required elements of programme delivery, including for example, staff learner ratios, practice based learning hours, admissions requirements and emerging areas of practice.

Our approval process

- 3.7 Our role in quality assuring education and training programmes is focused on protecting the public, while other parties' roles (including professional bodies) are focused more on developing or promoting the profession or academic credentials of the education provider.
- 3.8 Our approval process recognises the shared and distinct remits of all interested parties, and we work collaboratively with education providers to enable them to facilitate this as effectively and effortlessly as possible. In particular we:
- conduct joint site visits with professional bodies, validating bodies and other regulators;
 - enable providers to map jointly to HCPC and professional body requirements (particularly when we take on new professions);
 - adapt our visit agendas to enable education providers to structure approval events to meet all parties interests as effectively as possible;
 - hold joint meetings with other interested parties at approval events to minimise the impact on education provider representatives and their programme delivery partners; and,
 - are flexible with our documentary submission requirements to avoid education providers having to create bespoke materials to solely satisfy our own requirements.
- 3.9 We are clear with education providers that we welcome joint visits (including enquiring of this in our approval visit request form). However, the decision around which parties are invited to attend alongside the HCPC visitor panel rests with the education provider. This also extends to any decisions education providers make around pursuing accreditation with a professional body.
- 3.10 It is important to note that, where we do participate in joint visits, we work in such a way which ensures the Visitors reach their own independent findings, which are reported back to the Committee for further consideration. This can lead to circumstances where the HCPC approves programmes which have not been accredited by the professional body. In these circumstances, the Visitors must satisfy themselves that the reasons underpinning non-

accreditation are either not related to our own standards, or sit above the threshold we require to uphold public protection.