

Education and Training Committee, 23 April 2020

COVID-19 impact on implementing SET 1 for paramedics

Executive summary and recommendations

### **Introduction**

As a result of the impact of COVID-19, further consideration is needed regarding the implementation of the revised threshold for paramedics moving to degree in September 2021.

In March 2018, the Committee agreed that the SET 1 threshold level of award for paramedics should be raised to degree (level 6/9/10). The Committee also agreed that this should be implemented in such a way which meant new cohorts of students were entering degree level programmes only from September 2021 onwards. The Executive has worked since this time with the sector to ensure plans are in place to close programmes at Level 5 and below, and to approve new degree level programmes where requests were received. We are on track to introduce the new threshold in keeping with the Committee's original decision.

### **Workforce issues due to COVID-19**

The pandemic has impacted the ability for student paramedics to continue on currently approved Level 5 and 6 programmes. This is in the main due to being brought back into the service to support the COVID-19 response (particularly at Level 5), and being unable to continue training due to the unavailability of practice based learning and academic delivery.

We want to anticipate the knock-on effect of this and the potential workforce shortages throughout the UK. At the time of writing this paper, the Scottish Government has already raised this as a real prospect for their paramedic workforce and are keen to understand our position on the matter. We think similar enquiries may be made of us from the other home countries in due course.

### **Proposed approach**

From our perspective, it will be important to understand the needs of each health service in managing this issue going forward. It is likely that the requirements across the UK will not be uniform, and we should recognise this in any flexibility we may

wish to offer. However, the Committee should also be careful not to unnecessarily unpick the positive work done by the health and education sectors since March 2018 to introduce degree level entry training for the paramedic profession. This has led to the actual and scheduled closure of many programmes delivered below Level 6. As such, it should not simply be the case of extending approval for all programmes for a further period of 1-2 years where this may not be required.

With this in mind, we suggest the Committee direct the Executive to work directly with each health service to understand what, if any adjustment in lead in time is needed to ensure the paramedic workforce can be maintained during and following COVID-19. In doing so the Committee would effectively be directing the Executive to undertake the following activities:

1. We will publish the statement included as Appendix 1 confirming HCPC's position regarding the introduction of the revised SET 1 level for paramedics, considering COVID-19.
2. Discussions will be held regarding any workforce issues within each national health or specific ambulance services where this is requested.

We will conduct specific discussions with the following in mind:

1. Where a longer lead in time is requested, stakeholders will be asked to provide:
  - a. the basis for their workforce projections
  - b. a preferred adjusted lead in time, in terms of a last cohort entry date
  - c. the education providers they will be working with and funding to deliver paramedic education below Level 6 for a further extended period.
2. Where needed, we will adjust last cohort dates for identified programmes based on health service requirements.
3. For clarity, we will not make any provisions for new education providers to offer training at Level 5, nor will we engage with education providers directly regarding their intentions to seek commissioning around additional cohorts.

## **Decision**

- The Committee is asked to discuss the paper and agree an approach for the Executive to implement.
- The Committee is asked to discuss and agree the position statement included in Appendix 1.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Position statement: 'Implementing revised SET 1 threshold for paramedics considering COVID-19'
- Appendix 2 – ETC paper, '[Threshold level of qualification for paramedics](#)'

## **Resource implications**

- Stakeholder engagement where required with paramedic health service stakeholders.

## **Financial implications**

- None

## **Date of paper**

7 April 2020

## Appendix 1

April 2020

# Position statement on implementing the revised SET 1 threshold for paramedics in light of COVID-19

- 1.1 This position statement sets out how we work with the health service during and following the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to implementing degree level training for paramedics.

## Introduction

- 2.1 We raised the threshold level for paramedic education to degree (levels 6/9/10 on the relevant curriculum frameworks) in March 2018<sup>1</sup>. Careful planning and collaboration amongst stakeholders has been carried out since this time to implement our decision.
- 2.2 It has been important through this work to ensure the move to degree does not cause any shortages in paramedic workforce numbers in each home nation. To assist, we have worked closely with education providers around their plans to deliver education during the implementation period, with Level 5 provision closing to new student cohorts from September 2021 onwards.
- 2.3 COVID-19 has unfortunately impacted the progression of paramedic students, as it has across all other professions. This is due mainly to paramedic students being brought into the health service to support the COVID-19 response (particularly for ambulance technicians training at Level 5). Students have also been unable more generally to continue their training due to the unavailability of practice based learning and academic support.
- 2.4 We anticipate these impacts to planned student progression may lead to potential workforce shortages for the paramedic profession. The implementation of the revised SET 1 threshold may further compound this situation.
- 2.5 We are keen to work with health service colleagues in each nation to understand the impact of COVID-19 specifically on paramedic education. We are open to discuss specific circumstances in more detail, and we appreciate the impacts on workforce planning may be different for each nation, requiring different solutions.
- 2.6 We can extend approval for particular approved programmes delivered at Level 5 which are currently scheduled to close in September 2021, where there is a clear need to do so.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/globalassets/meetings-attachments3/education-and-training-committee/2018/march/enc-02---threshold-level-of-qualification-for-paramedics/>

- 2.7 We do not believe the current situation necessitates the approval of any new paramedic programmes delivered at Level 5 at this time.
- 2.8 If you wish to discuss this matter further, please contact our Education Department by email: [education@hcpc-uk.org](mailto:education@hcpc-uk.org)