
Approval process report

University of Birmingham, physiotherapy, 2022-23

Executive Summary

This is a report of the process to approve the physiotherapy programmes at the University of Birmingham. This report captures the process we have undertaken to assess the institution and programme(s) against our standards, to ensure those who complete the proposed programme(s) are fit to practice.

We have

- Reviewed the institution against our institution level standards and found our standards are met in this area
- Reviewed the programme(s) against our programme level standards and found our standards are met in this area
- Recommended all standards are met, and that the programme(s) should be approved

Previous consideration	This approval process was referred from our focussed review process.
Decision	The Education and Training Committee (Panel) is asked to decide: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• whether the programmes are approved
Next steps	Outline next steps / future case work with the provider: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The provider's next performance review will be in the 2026-27 academic year• The education provider is seeking approval for an independent prescribing programme

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Section 1: About this assessment

About us

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.

This is a report on the approval process undertaken by the HCPC to ensure that the programme(s) detailed in this report meet our education standards. The report details the process itself, evidence considered, outcomes and recommendations made regarding the programme(s) approval / ongoing approval.

Our standards

We approve education providers and programmes that meet our education standards. Individuals who complete approved programmes will meet proficiency standards, which 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.

Our regulatory approach

We are flexible, intelligent and data-led in our quality assurance of programme clusters and programmes. Through our processes, we:

- enable bespoke, proportionate and effective regulatory engagement with education providers;
- use data and intelligence to enable effective risk-based decision making; and
- engage at the organisation, profession and programme levels to enhance our ability to assess the impact of risks and issues on HCPC standards.

Providers and programmes are [approved on an open-ended basis](#), subject to ongoing monitoring. Programmes we have approved are listed [on our website](#).

The approval process

Institutions and programmes must be approved by us before they can run. The approval process is formed of two stages:

- Stage 1 – we take assurance that institution level standards are met by the institution delivering the proposed programme(s)

- Stage 2 – we assess to be assured that programme level standards are met by each proposed programme

Through the approval process, we take assurance in a bespoke and flexible way, meaning that we will assess whether providers and programmes meet standards based on what we see, rather than by a one size fits all approach. Our standards are split along institution and programme level lines, and we take assurance at the provider level wherever possible.

This report focuses on the assessment of the self-reflective portfolio and evidence.

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 design quality assurance assessments, and assess evidence and information relevant to the assessment. Visitors make recommendations to the Education and Training Committee (ETC). Education providers have the right of reply to the recommendation. If an education provider wishes to, they can supply 'observations' as part of the process.

The ETC make the 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 takes decisions through different levels depending on the routines and impact of the decision, and where appropriate meets in public. Their decisions are available to view [on our website](#).

The assessment panel for this review

We appointed the following panel members to support this review:

Fleur Kitsell	Lead visitor, physiotherapy
Elsbeth McCartney	Support visitor, speech and language therapy
John Archibald	Education Quality Officer
Tracey Samuel-Smith	Education Manager

Section 2: Institution-level assessment

The education provider context

The education provider currently delivers 10 HCPC-approved programmes across two professions, including a post registration prescribing programme. It is a higher education institution and has been running HCPC-approved programmes since 1992.

In March 2022, the education provider informed us they had undertaken a re-accreditation event with the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP), the professional body. The education provider stated their new MSc Physiotherapy provision had been accredited. The programme is four years in length and started in September 2022.

The education provider intended to replace their currently approved BSc (Hons) Physiotherapy provision with new MSc Physiotherapy programmes. This required us to consider any possible impact to how the proposed programmes met, and was not limited to, the following standards of education and training (SETs):

- SET 2: The admissions processes, including selection and entry criteria; procedures for assessing applicants; and the information provided, to ensure applicants were suitable to take part in the programmes.
- SET 3: The education provider had yet to confirm the number of learners across the programmes. We needed to make sure the necessary resources were available to learners and educators to support the learning and teaching activities and to deliver the programmes effectively. Also, to ensure effective systems and processes were in place to review, monitor and improve the delivery of the programmes.
- SET 4: There are three potential awards within the MSc Physiotherapy provision. We needed to be assured all learners would be able to meet the standards of proficiency (SOPs) for physiotherapists and understand the expectations and responsibilities of being a regulated professional upon successful completion of the programme.
- SET 5: Ensure all learners have access to the practice-based learning to meet their learning needs.
- SET 6: Demonstrate through assessments, learners meet the SOPs; the requirements of the programmes and learning outcomes; and the expectations of being a regulated professional. Ensure assessments are fair and effective at allowing learners to demonstrate their progression and achievement.

The information above was considered originally through a Focused Review which recommended the MSc provision was assessed via the Approval process. This recommendation was made as we needed to ensure new provision met our standards. The proposed programmes are heavily based upon BSc (Hons) programmes we already approve at the education provider. As such, the institution level standards (Stage 1) were demonstrated in the same way as the existing approved provision. We therefore did not need to undertake a Stage 1 assessment.

We agreed to undertake a bespoke assessment of the programme level standards. This meant we did not require the education provider to demonstrate those programme level standards which they continued to meet in the same way as the existing approved programmes. This removed eleven programme level standards from the visitor assessment. This report therefore only reports on those programme level standards remaining.

Practice areas delivered by the education provider

The provider is approved to deliver training in the following professional areas. A detailed list of approved programme awards can be found in [Appendix 1](#) of this report.

	Practice area	Delivery level		Approved since
Pre-registration	Physiotherapist	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate	1997
	Practitioner psychologist	<input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate	1992
Post-registration	Independent Prescribing / Supplementary prescribing			2020

Institution performance data

Data is embedded into how we understand performance and risk. We capture data points in relation to provider performance, from a range of sources. We compare provider data points to benchmarks, and use this information to inform our risk based decisions about the approval and ongoing approval of institutions and programmes.

This data is for existing provision at the institution, and does not include the proposed programme(s).

Data Point	Benchmark	Value	Date	Commentary
Total intended learner numbers compared to total enrolment numbers	659	659	2022	The benchmark figure is data we have captured from previous interactions with the education provider, such as through initial programme approval, and / or through previous performance review assessments. Resources available for the benchmark number of learners was assessed and accepted through these processes. The value figure is the benchmark figure, plus the number of learners the provider is proposing through the new provision.

				<p>The number of learners is the same. The proposed programmes are replacing the current approved BSc (Hons) physiotherapy provision and has the same number of learners.</p>
Learners – Aggregation of percentage not continuing	3%	2%	2020-21	<p>This data was sourced from data delivery. This means the data is a bespoke Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data return, filtered bases on HCPC-related subjects.</p> <p>The data point is below the benchmark, which suggests the provider is performing above sector norms.</p> <p>When compared to the previous year’s data point, the education provider’s performance has improved by 1%.</p> <p>We did not explore this data point through this assessment because the education provider is performing above sector norms.</p>
Graduates – Aggregation of percentage in employment / further study	94%	93%	2019-20	<p>This data was sourced from a data delivery. This means the data is a bespoke HESA data return, filtered bases on HCPC-related subjects.</p> <p>The data point is below the benchmark, which suggests the provider is performing below sector norms.</p> <p>When compared to the previous year’s data point, the education provider’s performance has dropped by 2%.</p> <p>We did not explore this data point through this assessment because there was no impact on the SETs considered through this process.</p>
Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) award	N/A	Gold	2017	<p>The definition of a Gold TEF award is “Provision is consistently outstanding and of the highest quality found in the UK Higher Education sector”.</p> <p>We did not explore this data point through this assessment because the</p>

				education provider is performing at the highest level.
National Student Survey (NSS) overall satisfaction score (Q27)	77.0%	74.7%	2022	<p>This data was sourced at the summary. This means the data is the provider-level public data.</p> <p>The data point is below the benchmark, which suggests the provider is performing below sector norms.</p> <p>When compared to the previous year's data point, the education provider's performance has dropped by 0.4%.</p> <p>We did not explore this data point through this assessment because this had no impact on the SETs considered through this process.</p>
HCPC performance review cycle length	N/A	2026/27	2018/21	<p>The education provider demonstrated budgets for each college are appropriate for delivering all targets. They are committed to quality assurance. The education provider responded positively to the challenges of the pandemic. They received positive feedback from formal review activities and demonstrated responsiveness to recommendations. The education provider's self-reflection identified areas that needed particular attention, and all programmes had clear plans to support review activities. Across the institution, they have implemented strategies to facilitate and respond to feedback from different stakeholders.</p> <p>There were no referrals and issues to highlight. Education and Training Committee considered the assessment panel's recommendations and the findings which support these. The committee made the decision the education provider's next engagement with the performance review process should be in the 2026-27 academic year.</p>

Section 3: Programme-level assessment

Programmes considered through this assessment

Programme name	Mode of study	Profession (including modality) / entitlement	Proposed learner number, and frequency	Proposed start date
MSci Physiotherapy	FT (Full time)	Physiotherapist	80 learners, one cohort	01/09/2022
MSci Physiotherapy	PT (Part time)	Physiotherapist		01/09/2022
MSci Physiotherapy, with international year	FT (Full time)	Physiotherapist		01/09/2022

Through clarification, the education provider informed us the full time programme is the only direct entry programme. The learner intake is 80 learners with one cohort per year. The part time and international year programmes are options for fulltime learners. There will not be any additional learners to the 80 initially recruited onto the full time programme.

We were informed the part time programme would only be used where an individual had a valid reason, such as a health issue. We also understood that learners wanting to change to the part time programme must submit reasoning to the education provider and collaborate with them to develop a bespoke part time programme. This would ensure the learner could successfully complete any remaining modules and meet the learning outcomes.

Also, through clarification, the education provider outlined how, in the first semester of the full time programme, learners are informed about the possibility of undertaking a year abroad. This would take place between years 2 and 3. Learners are asked to express an interest. Those who expressed an interest are asked in year 2 to formally apply. We were informed the year abroad is assessed as a pass / fail and there no practice-based learning is undertaken. Learners re-join the full time programme in the third year.

The education provider also confirmed they will be closing their approved BSc (Hons) Physiotherapy provision. Therefore, there will be no increase in learner numbers, rather the numbers and associated resources would move to the new MSci provision.

Stage 2 assessment – provider submission

The education provider was asked to demonstrate how they meet programme level standards for each programme. They supplied information about how each standard was met, including a rationale and links to supporting information via a mapping document.

Data / intelligence considered

We also considered intelligence from others, as follows:

- NHS England Midlands - we received information considering current pressures regarding practice-based learning in the Midlands. The information was reviewed but we considered it would not impact on this assessment.

Quality themes identified for further exploration

We reviewed the information provided, and worked with the education provider on our understanding of their submission. This allowed us to consider whether the education provider met our standards. We have reported on how the provider meets standards through the [Findings section](#).

Section 4: Findings

This section details the visitors' findings from their review through stage 2, including any requirements set, and a summary of their overall findings.

Conditions

Conditions are requirements that must be met before providers or programmes can be approved. We set conditions when there is an issue with the education provider's approach to meeting a standard. This may mean that we have evidence that standards are not met at this time, or the education provider's planned approach is not suitable.

The visitors were satisfied that no conditions were required to satisfy them that all standards are met. The visitors' findings, including why no conditions were required, are presented below.

Overall findings on how standards are met

This section provides information summarising the visitors' findings against the programme-level standards. The section also includes a summary of risks, further areas to be followed up, and areas of good practice.

Findings of the assessment panel:

- **SET 1: Level of qualification for entry to the Register –**
 - this standard is covered through institution-level assessment. The proposed programmes are heavily based upon BSc (Hons) programmes we already approve at the education provider. As such, the institution level standards (Stage 1) were demonstrated in the same way as the existing approved provision. We therefore did not need to undertake a Stage 1 assessment.

- **SET 2: Programme admissions –**
 - Selection and entry criteria were clear and set at an appropriate level for integrated Masters programmes. The criteria included GCSE qualifications or equivalent in Maths and English, an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check and occupational health clearance. Applicants are evaluated on NHS values at interview.
 - The process to apply for a place on the programmes is clearly articulated.
 - The visitors therefore considered the relevant standards within this SET area met.

- **SET 3: Programme governance, management and leadership –**
 - The staff on the programmes are appropriately qualified and experienced. The education provider's plan for reviewing staffing is clear. They will maintain a staff:student ratio of 1:17.
 - There are sufficient resources for the programmes to run effectively. The education provider has appropriate learning spaces. For example four clinical skills rooms, and library facilities. Teaching spaces are managed centrally. The education provider reviews and updates equipment annually.
 - We noted the education provider has been successful in receiving funding for large items. As a result, they are currently reviewing their simulation provision.
 - The visitors therefore considered the relevant standards within this SET area met.

- **SET 4: Programme design and delivery –**
 - As evidenced through the mapping document and module descriptors, visitors noted the learning outcomes were outlined for the programmes.
 - Professional behaviour, including the standards of conduct, performance and ethics, are taught throughout the programmes. This is clearly demonstrated in the module learning outcomes in the module descriptors.
 - A wide variety of teaching and learning methods are used on the programmes, such as independent study and taught sessions. The overall learning and teaching methods are clearly described in the

programme specification, the rationale document, and each module descriptor.

- The visitors therefore considered the relevant standards within this SET area met.
- **SET 5: Practice-based learning –**
 - The structure and duration of practice-based learning is clear. Learners undertake six periods of practice-based learning during the programmes. Each period is four days a week for six weeks.
 - Learners have the opportunity to undertake practice-based learning with a range of NHS and non-NHS providers.
 - The visitors therefore considered the relevant standards within this SET area met.
- **SET 6: Assessment –**
 - The visitors noted the assessment requirements were clearly evidenced in the programme specification, the rationale document and module descriptors. The assessments are aligned to allow learners to demonstrate how they meet the learning outcomes. The standards of proficiency were mapped to programme learning outcomes and assessments.
 - Professional behaviour, including the standards of conduct, performance and ethics, are assessed throughout the programmes. This is demonstrated in the programme specification, and module learning outcomes in the module descriptors.
 - There was clear evidence that assessment methods are designed to measure learner's ability to meet the learning outcomes.
 - The visitors therefore considered the relevant standards within this SET area met.

Risks identified which may impact on performance: None

Section 5: Referrals

This section summarises any areas which require further follow-up through a separate quality assurance process (the approval, focused review, or performance review process).

There were no outstanding issues to be referred to another process.

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. They do not need to be met before programmes can be approved, but they should be considered by education providers when developing their programmes.

The visitors did not set any recommendations.

Section 6: Decision on approval process outcomes

Assessment panel recommendation

Based on the findings detailed in section 4, the visitors recommend to the Education and Training Committee that:

- All standards are met, and therefore the programmes should be approved

Education and Training Committee decision

Education and Training Committee considered the assessment panel's recommendations and the findings which support these. The education provider was also provided with the opportunity to submit any observation they had on the conclusions reached.

Based on all information presented to them, the Committee decided that:

- The programmes are approved

Reason for this decision: The Panel accepted the visitor's recommendation the programme should receive approval.

Appendix 1 – list of open programmes at this institution

Name	Mode of study	Profession	Modality	Annotation	First intake date
BSc (Hons) Physiotherapy	FT (Full time)	Physiotherapist			01/09/1997
BSc (Hons) Physiotherapy	FLX (Flexible)	Physiotherapist			01/01/2005
MSc Physiotherapy (Pre-registration)	FT (Full time)	Physiotherapist			01/01/2005
Applied Educational and Child Psychology (D.Ed.Psy)	FT (Full time)	Practitioner psychologist	Educational psychologist		01/01/2005
Clinical Psychology Doctorate (ClinPsyD)	FT (Full time)	Practitioner psychologist	Clinical psychologist		01/01/1992
Doctorate in Forensic Psychology Practice (ForenPsyD)	PT (Part time)	Practitioner psychologist	Forensic psychologist		01/01/2002
Doctorate in Forensic Psychology Practice (ForenPsyD)	FT (Full time)	Practitioner psychologist	Forensic psychologist		01/01/2002
Forensic Clinical Psychology Doctorate (ForenClinPsyD)	FT (Full time)	Practitioner psychologist	Clinical psychologist; Forensic psychologist		01/09/2013
Practice Certificate in Independent Prescribing	PT (Part time)			Supplementary prescribing; Independent prescribing	01/09/2020