

Performance review process report

University of Essex, 2020-21

Executive summary

This is a report on the performance review process undertaken to review HCPC-approved provision at the University of Essex. This assessment was initially undertaken as part of the pilot of our new quality assurance model in the 2020-21 academic year, and has since been through several iterations of review based on changing requirements. This has led to substantial time passing from the initial portfolio review to this report being finalised.

In our review, we considered that this institution is performing well, and visitors have recommended that the education provider should next be reviewed in the 2025-26 academic year.

The Education and Training Committee considered this report and made a decision on next steps for the institution.

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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 performance review process undertaken by the HCPC to ensure that the institution and practice areas(s) detailed in this report continue to meet our education standards. The report details the process itself, evidence considered, outcomes and recommendations made regarding the institution and programme(s) 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 performance review process

Once a programme institution is approved, we will take assurance it continues to meet standards through:

- regular assessment of key data points, supplied by the education provider and external organisations; and
- assessment of a self-reflective portfolio and evidence, supplied on a cyclical basis

Through monitoring, we take assurance in a bespoke and flexible way, meaning that we will assess how an education provider is performing based on what we see, rather than by a one size fits all approach. We take this assurance at the provider level wherever possible, and will delve into programme / profession level detail where we need to.

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

Thematic areas reviewed

We normally focus on the following areas:

- Institution self-reflection, including resourcing, partnerships, quality, the input of others, and equality and diversity
- Thematic reflection, focusing on timely developments within the education sector
- Provider reflection on the assessment of other sector bodies, including professional bodies and systems regulators
- Provider reflection on developments linked to specific professions
- Stakeholder feedback and actions

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 panels to assess the provider's provision. This assessment was part of the pilot of our new quality assurance model, where we focused assessment at the school level. Through learning within the pilot, we decided to raise the level of assurance to the institution level, and so have produced findings within the report to the institution level.

John Archibald	Education Quality Officer
School of Sport, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science	
Fiona McCullough	Dietitian
Carol Rowe	Physiotherapist
Ian Hughes	Service user expert advisor

School of Health and Social Care	
Lorna Povey	Speech and language therapist
Patricia McClure	Occupational therapist
Mohammed Jeewa	Service user expert advisor
School of Life Sciences	
Peter Abel	Biomedical scientist
Kathleen Simon	Biomedical scientist
Prisha Shah	Service user expert advisor

Section 2: About the education provider

The education provider context

University of Essex is a higher education institution which delivers 15 HCPC-approved programmes across six professions. They are:

- Occupational therapy
- Physiotherapy
- Clinical psychology
- Biomedical science
- Speech and language therapy
- Independent and supplementary prescribing

The provider's programmes are within the School of Sport, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science, the School of Life Sciences, and the School of Health and Social Care.

Through the institution's last interactions through our legacy quality assurance model, we noted no relevant risks / areas of good practice to pick up through this review.

Programmes delivered by the education provider

Programme name	Mode of study	School
MSc Physiotherapy (pre registration)	Full time	School of Sport, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science
Post Graduate Diploma in Physiotherapy	Full time	
BSc (Hons) Physiotherapy	Full time	
BSc (Hons) Biomedical Science (Applied)	Full time	School of Life Sciences
BSc (Hons) Speech and Language Therapy	Full time	School of Health and Social Care
BSc (Hons) Speech and Language Therapy (Including Year Abroad)	Full time	
MSc Occupational Therapy (Pre-registration)	Full time	

MSc Speech and Language Therapy (pre registration)	Full time accelerated	
Post Graduate Diploma in Speech and Language Therapy	Full time accelerated	
Practice Certificate in Supplementary and Independent Prescribing for PHs, CHs, RAs and PAs	Part time	
BSc (Hons) Occupational Therapy	Full time and part time	
Post Graduate Diploma in Occupational Therapy (Pre-registration)	Full time	
Doctorate in Clinical Psychology (DClinPsy)	Full time	
BSc (Hons) Speech and Language Therapy (Including Placement Year)	Full time	

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.

Data Point	Benchmark	Value	Commentary
Total intended learner numbers compared to total enrolment numbers	230	404	This data point is for all the existing programmes within the institution, for the last academic year. The value is above the benchmark as a number of programmes across the school of health and social care and school of Sport, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science recruited more learners than they intended to.
Learners – Aggregation of percentage not continuing	3%	2%	We collected this data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). The score indicates the education provider has scored well. This gave us an indication that the education provider is performing well in this area.
Graduates – Aggregation of percentage in employment / further study	93%	94%	We collected this data from the HESA. The score indicates the education provider is very close to a good score.

Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) award	N/A	Gold	This is the highest level and demonstrates the provider is performing well in this area.
National Student Survey (NSS) overall satisfaction score (Q27)	74%	82%	We collect this data from the Office for Students (OfS), who run a survey for learners and graduates of undergraduate Higher Education. This score indicates the education provider is performing well in this area.

Section 3: Performance analysis and quality themes

Portfolio submission

The education provider was asked to provide a self-reflective portfolio submission covering the broad topics referenced in the [thematic areas reviewed](#) section of this report.

The education provider's self-reflection was focused on challenges, developments, and successes related to each thematic area. They also supplied data, supporting evidence and information.

Quality themes identified for further exploration

We reviewed the information provided, and worked with the education provider on our understanding of their portfolio. Based on our understanding, we defined and undertook quality assurance activities (in this case, providing written questions and seeking written answers) linked to the quality themes referenced below. This allowed us to consider whether the education provider was performing well against our standards.

Quality theme 1 – Resourcing

This theme applied across the whole institution, but was broken down as follows:

- For the School of sports, rehabilitation and exercise science we were unclear about the financial stability
- For the School of life sciences we explored whether there were sufficient practice educators to support the increasing numbers of placement learners; and
- For the School of health and social care we explored the number of apprentices in occupational therapy and speech and language therapy, considering the potential subsequent impact on physical resources and staffing

Quality theme 2 – Partnerships

This theme applied across the whole institution, and was broken down as follows:

- Exploration of the plans to expand practice learning opportunities such as virtual placements, non-traditional placements, and long-arm supervision
- For the School of Sports, Rehabilitation, and Exercise Science there was a risk identified to placement capacity with the introduction of two new programme providers into the region. We explored how collaboration and communication with neighbouring programme providers would develop considering this. For this school, we also explored strategic level partnership working, such as the main stakeholders involved, and how they address challenges
- For the School of Life Sciences, we explored how the provider determines future placement provision, including the practical mechanisms used
- For the School of Health and Social Care we explored how the terms of reference for Practice Education Group (PEG) and Practice Education Committees (PEC) are being used in practice

Quality theme 3 – Academic and placement quality

This theme applied across the whole institution, and was broken down as follows:

- For the School of Sports, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science, we explored how data related to practice education audits was collected and evaluated.
- For the School of Life Sciences, we explored
 - How the provider records external staff training. For example, which courses had been completed
 - Whether there were any issues with providing research projects in practice-based learning
 - How the provider interacts with service users to improve the quality of provision
- For the School of Health and Social Care, we explored what quality assurance processes the provider have in place for the non-NHS placement providers
- For both the School of Life Sciences and School of Health and Social Care, we explored how issues and improvements raised by external bodies were being followed up, and how this is recorded.

Quality theme 4 – Equality and diversity

This theme applied across the whole institution, and was broken down as follows:

- We explored how decolonising the curriculum will be rolled out
- What specific actions / targets were in place to reduce the ethnic minority attainment gap
- For the School of Sports, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science whether service users have training around equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Quality theme 5 – Horizon scanning

- For the School of Sports, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science we explored the plan for training practice educators, the impact of the apprenticeship programme on the staff team, placement capacity and resources, and clinical skills lab access for learners.

- For the School of Health and Social Care we explored which professions are being considered for pre-reg MSc provision, including information about what the market for this is like locally, and whether the international market is being considered.

Quality theme 7 – Learner feedback and support

- For the School of Sports, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science, we explored
 - assessment practices in response to the National Student Survey
 - the role of the Student Union in supporting learners.
- For the School of Life Sciences, we explored the actions taken by the provider to improve performance on learning application opportunities, good advice for study choices and clarity on actions taken based on learner feedback.

Quality theme 8 – Curriculum development

- For the School of Sports, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science, we explored what type of ideas in relation to curriculum development would be discussed at team away days.
- For the School of Life Sciences, we explored how the importance of service user confidentiality is taught in the curriculum

Quality theme 9 – Capacity of practice-based learning

Related to the School of Sports, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science, we explored

- the provider's plans for simulation, specifically the maximum number of weeks allowed, the types of activities involved, and assessing the ability to achieve some learning outcomes through simulation
- the risk of new programmes adversely impacting capacity or relationships with practice educators
- the provider's plans for increasing engagement or whether the process would be amended
- how practice educators were selected to sit on course committees and practice education committees.

Quality theme 10 – Impact of COVID-19

- For the School of Life Sciences, we explored:
 - Whether the summer school set up to cover practical skills sessions that were cancelled or postponed as a result of the 2020 pandemic was effective at realising this intention
 - If the education provider had any information about the potential and / or actual impact of delivery via Technology Enhanced Learning methods on the learners' experience.
 - The provider's plans to re-instate practical exams for the 2021-22 academic year and their aims to ensure that learners will complete all the practical learning skills required
 - How the provider ensures learner still had a valuable placement experience if they worked from home as a result of the pandemic

- For the School of Health and Social Care, we explored how the learners' timetable would be structured during the first semester of 2021-22 in terms of on-campus delivery and online learning.

Section 4: Summary of findings

This section provides information summarising the visitors' findings for each portfolio area, focusing on the approach or approaches taken, developments, what this means for performance, and why. The section also includes a summary of risks, further areas to be followed up, and areas of good practice.

Overall findings on performance

Quality theme: Institution self-reflection

Resourcing, including financial stability

The schools operate within the education provider's financial sustainability model. Financial sustainability is well-managed, and the schools consistently end the financial year with a small surplus. There is an annual review and planning cycle which enables identification of resourcing need against forthcoming recruitment targets. This enables planning for staffing and learning resources in advance of learner recruitment for the next academic year.

The visitors were satisfied that there is a strong annual planning process at school level, which enables planning for staffing resource and learning resources in advance of learner recruitment for the next academic year. This was shown through the portfolio and through exploration via the quality activities as noted in the above section.

This links to the provider's aim to centralise the learner experience, which is shown through the maintenance of staff / student ratios across their provision, and continued investment in resources, such as upgrades to physiotherapy teaching rooms with a £600,000 investment.

We were also satisfied that the education provider's new programme development process ensures that resourcing is considered prospectively with the input of relevant internal stakeholders and decision makers so the staffing, equipment, space, and resources can be invested to anticipate the growth in learner numbers. This links to the data point about number of learners being higher than expected at this provider. Considering the above, the visitors were confident that the provider has planned for and is able to manage this increase in learner numbers.

This is shown by the school finalising its planning to add occupational therapy and speech and language therapy integrated apprenticeship pathways from 2022-23, following commissioning from HEE and partnership with employers / placement partners. This approach to development has allowed for administrative and academic recruitment to maintain development on these programmes and ensure that resource remains focused on current provision. It has also enabled the school to

adapt its pathway design to the changing landscape of apprenticeship provision, such as the move towards integrated end-point assessment.

Overall, through exploration of themes within quality activities, the visitors were satisfied that the provider is resourcing its programmes to deliver them at the level required to ensure learners are safe and effective at the point of registration.

Partnerships with other organisations

There are well-established partnerships with a range of NHS and non-NHS partners, employers and placement providers. Partners contribute to the design and delivery of the programmes and the provision of practice-based learning experiences through placements.

The provider has also established working relationships with other regional education providers, to manage and work through regional challenges. For example, the provider has worked through challenges in securing practice-based learning due to the introduction of new provision in the region

Impact of COVID-19

- Partnerships with placement providers played an important role within the pandemic, where the provider reallocated placements effectively. They were able to think differently about placements, which was well supported by their partners, for example offering collaborative remote and simulated placements. No learners were not able to progress due to issues with securing practice-based learning
- A positive impact of the pandemic has been that it has been easier to bring senior people together into meetings, to discuss challenges. This has simplified and enabled partnership working.

The visitors were satisfied that partnerships were established, maintained, and developed as they need to be to ensure a good learner experience. This was shown through evidence and information provided such as:

- Collaborative working with professional bodies directly, and involvement in groups run by these bodies
- Formal management and governance arrangements, such as Programme Committee Meetings, attended by all relevant partners
- Development of a new interprofessional placement audit across several professions, and completion of audit processes

The visitors were confident from the evidence and information provided that the education provider manages, maintains, and develops their partnership working – responding to challenges appropriately. This is demonstrated by the examples given above, which show good performance in this area.

Academic and placement quality

Across the provider, academic quality is monitored through student module evaluation, programme committees, external examiner reporting and Student Voice Groups (SVGs). Reports are monitored through governance structures, and developments and changes consulted on and reported to the university's Quality and Academic Development (QUAD) team. The provider also hosts education away

days, education best practice seminars, and 'excellence and innovation' workshops for programme teams and individual educators to reflect upon their programmes, modules and practices and draw on the evidence base for continuing to develop programmes.

There is an audit tool for placement providers, including approval and monitoring of performance. Placement quality is monitored, assured, and enhanced in partnership and collaboration with providers. For example, in the Health and Social Care School, NHS and non-NHS partners through the strategic Practice Education Group (PEG) and single partner Practice Education Committees (PEC) meet monthly to enable continuous quality assurance and enhancement. PECs monitor student and educator placement evaluations, placement audits, practice educator preparation and continued alignment to professional, statutory, and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements for practice-based learning in each profession.

There have been some changes to quality governance arrangements within the Health and Social Care school to enable strategic monitoring of academic quality and alignment across PSRB standards. In addition, the monitoring of placement quality was adapted through the first wave of the pandemic with the strategic PEG overseeing placement quality across all placements and suspending the single-organisation PECs. With service delivery and redistribution of services and staff, this approach was effective in managing significant placement challenges during the uncertainty in the first half of 2020. Area of focus included scrutiny of PPE provision, management of supervision and assessment, risk assessment and management, and oversight of PSRB temporary registers and student paid deployment. PECs (where placement quality is monitored within a single organisation) have since been re-introduced as services returned to their usual provision. The visitors were satisfied these changes were put into place to fulfil specific aims and were able to meet those aims.

Student Voice Groups have generally provided positive reports, though students in both SLT and OT have indicated that the workload associated with the course is excessive. The provider has plans in place to consider and act on this feedback, and the visitors considered this was a reasonable approach to this feedback from learners, showing their monitoring processes are gathering feedback required.

In relation to the questions asked for the School of Life Sciences, the education provider gave responses which satisfied the visitors in relation to:

- The recording of placement staff training; and
- Any issues with providing research projects in practice-based learning

When considering the response, the visitors noted that there was no impact on standards relating to academic or placement quality.

Overall, the visitors' view was that the mechanisms related to academic and placement quality were working well, as demonstrated by the examples given above. The provider has been able to identify and react to challenges, and to develop their provision so it remains fit for purpose. This shows that the provider is performing well in this portfolio area.

Interprofessional education

The education provider noted that inter-professional education (IPE) was a key underpinning component of all their programmes, in the placement and academic settings:

- In the School of Health and Social Care, the provider noted IPE is embedded across curricula to ensure IPE is relevant to the students involved. They focus on the outcome (“to enhance collaboration and the quality of care and services”) rather than process
- In the School of Sports, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science, the provider developed their IPE in 2020-21 by redesigning programmes so they included task-focused interprofessional learning sessions rather than specific IPE modules. This was either through project working with learners from other professional groups, professional development modules, or through specialist sessions delivered by speakers from other professions
- In the School of Life Science, multiple professions teach on the programmes, focusing students on different professional skills and experience.

In the review period, the above approaches have been developed with learners, to ensure IPE elements of programmes are relevant to their learning and to the benefit of service users. For example:

- Introduction of task-focused projects between physiotherapy and occupational therapy students embedded in interprofessional and profession-specific modules
- Shared research, critical enquiry, and project modules for SLT and OT students

Feedback from learners has been positive, which shows the IPE approach is having its desired effect.

The visitors considered the provider’s strong and structured approach to IPE means they are performing well in this portfolio area. This is shown through the statements of intentions, specific developments based on those intentions and feedback, and good feedback from learners involved in programmes.

Service users and carers

The education provider noted that service users are involved at various points within all programmes, particularly with programme development, recruitment, and programme committee meetings.

For example, within the School of Health and Social Care, there is an active service user reference group (SURG) in the provider, who are committed to partnered co-design, learner recruitment, teaching and learning delivery, and quality assurance of programmes. Service users from the group sit on programme committees for each profession and as panel members during internal validation events.

The provider notes they are “committed to co-producing programmes with the public and service users” and that they are “one of the first stakeholders engaged when designing a new programme or redesigning an existing programme.” This is evidenced through the service user involvement in the re-design of the independent and supplementary prescribing programme.

Through this exercise, feedback from service users shows that they value their involvement in the programme development and review process and wish to expand their contribution.

Service users are involved in several ways through programme delivery, for example:

- The provider holds a wide range of written and video testimonies about lived experiences as re-useable learning materials
- Online direct interaction with a service user which involved the use of case studies and filmed excerpts of service users
- Two service users provided a joint session about the importance of involving carers in assessment and treatment
- A service user undertook a joint session with staff about service user involvement in enhancement and innovation of services

Learner feedback shows that service user contributions are beneficial to their learning. Module reports are used to identify how to continue to strengthen and support service user involvement. Training is coordinated by user involvement leads, and the service user reference group. Online training is provided which enables service users to engage effectively. They are also provided with the relevant and appropriate information to enable them to perform their roles successfully.

The visitors were confident that there is an active service user group at the provider, who have a strong voice in curriculum development and contribute to programme teaching resources. They are also confident that this service user group is deployed and supported within a well-tested and robust framework for involvement.

Equality and diversity

The university has an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy 2019-2025 which is complied with by all schools. The Policy is embedded into their mission, values and objectives as set out in the Strategic Plan, People Supporting Strategy, and Education and Research Strategies. Beyond this:

- the School of Health and Social Care intends to address discriminations and inequalities that marginalise some groups within the school's community and in health professions education more widely
- The School of Life Sciences has a commitment to addressing under-representation where it exists, celebrating the diversity of our students and staff, nurturing communities of belonging in which all are accepted without exception, and promoting inclusion, well-being, resilience, and empowerment to enable everyone to reach their full potential
- The School of Sports, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science are developing as a new school in the provider and aim to move to receiving the provider's 'bronze award' for EDI.

The School of Health and Social Care introduced a 'Racism in Health and Social Care' taskforce constituted by students and staff which sought to listen to, bear witness to and understand the structural discriminations associated with health professions education. This led to the establishment of three working groups focused on racism and discrimination in placements; decolonising the curriculum; and

awareness, attention, and wellbeing of the community. Examples of actions include enhanced mechanisms for raising concerns and challenging practices in partner organisations, decolonising curricula that implicitly over-emphasise the normativity of the white, heterosexual, male, able-bodied perspective, and experience and promotes evidence base derived from this same dominant discourse.

The School of Life Sciences has focused on encouraging women in life sciences. Between 2018-19 they recruited nearly 50% female academic staff, by encouraging female applications and having senior female academics chairing the panels. Female academics have also been promoted to more senior positions.

For the School of Sports, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science, data shows improving trends in terms of admission and undergraduate degree outcome in relation to diversity imbalances. Like the School of Health and Social Care, the School has developed a school-wide action plan to explore the de-colonisation of the curriculum.

The visitors explored specific areas referenced within the quality activity section of this report, and noted that:

- Good progress is being made to decolonise curricula. They have undertaken a structured piece of work with students, staff and others, and are developing curricula to be updated for the 2022-23 academic year
- In reference to the BAME attainment gap, the visitors recognised the work being undertaken by the provider, and the challenging area this presents for them. They have placed a greater emphasis on actively supporting students who may not feel comfortable asking for help, and are further exploring whether there is an attainment gap in practice-based learning
- For the School of Sports, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science, members of the Service User Reference Group received a training session on equality, diversity and inclusion and unconscious bias training in 2019, and the school is developing a means for members to have continual access to online training already in place for staff within the School of Health & Social Care.

The visitors noted through the portfolio of the School of Sport, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science as good practice the appointment of a School Director of Equality Diversity and Inclusion in every school. They also considered it good practice in reporting equality, diversity and inclusion in the annual programme reports and associated action plans.

In summary, the visitors were satisfied that the education provider has policies in place around EDI and delivers improvement in a structured way in line with these policies. Therefore, they are satisfied with the performance of the provider in this area.

Horizon scanning

The provider intends to remain sensitive to contemporary and future developments in health professions education and regional and national workforce demands. For example, they have developed HEE-funded apprenticeship routes in speech and language therapy and occupational therapy. The provider aims to maintain a good relationship with HEE and practice partner organisations, aiming to remain sensitive

to developments that may impact on existing provision, and anticipating future demand for new provision.

Examples of developments in response to horizon scanning are:

- That the provider proactively identified and made small developments in their provision and practice assessment approach in the independent and supplementary prescribing module in line with changes in Nursing and Midwifery Council Standards for Prescribing programmes and supervision and assessment.
- The preparation for collaboration with international universities, and with clinical partners, for example, the new science centre in Harlow through collaboration with many hospitals and placements is considered as a successful programme by the provider
- Preparation for new physiotherapy curriculum in 2019-20 enabled the provider to engage with clinical partners and other stakeholders to establish the philosophy and concepts of the programme

The visitors explored the introduction of new apprentice provision, linked to this area, which is discussed in the resourcing, including financial stability section. They were satisfied that the provider has considered resourcing of this new provision and noted there is an approval process currently underway to review the proposal in detail.

The visitors also explored additional professions which are being considered for MSc provision but noted that concerns related to introduction of new provision would be raised and explored through approval assessments for those proposals.

Considering the provider's intentions in this area, and the exploration of specifics with the provider (such as those reported above), the visitors considered there was unambiguous evidence which demonstrates the provider can effectively horizon scan, consider potential risks and impacts, mitigate risks, and explore opportunities.

Further findings:

- Risks identified which may impact on performance: None
- Outstanding issues for follow up: None

Quality theme: Thematic reflection

Impact of COVID-19

In response to the pandemic, the education provider invested in technology-enhanced learning solutions and provided training to staff and students on the use of these technologies. Most group teaching was delivered via e-learning which was managed by the provider's central timetabling team in collaboration with programme teams to ensure an effective student learning experience.

For the 2020-21 academic year, learners began returning to campus for essential practical skills teaching, mandatory training, and practical module assessment. This was within a blended approach – for example physiotherapy labs were set up as 'zoom rooms', enabling staff to present from the labs, using equipment to demonstrate skills and techniques.

Some practical assessments were adapted, enabling them to go ahead using Zoom, with a focus on subjective skills of a patient model via Zoom, and a discussed justification around the planned objective assessment. The education provider continued delivering services virtually in partnership with placement providers, with priority being given to students assessed as high risk or shielding.

In relation to practice based learning, the education provider withdrew students from placements at the start of the pandemic where they needed to and rescheduled placements for later in the year (2020). Final year learners were given priority for available placements to enable them to graduate on schedule.

Shielding or 'high risk' learners were offered virtual placements, postponed placements, or an alternative assignment, enabling all to meet their programme outcomes and complete over the summer months. Other students had placements postponed and moved to the 2020-21 academic year, with credits trailed at exam boards. To fill the weeks of cancelled placement activity, academic modules were launched, enabling students to continue with programme progress, and free up time in the 2020-21 year for necessary placements.

With regards to the School of Life Sciences, the visitors confirmed that the summer school covered all practical skills missed in the spring term when learners were taught virtually, and that it had been well-received.

The visitors were informed that most learners adapted and engaged well with the shift to online learning. The use of shared screen and breakout rooms has been popular with learners, and staff gathered student feedback to assess the impact of the changes and to continue to ensure that students' learning needs are met. They were also told that when in person teaching resumed on campus for essential practical skills teaching, student adapted well to the blended learning approach and saw the benefits.

The visitors noted that the impact of the pandemic was significant but that the education provider responded rapidly and effectively. The evidence submitted identified how the education provider has successfully adapted using innovative methods to ensure the needs of all professions were met, along with maintaining standards successfully. The visitors recognised the amount of work the programme teams had done to enable learners to progress in their programmes during this challenging time. Therefore, the visitors are satisfied with how the school has approached the Covid-19 pandemic.

Use of technology: Changing learning, teaching and assessment methods

The provider utilises a suite of technology-enhanced learning (TEL) packages and has an established TEL team who support students and staff in using and accessing these.

In the School of Life Sciences, the provider has invested in a new STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) building, and has told us that its new technology has increased learners' interest in practical work.

The University utilises a virtual learning environment (VLE) based upon the Moodle platform. All lectures, sample exam papers, videos, some recorded lectures on the appropriate technology enhanced learning systems.

The School of Life Sciences trialled a pilot project and used data to enable early identification and intervention of learners who are struggling, and to identify the reasons. An example of intervention includes organising small group sessions and providing peer mentors to those learners who have been identified as struggling. The data is also used to monitor gender balance of Post Graduate Taught applications, offers and accepted places.

The visitors saw that the education provider uses a suite of technology-enhanced learning. The evidence submitted demonstrated how learners are supported through these technologies and can feed back through module evaluations about issues related to access to technology and any support activities. Furthermore, the provider has permanently adopted teaching, learning and assessment methods used through the pandemic where these have been successful. Therefore, the visitors are satisfied with this portfolio area.

Apprenticeships

Health Education England (HEE) commissioned the provider to develop apprenticeship routes in Occupational Therapy and Speech and Language Therapy in partnership with local service providers, to commence in October 2022. There is an established process and team for developing and managing apprenticeship routes, which will apply to this provision. We are currently assessing these programmes through a separate process and so have not explored findings in any more detail here.

Further findings:

- Risks identified which may impact on performance: None
- Outstanding issues for follow up: None

Quality theme: Sector body assessment reflection

Assessments against the UK Quality Code for Higher Education

The provider has a framework in place with regards to the QAA's UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which focuses on approval, annual review of courses, periodic review, external examiners and student feedback.

The provider is required to respond to recommendations arising from periodic reviews, follow up action points from previous annual reviews of programmes, report on actions arising from student feedback mechanisms, monitor feedback on coursework and respond to matters raised by external examiners.

As discussed earlier in this report, the provider has structures in place in relation to approval of new provision, review of existing provision, and external examiner and student feedback.

The visitors were confident that the provider takes its responsibility to respond to recommendations arising from QAA actions seriously and has structures in place to achieve this. Therefore, the visitors are satisfied with this area.

Assessment of practice education providers by external bodies

The provider has clear structures to consider external assessment of practice education providers by external bodies. For example:

- The provider has processes in place to continuously monitor and review the Care Quality Commission (CQC) outcome reports of their practice learning partners. This includes reviewing current reports during placement audits and notification of newly published CQC reports.
- If a provider is rated as 'inadequate' by the CQC in its report, the provider would normally suspend all placements in that setting. The report would be reviewed in detail and the placement partner would be provided with an opportunity to submit a plan detailing how their plans will enhance their service provisions. Placements would only be reinstated after a satisfactory follow-up report from the CQC.
- The provider would usually continue placements with partners who receive a CQC rating of 'requirements improvement'. A request would be made setting out the specific actions that will be taken to address any issues identified
- There is a requirement for all lab-based practice education providers to be United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) accredited.

In this review period, the provider has not needed to suspend any placements because of an 'inadequate' CQC rating.

The visitors noted that the information in the portfolio submission clearly identified how the education provider assesses and monitors practice education providers, in relation to external audit of these providers, in the ways explored through this section. Therefore, they are satisfied with the performance of the provider in this area.

National Student Survey (NSS) outcomes

Leaners' experience is valued by the provider and is considered as a key metric to improve. This is demonstrated by the provider's performance of 83.4% overall learner satisfaction for the 2019-20 academic year, which was a significant improvement on the score for 2018-19, which was 68.6%.

The provider has made changes which contributed to the increase in the overall score including:

- Changing the name of tutorials to academic support tutorials
- Provided specific dates for providing students' feedback on their coursework
- Using the language of the student voice when requesting and providing feedback

There were reductions in satisfaction scores for some programmes, which the education provider explored. For example, the provider conducted an analysis of the qualitative data and focused student feedback to understand the reasons for the low satisfaction rating for the occupational therapy programme. The themes identified as a result included:

- Learners felt that academic staff were unfamiliar with structure of the new programme which resulted in repetition of content
- Insufficient preparation for developing practical skills made application of theory to practice more difficult.

The visitors were satisfied that the provider has picked up poor scoring areas, explored the reasons for these poor scores, and put in place actions to address these areas, with the aim of measurably improving scores moving forward. For example, in the School of Life Sciences, the provider has set itself the following themes to explore and action:

- To uncover reasons for lower scores using student engagement worker-led student focus groups
- Review system for and then undertake peer review of delivery of teaching, related activity including materials on Moodle, communication
- Academic action on personal responsibility, time management, review of admin support and monitoring system
- Set up and active use of programme Moodle pages, regular meetings of course directors and learner representatives, and greater consultation

Therefore, the visitors were satisfied with the provider's approach and response to NSS data. They have demonstrated that it is integrated into improving their provision, with measurable actions defined to address issues.

Other professional regulators / professional bodies

The provider reported that they have close working relationships with regulatory and professional bodies and value the input of regulators to help ensure their programmes have effective public oversight and enhance the student experience.

Within the School of Health and Social Care, communication with professional and regulatory bodies is undertaken by the Divisional Lead from each profession with support by the Director of Education and the Dean of Health and Social Care.

Within the School of Sports, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science, the physiotherapy programmes engage with the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) as the professional body.

Within the School of Life Science, the biomedical science programme is accredited by the Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS)

The visitors were informed of several review events by the following organisations:

- Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) approval event for the independent and supplementary prescribing programme, following realignment to NMC standards for nurses who access the prescribing module.
- Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) accreditation event for the BSc Occupational Therapy degree apprenticeship.
- Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) accreditation event for BSc Speech and Language Therapy degree apprenticeship
- IBMS accreditation for the biomedical science programme

The provider has also collaborated with the occupational therapy and speech and language therapy professional bodies to seek guidance with regards to the development of the apprenticeship programmes. This was to ensure that the programmes were in line with professional body expectations.

The evidence from the education provider showed consistent and close engagement with professional and regulatory bodies. This was demonstrated by complying with annual monitoring requirements and subsequent feedback raising no issues. Therefore, the visitors were satisfied with the provider's approach in this area.

Further findings:

- Risks identified which may impact on performance: None
- Outstanding issues for follow up: None

Quality theme: Profession specific reflection

Curriculum development

The education provider flagged the curriculum development through its submission, including:

- **Independent and supplementary prescribing** – The programme was updated during the 2020-21 academic year in response to a change in the Nursing and Midwifery Council's Standards for Prescribing programmes and Standards for Student Supervision and Assessment. These updates were made using the provider's co-production and co-design model, with contribution from service users, students, clinicians, placement providers and academics. Through their process, the provider aimed to ensure that the module fully aligns to both NMC and HCPC requirements.
- **Occupational therapy** - The full-time BSc and MSc Occupational Therapy programmes were approved in 2015-16 and ran from 2016-17 (part-time variant) and from 2017-18 (full-time variant). The part-time variant to the BSc programme is now dormant and the provider does not intend to recruit to this programme in the future. The BSc and MSc Occupational Therapy programmes have undergone some modest developments in response to student feedback since they were approved for the 2015-16 academic year.
- **Speech and Language Therapy** - The BSc and MSc in Speech and Language Therapy have undergone some modest developments since initial approval in 2017-2018 in response to student feedback. There are plans to review the assessment in selected parts of the programme, with a view to streamlining assessment whilst retaining authenticity and validity in capturing student performance against the standards of proficiency.

In relation to the areas explored by quality activity:

- Visitors were informed that confidentiality is an important issue in the curriculum. The school starts with first year learners and the first lecture includes links for confidentiality. All second-year learners are given lectures on confidentiality as part of the skills module. These lectures are taught by external and internal staff. Specific lectures are given to the placement learners before the start of their placements
- The provider uses annual away days to gather relevant staff and stakeholder feedback and other developments such as the design of apprenticeship

programmes. This is a chance to focus on reviewing provision in a dedicated space.

From reviewing the processes to arrive at these developments, the visitors were satisfied that education provider and school policies had been followed. The provider took account of feedback from learners, research, and external drivers for change in developing programmes. Therefore, the visitors are satisfied with this portfolio area.

Development to reflect changes in professional body guidance

The provider noted how they used guidance from professional bodies produced in response to the covid-19 pandemic. This helped the provider to:

- Support learners in fulfilling their practice hours and progressing to the next stage of their programmes
- Provide alternative practice learning opportunities

Consider the re-sequencing of modules and placements for students who were risk-assessed as unable to access placements during pandemic surges and peaks

Specific to professions, the following are examples of how the provider worked with or responded to:

- The Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS) to change the online verification process for placements
- The Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) to ensure their professional expectation of 1000 practice hours was delivered but thinking flexibly about how these hours could be accumulated
- The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) to achieve their support for a virtual and remote placement approach in the first pandemic wave
- The British Psychological Society (BPS) to interpret guidance produced to support providers through the pandemic

The above approach and examples demonstrated to the visitors that the provider effectively consulted and implemented professional body guidance to ensure continued delivery and assessment of their programmes during the pandemic. Guidance from different professional bodies was followed which resulted in profession-specific changes to programmes. The visitors considered this demonstrated a good collaborative approach with professional bodies, and that this approach resulted in improvements to provision. Therefore, they are satisfied that the provider is proactively aware of and considers professional body guidance in developing their provision.

Capacity of practice-based learning

For each school within the provider, capacity challenges are currently managed as follows:

- For the School of Health and Social Care, the provider has established and maintained relationships with placement providers with the aim of ensuring sufficient capacity for managing placement allocations. They reported that all learners on HCPC-regulated programmes have been offered good quality in-situ, virtual or remote placements, completed all practice hours required, and progressed on schedule to the next stage of their programme.

- Within the School of Life Sciences, the provider noted that their arrangement with practice education providers ensures that learners sign honorary contracts of employment with hospitals and are in effect 'Trainee Biomedical Scientists' with those organisations. This enables the provider to secure practice-based learning opportunities for all learners. The provider has put in place a package to support learners financially during their placement year.
- For the School of Sports, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science, the provider noted significant challenges in practice-based learning (in the form of securing practice placements) because of the pandemic. However, they also noted that they continued to allocate all learners in high quality placements in line with their quality assurance practices. Despite this, there has been some limitation in the diversity of practice experience for some learner's placements.

In future, the provider is considering placement provision, and aiming to develop to ensure good practice experience for all learners. This includes initiatives such as:

- Moving towards a more strategic approach to placement allocation and capacity management in large NHS providers. This will move the responsibility of securing placements from the internal team to be managed in collaboration with Education Liaison teams within larger NHS Trusts. The provider will continue with their current approach for smaller NHS providers.
- HEE funding secured to develop teletherapy clinics in speech and language therapy and occupational therapy as part of the provider's direct offer. These clinics will provide further opportunities for students to undertake practice-based learning directly with service users.

The visitors recognised that the education provider has considered and embraced the guidance issued from professional bodies around alternative placement approaches. They also saw that the education provider has acknowledged that placement capacity has been maintained for the current set of learners, and that there are plans in place to manage challenges moving forward. The visitors were therefore satisfied with the approach of the education provider in this area.

Further findings:

- Risks identified which may impact on performance: None
- Outstanding issues for follow up: None

Quality theme: Stakeholder feedback and actions

Learners

The provider informed the visitors of their methods for collecting learner feedback which included:

- through student voice groups (SVGs), who attend meeting with the Director of Education and Course Directors
- Module evaluations
- Representation on relevant committees
- 'You Said We Did' discussions are shared on the provider's electronic board
- Learners on placements return monthly confidential feedback forms

The provider has recently appointed a Director of Student Engagement, Satisfaction and Employability who is responsible for maintaining and enhancing the student experience across the provider.

The provider noted that some feedback provided may benefit future cohorts rather than the cohort who raised the issue. However, they also attempt to act in real time where possible. Examples of 'rapid' developments within the review period due to learner feedback include:

- Re-scheduling selected assessment deadlines where a cohort has raised a consensus concern
- Distributing uniforms / clothing for practice placement by post rather than on site
- Supporting access to learning materials for learners who were held up overseas due to travel and quarantining restrictions

Learners are also included by being seen as 'partners' in developing new programmes. Student representatives are invited to partner with service users, clinicians, and other stakeholders in developing new programmes.

For the School of Sports, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science, we explored the role of the Student Union in supporting learners. The visitors noted that this support was appropriate and in addition to strong structures in place within the school.

The visitors were satisfied that the provider has strong structures in place to involve learners in developing the quality of their provision. They effectively use evaluation tools to improve provision and involve learners in key aspects of programme development.

Practice placement educators

Practice educators provide feedback in the following ways:

- For the School of Health and Social Care, practice educators provide feedback through the Programme Committees and to Practice Education Committees (PECs). They also complete placement evaluations on individual placement experiences through the provider's Practice Education Management System (PEMS)
- For the School of Life Science, practice educators attend the annual Management Committee meeting. They also provide feedback on the programme during a yearly "Good Teaching Practice" session
- For the School of Sports, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science, and the School of Health and Social Care, the visitors noted that practice educators report they find it easy to feedback issues and concerns as they happen during placements, and through the programme committees.

The visitors were satisfied that the education provider had clear processes in place (as set out above) to gather and act on feedback from practice educators, and are aware of where shortfalls are, and aim to increase engagement where this would be beneficial. Therefore, the visitors are satisfied with this portfolio area.

External examiners

The education provider has requirements for external examiners in place, including qualifications and experience required. They also have a structured process to ensure external examiners provide external oversight of their programmes, focusing on quality of provision. External examiners are encouraged to act as critical friends to support programmes to improve.

In reviewing external examiner reports, the visitors noted the reports and the response from programme directors are clear and demonstrate that any comments are acted on appropriately. We have not explored further profession specific developments here, due to this report being focused on the institution level wherever possible. This means that in reviewing this portfolio area, we have reviewed to ensure the structures are in place as required, rather than specific granular feedback has been acted upon.

The visitors were therefore satisfied with the education provider's approach in this area.

Further findings:

- Risks identified which may impact on performance: None
- Outstanding issues for follow up: None

Section 5: Issues identified for further review

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

There were no outstanding issues to be referred to another process

Section 6: Decision on performance review outcomes

Assessment panel recommendation

Based on the findings detailed in section 4, the visitors recommend to the Education and Training Committee that the education provider's next engagement with the performance review process should be in the 2025-26 academic year

Reason for this recommendation: From their detailed documentary review and considering the responses to quality activity, the visitors were satisfied with the education provider's approaches in all areas reflected upon within the portfolio submission.

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 education provider's next engagement with the performance review process should be in the 2025-26 academic year.

Reason for this decision: The Panel agreed with the visitors' recommended monitoring period, for the reasons noted through the report.