

HCPC approval process report

Education provider	The University of Bolton
Name of programme(s)	BSc (Hons) Paramedic Practice, Full time
Approval visit date	08-09 April 2021
Case reference	CAS-16306-K5T2T0

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Executive Summary

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.

The following is a report on the approval process undertaken by the HCPC to ensure that programme(s) detailed in this report meet our standards of education and training (referred to through this report as 'our standards'). The report details the process itself, the evidence considered, and recommendations made regarding programme approval.

Section 1: Our regulatory approach

Our standards

We approve programmes that meet our education standards, which ensure individuals that complete the programmes meet proficiency standards. The proficiency standards 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.

Programmes are normally [approved on an open-ended basis](#), subject to satisfactory engagement with our monitoring processes. Programmes we have approved are listed [on our website](#).

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 undertake assessment of evidence presented through our processes. The visitors make recommendations to the Education and Training Committee (ETC). Education providers have the right of reply to the recommendation of the visitors, inclusive of conditions and recommendations. If an education provider wishes to, they can supply 'observations' as part of the process.

The ETC make 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 meets in public on a regular basis and their decisions are available to view [on our website](#).

HCPC panel

We always appoint at least one partner visitor from the profession (inclusive of modality and / or entitlement, where applicable) with which the assessment is concerned. We also ensure that visitors are supported in their assessment by a member of the HCPC executive team. Details of the HCPC panel for this assessment are as follows:

Susan Boardman	Paramedic
Andrew Jones	Paramedic
John Archibald	HCPC executive

Other groups involved in the virtual approval visit

There were other groups involved with the approval process as follows. Although we engage in collaborative scrutiny of programmes, we come to our decisions independently.

Gill Waugh	Independent chair (supplied by the education provider)	University of Bolton
Angela Nuttall	Secretary (supplied by the education provider)	University of Bolton
Louise Ashby	Internal panel member	University of Bolton
Andrew Williamson	External panel member	St George's, University of London
Andrew Bateson	Student panel member	University of Bolton

Graham Harris	Professional body representative	College of Paramedics
Bob Fellows	Professional body representative	College of Paramedics
Paul Mayze	Professional body representative	College of Paramedics

Section 2: Programme details

Programme name	BSc (Hons) Paramedic Practice
Mode of study	FT (Full time)
Profession	Paramedic
Proposed first intake	01 September 2021
Maximum learner cohort	Up to 20
Intakes per year	1
Assessment reference	APP02293

We undertook this assessment of a new programme proposed by the education provider via the approval process. This involved consideration of documentary evidence and a virtual approval visit, to consider whether the programme meet our standards for the first time.

Section 3: Requirements to commence assessment

In order for us to progress with approval and monitoring assessments, we ask for certain evidence and information from education providers. The following is a list of evidence that we asked for through this process, and whether that evidence was provided. Education providers are also given the opportunity to include any further supporting evidence as part of their submission. Without a sufficient level of evidence, we need to consider whether we can proceed with the assessment. In this case, we decided that we were able to undertake our assessment with the evidence provided.

Type of evidence	Submitted	Comments
Completed education standards mapping document	Yes	
Information about the programme, including relevant policies and procedures, and contractual agreements	Yes	
Descriptions of how the programme delivers and assesses learning	Yes	
Proficiency standards mapping	Yes	
Information provided to applicants and learners	Yes	
Information for those involved with practice-based learning	Yes	
Information that shows how staff resources are sufficient for the delivery of the programme	Yes	

Internal quality monitoring documentation	No	Only requested if the programme (or a previous version) is currently running
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Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the education provider decided to move this event to a virtual (or remote) approval visit. In the table below, we have noted the meeting held, along with reasons for not meeting certain groups (where applicable):

Group	Met	Comments
Learners	Yes	As we do not currently approve the programme and has not run yet, we met with learners from the MSc Physician Associate programme.
Service users and carers (and / or their representatives)	No	Since the move to virtual visits, we do not ask to meet with service users and carers. The visitors explored areas relating to service users and carers by the submission of written statements and at other, appropriate meetings.
Facilities and resources	Yes	
Senior staff	Yes	
Practice educators	Yes	
Programme team	Yes	

Section 4: Outcome from first review

Recommendation of the visitors

In considering the evidence provided by the education provider as part of the initial submission and at the virtual approval visit, the visitors' recommend that there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate that our standards are met at this time, but that the programme(s) should be approved subject to the conditions noted below being met.

Conditions

Conditions are requirements that must be met before programmes can be approved. We set conditions when there is insufficient evidence that standards are met. The visitors were satisfied that a number of the standards are met at this stage. However, the visitors were not satisfied that there is evidence that demonstrates that the following standards are met, for the reasons detailed below.

We expect education providers to review the issues identified in this report, decide on any changes that they wish to make to programmes, and then provide any further evidence to demonstrate how they meet the conditions. We set a deadline for responding to the conditions of 28 May 2021.

2.1 The admissions process must give both the applicant and the education provider the information they require to make an informed choice about whether to take up or make an offer of a place on a programme.

Condition: The education provider must provide further evidence of the information made available in the admissions process to determine it is comprehensive and means that applicants are able to make an informed decision.

Reason: To meet this standard, the education provider referred the visitors to the webpage for the programme. From the webpage, the visitors were able to access some information about the programme. However, the visitors could not find information about the programme model and structure, the number of hours spent on the programme, leave allocation for learners, when applicants would be required to process criminal conviction and health checks, and funding.

The visitors considered applicants needed to be fully aware of these areas when making a decision about whether to apply for, and take up, an offer of a place on the programme. The visitors considered that the education provider did not provide the full information applicants need so they can come to an appropriate decision about their suitability for the programme. The visitors therefore were unsure that information provided throughout the admissions process allows for informed decision-making. The education provider must submit further evidence of the admissions process to demonstrate it is comprehensive and means that applicants are able to make for an informed decision.

3.9 There must be an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff in place to deliver an effective programme.

3.10 Subject areas must be delivered by educators with relevant specialist knowledge and expertise.

Condition: The education provider must provide further evidence that there is an appropriate number of staff who are able and equipped to deliver the programme effectively, and that educators have the necessary knowledge and expertise to deliver their parts of the programme effectively.

Reason: To evidence these standards, the education provider informed the visitors the programme lead has a paramedic background and that they were recruiting further lecturers. In the meeting with the senior team, the education provider informed the visitors they had recently recruited two new lecturers, 1.5 FTE, to the programme. The visitors had not seen details of the recently recruited lecturers, and could not be sure that:

- the number of staff in place - as well as the proportion of their time spent working on the programme, in relation to the practical requirements of the programme, the number of learners, their needs and the learning outcomes to be achieved - is appropriate to the programme; and
- educators are suitable and well equipped to take part in teaching and to support learning in the subject areas they are involved in.

The education provider must provide further evidence there is an appropriate number of staff able and equipped to deliver the programme effectively, and that educators have the necessary knowledge and expertise to deliver their parts of the programme effectively.

5.2 The structure, duration and range of practice-based learning must support the achievement of the learning outcomes and the standards of proficiency.

Condition: The education provider must demonstrate how the design of practice-based learning allows learners to achieve the learning outcomes of the programme and the standards of proficiency (SOPs) for paramedics.

Reason: To evidence this standard, the education provider informed the visitors that the majority of practice-based learning would be with North West Ambulance Service (NWS), the main practice partner. In response to the visitors request for further evidence, the education provider informed the visitors that they intended on sourcing different clinical settings for their learners alongside the NWS placements. At the visit, the visitors received an additional piece of evidence, which detailed the organisations outside of NWS who would provide practice-based learning, and the learning environment of the placement. These organisations were local NHS trusts, care homes and private healthcare facilities. The visitors were however unclear what was involved in these non-ambulance placements and how they related to the learning outcomes of the programme.

The education provider gave an overview of the Practice Assessment Document (PAD), which is for learners to record and document skills, competencies, and hours completed in practice. The education provider also provided an example of how the PAD will work.

However, the visitors could not find specific details of the competencies, such as details of assessments, the level of assessment, and what learners needed to complete in order to meet the competencies, related to practice-based learning. The visitors were therefore unable to see the competencies to be assessed in practice-based learning, and their link to the learning outcomes of the programme. The education provider must provide further information to demonstrate that the way practice-based learning is designed allows learners to achieve the learning outcomes of the programme and the SOPs.

5.5 There must be an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff involved in practice-based learning.

Condition: The education provider must ensure there is enough support for learners to take part in safe and effective practice-based learning in non-ambulance practice-based settings.

Reason: To evidence this standard, the education provider informed the visitors there would be a member of the paramedic team designated as a link tutor for all practice-based learning. Also as part of the programme documentation, the education provider said that although the majority of practice-based learning would be with North West Ambulance Service (NWS), the main practice partner, they intended on sourcing different clinical settings for their learners alongside the NWS placements. At the visit, the visitors received an additional piece of evidence, which detailed the organisations outside of NWS who would provide practice-based learning, and the learning environment of the placement. These organisations were local NHS trusts, care homes and private healthcare facilities.

The visitors were made aware that NWS adopts a 'team' approach to practice-based learning where each learner is allocated to a senior paramedic team lead who manages a team. Each team will contain a maximum of five learners. However, the visitors did not receive information about how the education provider makes sure there is a suitable

number of practice educators in non-ambulance practice-based learning. They also did not receive information about others working in this setting, taking into account the number of learners and the level of support specific learners need. The visitors did not receive any information from the education provider about what they consider to be an adequate number of staff in non-ambulance placement settings nor why this was the case.

The meeting with practice educators did not include representatives from a non-ambulance setting. The visitors therefore require further information which explains how the education provider justifies there is a suitable number of staff for the number of learners. This is to ensure there is enough support the learners need within the non-ambulance practice-based learning environment.

6.1 The assessment strategy and design must ensure that those who successfully complete the programme meet the standards of proficiency for the relevant part of the Register.

Condition: The education provider must submit further information about the competencies within practice-based learning, so learners who complete the programme have demonstrated the threshold level of knowledge, skills and understanding to practise their profession safely and effectively.

Reason: To evidence this standard, the education provider informed the visitors that each module specification states the marks required, the breakdown of the total mark for each assessment and the requirements to have successfully completed the module. The education provider made the visitors aware of the Practice Assessment Document (PAD), for learners to record and document skills, competencies, and hours completed in practice. The education provider also provided an example of how the PAD will work but this was not for the proposed programme. The example PAD contained information about the first year only and referred to both compulsory and desirable competencies. From this, the visitors were unclear about how a competence would be assessed and demonstrated. For example, what level of assessment (i.e. observation, supervision, independent working) would be associated with a compulsory competence, in module HLT4095, Introducing Practical Capabilities. The visitors were therefore unclear about what learners needed to achieve during the programme to ensure they met the standards of proficiency upon completion.

The visitors considered that as they had not seen the full version of the PAD for the proposed programme, they were unclear about the details of assessments, the level of assessment, and what learners needed to complete in order to meet the competencies. The visitors were not able to see this level of information in other documentation, such as module descriptors or handbooks, submitted by the education provider.

The visitors considered it was unclear what learners needed to demonstrate within practice-based learning in order to meet competencies at each stage of the programme. The visitors therefore need further information to clarify the competencies, and their associated level of assessment, so learners understand the programme's expectations of them at each stage of the programme and educators can apply assessment criteria consistently.

The education provider must therefore submit further information about the competencies within practice-based learning, so learners who complete the programme have demonstrated the threshold level of knowledge, skills and understanding to practise their profession safely and effectively.

6.3 Assessments must provide an objective, fair and reliable measure of learners' progression and achievement.

Condition: The education provider must submit further information about when assessments take place so they are effective at deciding whether a learner is fit to practise by the end of the programme.

Reason: To evidence this standard, the education provider informed the visitors that each module specification states the marks required, the breakdown of the total mark for each assessment and the requirements to have successfully completed the module. The visitors were able to see this information when reviewing the module specifications and the assessment map. In the meeting with the programme team, the visitors were informed that there would be one or two assessments per month. Due to the number of potential assessments each month, the visitors considered there was not an effective retrieval period for learners to try to pass assessments towards the end of the first year, if necessary. The visitors were therefore unsure whether the schedule of assessments meant they were realistic at providing a valid and accurate picture of a learners' progression and, ultimately, whether a learner was fit to practise by the end of the programme. The visitors require further information about when assessments take place and the system for retrieval and retakes so they can be sure they are effective at deciding whether a learner is fit to practice by the end of the programme.

Section 5: Visitors' recommendation

Considering the education provider's response to the conditions set out in section 4, the visitors are satisfied that the conditions are met and recommend that the programme(s) are approved.

This report, including the recommendation of the visitors, will be considered at the 06 July 2021 meeting of the ETC. Following this meeting, this report should be read alongside the ETC's decision notice, which are available [on our website](#).