Visitors' report

Name of education provider	University of Manchester
Programme name	Doctorate in Counselling Psychology (D.Couns.Psych.)
Mode of delivery	Full time
Relevant part of HPC Register	Practitioner psychologist
Relevant modality / domain	Counselling psychologist
Date of visit	18 -19 August 2010

Contents

Executive summary

The Health Professions Council (HPC) approve educational programmes in the UK which health professionals must complete before they can apply to be registered with us. The HPC is a health regulator and our main aim is to protect the public. The HPC currently regulates 15 professions. All of these professions have at least one professional title which is protected by law. This means that anyone using the title 'Practitioner psychologist'or 'Counselling psychologist' must be registered with us. The HPC keep a register of health professionals who meet our standards for their training, professional skills, behaviour and health.

The visitors' report which follows outlines the recommended outcome made by the visitors on the ongoing approval of the programme. This recommended outcome was accepted by the Education and Training Committee (Committee) on 21 October 2010. At the Committee meeting on 21 October 2010, the ongoing approval of the programme was re-confirmed. This means that the education provider has met the condition(s) outlined in this report and that the programme meets our standards of education and training (SETs) and ensures that those who complete it meet our standards of proficiency (SOPs) for their part of the Register. The programme is now granted open ended approval, subject to satisfactory monitoring.

Introduction

The HPC visited the programme at the education provider as it was a new programme which was seeking HPC approval for the first time. This visit assessed the programme against the standards of education and training (SETs) and considered whether those who complete the programme meet the standards of proficiency (SOPs) for their part of the Register.

This visit was part of a joint event as the professional body considered their accreditation of the programme. The professional body and the HPC formed a joint panel, with an independent chair and secretary, supplied by the education provider. Whilst the joint panel participated in collaborative scrutiny of the programme and dialogue throughout the visit; this report covers the HPC's recommendations on the programme only. As an independent regulatory body, the HPC's recommended outcome is independent and impartial and based solely on the HPC's standards. A separate report, produced by the professional body, outlines their decisions on the programme's status.

Visit details

Name of HPC visitors and profession	David Packwood (Counselling psychologist) Ewan Gillon (Counselling psychologist)
HPC executive officer (in attendance)	Benajmin Potter
Proposed student numbers	9
Proposed start date of programme approval	24 November 2010
Chair	Bertrand Taithe (University of Manchester)
Secretary	Joanne Kaiserman (University of Manchester)
Members of the joint panel	Barbara Douglas (British Psychological Society) Victoria Galbraith (British Psychological Society) Lucy Kerry (British Psychological Society)

Sources of evidence

Prior to the visit the HPC reviewed the documentation detailed below, sent by the education provider:

	Yes	No	N/A
Programme specification	☒	☐	☐
Descriptions of the modules	☒	☐	☐
Mapping document providing evidence of how the education provider has met the SETs	☒	☐	☐
Mapping document providing evidence of how the education provider has met the SOPs	☒	☐	☐
Practice placement handbook	☒	☐	☐
Student handbook	☒	☐	☐
Curriculum vitae for relevant staff	☒	☐	☐
External examiners' reports from the last two years	☐	☐	☒

The HPC did not review the external examiners' reports from the last two years prior to the visit because as the programme is new and as such there are no external examiners' reports.

During the visit the HPC saw the following groups or facilities:

	Yes	No	N/A
Senior managers of the education provider with responsibility for resources for the programme	☒	☐	☐
Programme team	☒	☐	☐
Placements providers and educators/mentors	☒	☐	☐
Students	☒	☐	☐
Learning resources	☒	☐	☐
Specialist teaching accommodation (eg specialist laboratories and teaching rooms)	☒	☐	☐

The HPC met with students from the MA Counselling, M.Ed Psychology of Education and Doctorate in Counselling programmes as the programme seeking approval currently does not have any students enrolled on it.

Recommended outcome

To recommend a programme for approval, the visitors must be assured that the programme meets all of the standards of education and training (SETs) and that those who complete the programme meet our standards of proficiency (SOPs) for their part of the Register.

The visitors agreed to recommend to the Education and Training Committee that a number of conditions are set on the programme, all of which must be met before the programme can be approved.

The visitors agreed that 50 of the SETs have been met and that conditions should be set on the remaining 7 SETs.

Conditions are requirements that the education provider must meet before the programme can be recommended for approval. Conditions are set when certain standards of education and training have not been met or there is insufficient evidence of the standard being met.

The visitors have also made two recommendations for the programme.

Recommendations are observations on the programme or education provider which do not need to be met before the programme is recommended for approval. Recommendations are normally set to encourage further enhancements to the programme and are normally set when it is felt that the particular standard of education and training has been met at, or just above the threshold level.

The visitors did not make any commendations on the programme.

Commendations are observations of innovative best practice by a programme or education provider.

Conditions

3.16 There must be a process in place throughout the programme for dealing with concerns about students' profession-related conduct.

Condition: The education provider must implement a formal fitness to practice process to deal with concerns regarding students' profession-related conduct, and to allow for suspension of practice if necessary.

Reason: From the documentation and in discussion with the programme team, the visitors identified that there was no formal process in place for dealing with concerns about students' profession-related conduct which also affects how the programme meets SETs 5.11, 6.4 and 6.7. They did note that concerns could be raised about a students conduct and that those concerns would be dealt with. However, it was made clear that this was done informally on a case by case basis, with no clear and transparent procedure for situations that remain unresolved. The visitors articulated that this could lead to students perceiving they may have been treated differently in different situations. In turn this perception may lead to decisions made about professional conduct open to successful academic appeal and, possibly, to students successfully completing the programme with concerns about their professional conduct. The visitors therefore require evidence of a formal process to objectively and consistently deal with concerns regarding students' profession-related conduct to ensure that this standard is met.

5.2 The number, duration and range of practice placements must be appropriate to support the delivery of the programme and the achievement of the learning outcomes.

Condition: The programme team must implement a formal mechanism to ensure that every student completing the programme gets the diversity of practice placement experience to enable them to meet the relevant learning outcomes.

Reason: From the documentation and in discussion with the programme team it was clear that students are expected to gain a breadth of experience to be able to meet the learning outcomes associated with practice placements. However the visitors could not identify how the programme team can ensure that each student will gain the necessary practice experience in a diverse range of settings, if the informal advice provided was not adhered to by the student. The visitors raised concerns that if the diversity of placement experience was not subject to formal monitoring and evaluation then students successfully completing the programme may do so having not met certain learning outcomes. This also affects how the programme meets SET 6.7. The visitors therefore require evidence to demonstrate how the programme team will ensure that each student will have undertaken a sufficiently diverse range of practice placement experience. This will ensure that students successfully completing the programme will have met all learning outcomes associated with the practice placements and enable them to meet the relevant standards of proficiency (SOPs).

5.11 Students, practice placement providers and practice placement educators must be fully prepared for placement which will include information about an understanding of:
  - **the learning outcomes to be achieved;**
  - **the timings and the duration of any placement experience and associated records to be maintained;**
  - **expectations of professional conduct;**
  - **the assessment procedures including the implications of, and any action to be taken in the case of, failure to progress; and**
  - **communication and lines of responsibility.**

Condition: The programme team must clearly communicate how practice placements are assessed and what implications there may be for any student who fails the assessment.

Reason: The visitors noted in both the programme documentation and in discussion with the programme team that a great deal of the practice placement experience was recorded and reported back to the programme team. However, the visitors were unclear as to how this extensive reporting links back to the process of formally assessing practice placement experience and how the experience links directly to certain learning outcomes, which also affects how the programme meets SETs 6.4 and 6.7. The visitors therefore had concerns that practice placement providers and students may undertake practice placements without fully understanding the assessment procedures including the implications of, and any action to be taken in the case of, failure. Therefore the visitors require the programme team to clearly communicate how the practice placement experience is to be evaluated and/or assessed. The programme team should also clearly communicate how a student may fail a practice placement and what implications there would be for a student in this instance. This is to ensure that students and practice placement educators are fully prepared for placement and that they understand the implications of the outcome of that placement experience.

6.4 Assessment methods must be employed that measure the learning outcomes.

Condition: The programme team must demonstrate how the reporting procedures associated with the practice placements link to learning outcomes and how the learning outcomes are measured.

Reason: The visitors noted in both the programme documentation and in discussion with the programme team that a great deal of the practice placement experience was recorded and reported back to the programme team to support the processes of determining whether a student should progress from one stage of the programme to another. However, they were unclear as to how this extensive reporting and assessment procedure relates to measuring the learning outcomes, which also affects how the programme meets SETs 5.11 and 6.5. As the process for evaluating this recording and reporting of experience is unclear the visitors had concerns that students who complete practice placements may do so without achieving the learning outcomes. It could also lead to academic appeals being lodged if a student perceived that their experience was evaluated differently from others which may lead to students successfully completing the

programme having not met all of the learning outcomes. Therefore the visitors require the programme team to clearly link the relevant learning outcomes to the practice placement experience and to demonstrate how that experience is to be evaluated and/or assessed. This is to ensure that the practice placement experience will be measured against the stated learning outcomes and that students successfully completing the programme can meet the relevant SOPs for counselling psychologists.

6.5 The measurement of student performance must be objective and ensure fitness to practise.

Condition: The programme team must revisit the practice placement assessment evaluation criteria to demonstrate that effective mechanisms are place to assure that appropriate standards in assessment will be maintained.

Reason: The visitors noted in meeting with programme team and through the programme documentation that the education provider will ensure that students' practice placement experiences will be recorded and reported. However, the visitors could not determine how the team will ensure that these records and reports will be evaluated objectively and linked back to learning outcomes to ensure fitness to practice. This also affects how the programme meets SETs 3.16 and 6.4. As the process for evaluating this recording and reporting of experience is unclear the visitors had concerns that students may lodge academic appeals if they perceive their experience was evaluated differently from others. This could lead to students completing the programme not able to meet all of the relevant SOPs or with questions about their fitness to practice. Therefore the visitors require the programme team to articulate how they will ensure that the reporting and evaluation mechanisms for practice placements (e.g. supervisor and placement educator reports) will utilise a consistent objective measure and consequently ensure fitness to practice. This will then ensure that the programme can meet this standard.

6.7 Assessment regulations must clearly specify requirements for student progression and achievement within the programme.

Condition: The education provider must clearly specify what the implications of failing a practice placement are for students.

Reason: From the documentation provided and in discussion with the programme team, the visitors found it difficult to determine how the assessment regulations for the programme are conveyed to students so that they are aware of what the implications of failing a practice placement are. As the visitors could not identify the implications of failing a placement they could also not identify how this may impact the progression and achievement of a student and what effect this might have in regards to any formal fitness to practice policy. This also affects how the programme meets SETs 3.16, 5.2, 5.11 and 6.4. As these requirements have not been clearly specified this may lead to academic appeals and possibly to students completing the programme having not met all of the learning outcomes. Therefore the visitors require the programme team to revisit the programme documentation and clearly specify the requirements for student progression and what the implications of failing a placement might be. This will

ensure that the students exiting the programme will have met all of the relevant SOPs and that the programme meets this standard.

6.11 Assessment regulations must clearly specify requirements for the appointment of at least one external examiner who must be appropriately experienced and qualified and, unless other arrangements are agreed, be from the relevant part of the Register.

Condition: The programme team must revisit the programme documentation to clearly articulate that external examiners appointed to the programme must be HPC registered unless alternate arrangements have been agreed with the HPC.

Reason: In the documentation submitted by the education provider there was insufficient detail concerning the recruitment of external examiners to the programme. The visitors were happy with the external examiner arrangements after discussions with the programme team. However this standard requires that the assessment regulations of the programme must state that any external examiner appointed to the programme needs to be appropriately registered or that suitable alternative arrangements should be agreed. Therefore the visitors require evidence that HPC requirements regarding the appointment of external examiner to the programme have been included in the documentation to ensure that this standard is met.

Recommendations

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

Recommendation: The programme team should consider monitoring the level of counselling psychologist input to the programme and develop contingencies to maintain this input at an appropriate level.

Reason: The visitors noted that the programme team did have an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff to deliver the programme effectively, for the cohort identified for year 1. Therefore they were satisfied that this standard was met. However, the visitors feel that the team should consider keeping the number of counselling psychologists directly contributing to the programme under review. This is particularly the case if the programme grows in line with the education provider's projections. The visitors also stated that the programme team may want to develop clear contingencies to maintain the input from counselling psychologists at an appropriate level regardless of circumstance.

5.11 Students, practice placement providers and practice placement educators must be fully prepared for placement which will include information about an understanding of:
- **the learning outcomes to be achieved;**
- **the timings and the duration of any placement experience and associated records to be maintained;**
- **expectations of professional conduct;**
- **the assessment procedures including the implications of, and any action to be taken in the case of, failure to progress; and**
- **communication and lines of responsibility.**

Recommendation: The programme team should consider tailoring the information provided to students and practice placement providers to highlight the experience a student needs to meet the necessary learning outcomes.

Reason: The visitors noted that the programme team did provide a significant amount of information to students, practice placement providers and practice placement educators. However they articulated that the information provided was primarily for students and practice placement educators who were undertaking their first placement or was to be utilised for reference purposes. This means that the information is not tailored to specify what a student needs to experience in order to meet any learning outcomes not met through previous practice placements. The visitors therefore recommend that the programme team look at how students, and in particular practice placement educators, are prepared for providing the specific experience a student requires to meet any outstanding learning outcomes.

Ewan Gillon
David Packwood