

Visitors' report

Name of education provider	Aston University
Programme name	BSc (Hons) Applied Biomedical Science
Mode of delivery	Full time
Relevant part of HPC Register	Biomedical scientist
Date of visit	23 – 24 March 2010

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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 'Biomedical scientist' 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 approval of the programme. The education provider has until 17 May 2010 to provide observations on this report. This is independent of meeting any conditions. The report and any observations received will be considered by the Education and Training Committee (Committee) on 8 June 2010. At this meeting, the Committee will accept the visitors' recommended outcome, including the conditions. If necessary, the Committee may decide to vary the conditions.

The education provider is due to redraft and resubmit documentary evidence in response to the conditions outlined in this report by 30 July 2010. The visitors will consider this response and make a separate recommendation to the Committee on the approval of the programme. It is anticipated that this recommendation will be made to the Committee on 16 September 2010.

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. 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	Christine Murphy (Biomedical Scientist) Pradeep Agrawal (Biomedical Scientist)
HPC executive officer(s) (in attendance)	Lewis Roberts
HPC observer	Paula Lescott
Proposed student numbers	25
Proposed start date of programme approval	01 October 2010
Chair	Roy Smith (Aston University)
Secretary	Gillian Cook (Aston University)
Members of the joint panel	Andrew Usher (Institute of Biomedical Science) Jim Cunningham (Institute of Biomedical Science) Alan Wainwright (Institute of Biomedical Science)

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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Descriptions of the modules	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mapping document providing evidence of how the education provider has met the SETs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mapping document providing evidence of how the education provider has met the SOPs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practice placement handbook	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student handbook	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Curriculum vitae for relevant staff	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
External examiners' reports from the last two years	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Minutes of meetings	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Supplementary documents	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Programme team	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Placements providers and educators/mentors	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Specialist teaching accommodation (eg specialist laboratories and teaching rooms)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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 35 of the SETs have been met and that conditions should be set on the remaining 21 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 a recommendation 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

2.1 The admissions procedures 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 revisit all programme documentation, including advertising materials, to ensure that it addresses the exact nature of the applied route, provides details about the funding arrangements available for students undertaking the applied route and details on the likelihood of students receiving financial assistance during the placement year, as well as clearly outlining the funding arrangements for Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and immunisation checks.

Reason: The visitors noted that the documentation submitted showed inconsistencies and did not give students a coherent explanation of the nature of the programme and the funding options available to them. The visitors also noted that students were not given any information about competition for places on the Applied route. From a review of the documentation and discussions at the visit the visitors could not determine how the students were able to financially plan for the placement year. Both the programme team and students expressed concerns about the funding arrangements for the placement year with some students noting that they did not receive any funding until 7 months into the placement. One student also stated that they were doing a 4 day week on placement to allow them to take on part time work. The education provider should clarify the funding arrangements for placements and formalise details around any flexibility that is given to students to allow them to take up part time work.

The visitors also expressed concerns that the funding arrangements for CRB and immunisation checks were not clear. The visitors noted contradictory accounts from students about whose responsibility it was to pay for these checks. This information should be clearly stated within the programme documentation, including advertising material so that applicants have all the information they require to make an informed choice about the programme.

3.2 The programme must be effectively managed.

Condition: The programme team must revisit the programme documentation to demonstrate that all placements in the programme are initially approved by the education provider and then regularly monitored.

Reason: From a review of the documentation submitted and discussions with the programme team and practice placement providers the visitors noted that there was not enough evidence that the placements are approved and monitored by the education provider. The education provider must clearly outline the specific roles and responsibilities in the management of placements at both the education provider and at placement sites. The visitors require further evidence to demonstrate that the programme team apply clear procedures when dealing with problems on placement and that clear lines of responsibility are drawn between the placement providers and the education provider.

The visitors were provided with an example Memorandum of Understanding between the education provider and a placement provider. The visitors require further evidence that the Memorandums of Understanding or placement agreements clearly articulate the requirements of all parties involved in placements.

As the education provider must take responsibility for placement management for the programme the visitors felt further evidence is required to ensure that this standard is being met.

3.9 The resources to support student learning in all settings must effectively support the required learning and teaching activities of the programme.

Condition: The education provider must clarify the process that is in place to audit and monitor resource provision in all placement environments for students on placement.

Reason: From the documentation provided the visitors could not clarify how the education provider audits and monitors the provision of resources in all placement settings. The visitors require further evidence to show how placements are audited, and the minimum resource requirements expected of a placement, to ensure that adequate resources are in place to support the required learning and teaching activities of the programme and that student learning is supported.

3.14 Where students participate as service users in practical and clinical teaching, appropriate protocols must be used to obtain their consent.

Condition: The education provider must ensure that a system is in place for gaining students informed consent before they participate as service users in practical teaching.

Reason: From the documentation provided the visitors could not find evidence of a consent procedure in place to mitigate any risk involved in students participating as service users in practical teaching. The visitors were shown the policy utilised for gaining consent for research projects but this did not demonstrate how consent is obtained for practical elements in the programme. The visitors require further evidence to show the consent policy in place, how the education provider will collect consent and also how they will inform students about this policy and their right to confidentiality.

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 demonstrate that there is a process in place for dealing with concerns about profession-related conduct in the programme.

Reason: From the documentation provided and discussions at the visit the visitors could not determine the exact intended use for the draft Fitness to practice document provided. The visitors require clarification of the finalised process that is place for dealing with student conduct and guidance outlining this process. The visitors also require further evidence that outlines the ways in which this information will be communicated to students and placement providers.

4.1 The learning outcomes must ensure that those who successfully complete the programme meet the standards of proficiency for their part of the Register.

Condition: The education provider must revisit the learning outcomes and module descriptors to clearly demonstrate how the learning outcomes ensure that the standards of proficiency are addressed within all aspects of the programme.

Reason: From the documentation provided prior to the visit the visitors were unable to see where the standards of proficiency were being met within the programme from the module descriptors and learning outcomes. The visitors also noted that the standards of proficiency had been mapped mostly against the placement element of the programme and appeared dependent on the Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS) portfolio. Therefore the visitors require further evidence to demonstrate how the standards of proficiency are linked to all aspects of the curriculum, not just the placement element, and are clearly communicated to all parties involved in the programme.

In addition, as the documentation provided indicated that learning outcomes and assessment in the programme appeared dependent on the Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS) portfolio the visitors require further evidence to demonstrate that the learning outcomes are linked to the standards of proficiency in the assessment portfolio This should include clear guidelines regarding the completion of the portfolio (including when the portfolio is started) and clear demonstration of the progression of skills required throughout the programme.

4.3 Integration of theory and practice must be central to the curriculum.

Condition: The education provider must revisit the programme documentation to clearly outline how theory and practice are integrated in both the theoretical and practical parts of the programme.

Reason: From the learning outcomes, module descriptors and mapping of the standards of proficiency and discussions with the programme team the visitors were unable to clearly determine how theory and practice were integrated in the programme and how this was informed through the design of the programme. The visitors noted that the standards of proficiency had been mapped mostly against the placement element of the programme therefore it appeared that there is a separation of theory and practice in the programme. The visitors require further evidence to demonstrate how the standards of proficiency are linked to all aspects of the curriculum, not just the placement element.

5.1 Practice placements must be integral to the programme.

Condition: The education provider must revisit the programme documentation and clearly outline how practice placements are integral to the programme.

Reason: From a review of the programme documentation and discussions with the programme team and practice placement providers the visitors noted that there was not enough evidence that the education provider was responsible for managing the placements in the programme. The visitors require further evidence to show the ongoing partnership arrangements with practice placements, how the education provider supports and encourages practice placement staff to take part in developing the programme and how the learning outcomes for the practice placement are in line with the rest of the programme.

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 education provider must revisit the programme documentation to demonstrate that the range of placements is appropriate to ensure the achievement of the programmes learning outcomes and the methods utilised to ensure that there is parity regarding the placement experience on the programme.

Reason: From the documentation submitted and discussions with the programme team, placement providers and students it was not clear that the education provider has mechanisms in place to ensure that all students on placements get comparable experiences. From the information provided at the visit it was apparent that some of the placements utilised are multi-disciplinary and some are single discipline. The visitors were therefore concerned that some placement providers could offer students a wide range of clinical experiences and others would only be able to offer students a limited range.

The visitors therefore require further evidence that demonstrates how the education provider ensures comparable experience across students on the programme despite different placement environments. This evidence should detail the elements that are required of each placement environment and the core outcomes required to ensure that all students are fit to practice on completion of the programme. The visitors also require information that demonstrates that these requirements are clearly articulated to all parties involved in placements.

5.3 The practice placement settings must provide a safe and supportive environment.

Condition: The education provider must revisit the programme documentation and outline the process for checking the quality of placements. The education provider must also produce guidelines on their placement requirements,

articulating what they constitute as a safe and supportive placement environment.

Reason: From a review of the documentation and discussions with the programme team and practice placement providers the visitors could find no evidence of a mechanism in place to check and monitor the quality of a practice placement and therefore demonstrate that the education provider was responsible for and managing the placements in the programme. The visitors require further evidence of the auditing process and the guidelines in place to ensure that the education provider can make a judgement on whether placements are of good quality and provide safe and supportive environments.

5.4 The education provider must maintain a thorough and effective system for approving and monitoring all placements.

Condition: The education provider must revisit all programme documentation and produce clear policies and procedures to support the approval and monitoring of placements.

Reason: From the documents submitted and discussions with the programme team the visitors did not have enough evidence that the education provider has a thorough and effective system in place for the approval and monitoring of placements and therefore that the education provider was responsible for the placements in the programme. The visitors require the education provider to produce clear policies and procedures around placements in the programme to ensure that this standard is met.

In addition, the visitors noted references in the documentation to students being removed from placements due to unsatisfactory performance. The visitors require clarification of what constitutes unsatisfactory performance and how this policy is communicated to all parties involved in placements.

5.5 The placement providers must have equality and diversity policies in relation to students, together with an indication of how these will be implemented and monitored.

Condition: The education provider must provide further information about the way in which they check the quality of placements and monitor the equality and diversity policies of practice placements. The education provider must also clarify the mechanisms that they use to inform students about access to these policies.

Reason: From a review of the programme documentation and discussions with the programme team and practice placement providers the visitors could find no evidence of a mechanism in place to check and monitor the quality of a practice placement and therefore demonstrate that the education provider was responsible for managing the placements in the programme. The visitors require further information to clarify the mechanisms that the education provider uses to monitor the equality and diversity policies of its practice placements. The visitors also require evidence that demonstrates how students are informed about accessing

the equality and diversity policies on placements and what to do if they feel they have been discriminated against whilst on placement.

5.6 There must be an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff at the practice placement setting.

Condition: The education provider must clarify the placement audit and document a clear process for monitoring staff numbers and experience within the placements utilised on the programme. The education provider must also document the criteria by which they judge staff to be appropriately qualified and experienced.

Reason: From the documentation provided prior to the visit and speaking to the programme team and practice placement providers the visitors could find no evidence of a mechanism in place to check and monitor the quality of practice placements and therefore demonstrate that the education provider was responsible for managing the placements in the programme. The visitors require further information to clarify the mechanisms that the education provider uses to monitor the staff numbers and experience of its practice placements and the staff numbers and experience requirements that the education provider sets to ensure that staff support student learning in a safe environment.

5.8 Practice placement educators must undertake appropriate practice placement educator training.

Condition: The education provider must clearly articulate the mechanism they use to ensure practice placement educators undertake appropriate practice placement educator training.

Reason: From the documentation submitted and discussions with the programme team and placement providers it was not made clear that sufficient arrangements are in place to prepare practice placement educators to supervise students on the programme. The visitors noted that the education provider could utilise practice placement educators who had received external training for supervising students. The visitors require clarification of how the education provider ensures the suitability of this training in preparing educators to take students from this programme.

From the information provided the visitors could not determine how practice placement educators were informed of the programme specific requirements including the learning outcomes. The visitors require further evidence that demonstrates the plans for delivering programme specific training to practice placement educators, the details of the commencement dates of this training and the content of the planned training. The visitors also require evidence to show how they will provide ongoing refresher training.

5.10 There must be regular and effective collaboration between the education provider and the practice placement provider.

Condition: The education provider must provide evidence of how they ensure that there is regular communication between the education provider and practice placements to ensure that key information is exchanged between the two parties.

Reason: From discussions with the programme team and the practice placement educators it was clear that collaboration was in place. The visitors were concerned however that information regarding CRB checks was not being communicated between the two as it was mentioned that this information was kept solely with the practice placements. The visitors require further evidence to demonstrate that the education provider effectively collaborates with the practice placement providers regarding key information in relation to student CRB checks.

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 education provider must revisit the programme documentation to demonstrate how students and practice placement educators are fully prepared for placements in the programme.

Reason: From a review of the documentation provided the visitors noted that the placement handbook was in a draft format. The visitors noted that the information provided in this document did not fully prepare students, practice placement providers and educators with the information required to prepare all parties for the placement experience. The visitors noted that the learning outcomes were not clearly communicated within this document and therefore it was not clear how the learning outcomes were linked to the requirement that the standards of proficiency are met. The document provided also did not clearly communicate the timings and durations of placements and the associated records to be maintained on placements, the assessment procedures and the lines of communication and responsibility between the education provider, the students and the practice placement.

The visitors therefore require further evidence to demonstrate that this standard is being met; this could be in the form of a finalised placement handbook.

6.1 The assessment strategy and design must ensure that the student who successfully completes the programme has met the standards of proficiency for their part of the Register.

Condition: The education provider must revisit the learning outcomes and module descriptors to clearly demonstrate how they ensure that the standards of proficiency are assessed within the programme.

Reason: From the documentation provided prior to the visit the visitors were unable to see where the standards of proficiency were being met within the programme from the module descriptors and learning outcomes. The visitors also noted that the standards of proficiency had been mapped mostly against the placement element of the programme and appeared dependent on the Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS) portfolio. The visitors require clarification of whether the IBMS portfolio would be utilised in the programme as it stands or if it would be adapted by the education provider to the programme. In the case of the portfolio being adapted the visitors would require the finalised version of this assessment tool.

From the documentation submitted it was not clear who would be assessing the practice placement elements and the IBMS portfolio. The visitors require further evidence regarding the assessment of the placement module in the programme including details of the methods of assessments, what is required as part of the placement assessments, the timescales involved and clarification of the actions taken if the timescales or assessment requirements are not met. The visitors noted that if the education provider were to use IBMS verifiers to assess students on placements, as was indicated at the visit, they would not be assessing the specific learning outcomes for the placement module. The visitors require evidence of the training that will be provided to verifiers for the requirements of the programme.

The visitors therefore require further evidence to demonstrate that the assessment methods used ensure that the students are meeting the standards of proficiency and are clearly communicated to all parties involved in the programme to demonstrate that this standard is being met.

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

Condition: The education provider must revisit the programme documentation to clearly demonstrate how the assessment methods ensure that the standards of proficiency are assessed within the programme.

Reason: From the documentation provided prior to the visit the visitors were unable to link the successful attainment of the standards of proficiency to the learning outcomes. The visitors require further evidence to clarify the assessment methods used during the practice placements that demonstrates the link to the module learning outcomes.

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

Condition: The education provider must revisit the programme documentation to clearly demonstrate how the measurement of student performance is objective within the programme and ensures fitness to practice.

Reason: From the documentation provided prior to the visit the visitors were unable to clearly link the successful attainment of the standards of proficiency to the learning outcomes. The visitors could not fully determine the details around the education provider placement visits, the criteria of the visits and details outlining the expectations of placement tutors and the work that students are required to complete at which stages of the placement experience.

The visitors also expressed concern by the potential lack of parity in the assessment of students because practice placement educators did not appear to have received programme specific training from the education provider. The visitors therefore require further evidence to demonstrate that this standard is being met, this should include clarification of the mechanisms in place to ensure that the education provider maintains overall responsibility for placements.

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

Condition: The education provider must revisit the programme documentation and clarify the requirements for student progression and achievement within the placement module of the programme.

Reason: From the documentation submitted it was not clear what arrangements were in place for students who did not progress from the placement year into the final year of the programme. The assessment regulations for the programme did not provide the required information on this matter. The visitors require the documentation to clearly outline the options that are available for a failing student on this programme. From discussions at the visit it was apparent that the assessment regulations for the programme were due to be finalised at an internal verification event in April. The visitors need to receive the finalised assessment regulations from this event. The visitors therefore require further evidence to demonstrate that this standard is being met.

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 education provider 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 in the external examiner recruitment policy. The visitors were happy with the planned external examiner arrangements for the programme but need to see evidence that HPC requirements regarding the external examiner on the programme have been included in the documentation to demonstrate the recognition of this requirement.

Recommendations

5.9 Practice placement educators must be appropriately registered, unless other arrangements are agreed.

Condition: The visitors wish to strongly recommend that the education provider checks that all practice placement educators are HPC registered.

Reason: The visitors recommend that the education provider checks the registration status of all placement educators if they are on the HPC register as an additional level of security for the education provider placement management.

Pradeep Agrawal
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