

The approval and monitoring processes

1. Key components

- 1.1 The Council must establish approval and monitoring processes that ensure that education providers meet the Standards of Education and Training. In order to achieve increased efficiency and effectiveness for all stakeholders, we want to streamline and unify current procedures. We also want variations between professions to be limited to profession-specific requirements.

As far as possible, the new procedures will align with and build upon existing approval and quality assurance processes already used by education providers. For example, annual monitoring and periodic review and quality assurance processes of other external stakeholders, for example, major review. An overview of the proposals for the approvals and annual monitoring processes is shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2.
- 1.2 A unified approach will mean that multiple professional approvals can be incorporated within a single approval event, where this is appropriate and practical for the education provider. It is also proposed that formal approval of education providers will now be achieved through the process of programme approval.
- 1.3 In accordance with the Order, we propose that programmes will normally be approved on an open-ended basis subject to satisfactory annual monitoring returns. Previously programmes were approved on a five-yearly cycle. Where there are changes to programmes the Council will determine, against established criteria, whether this will trigger a new approval event. If no major changes have occurred, or on-going issues arise through the annual monitoring process, then the Council reserves the right to visit and or initiate a new approval event. The Council believes that this proposed process for approval and monitoring of programmes will significantly reduce the regulatory burden on education providers.
- 1.4 The Council has established an Approvals Committee as a sub-committee of the Education and Training Committee with responsibility for overseeing the approvals and monitoring processes.

2. The multiple professional approach

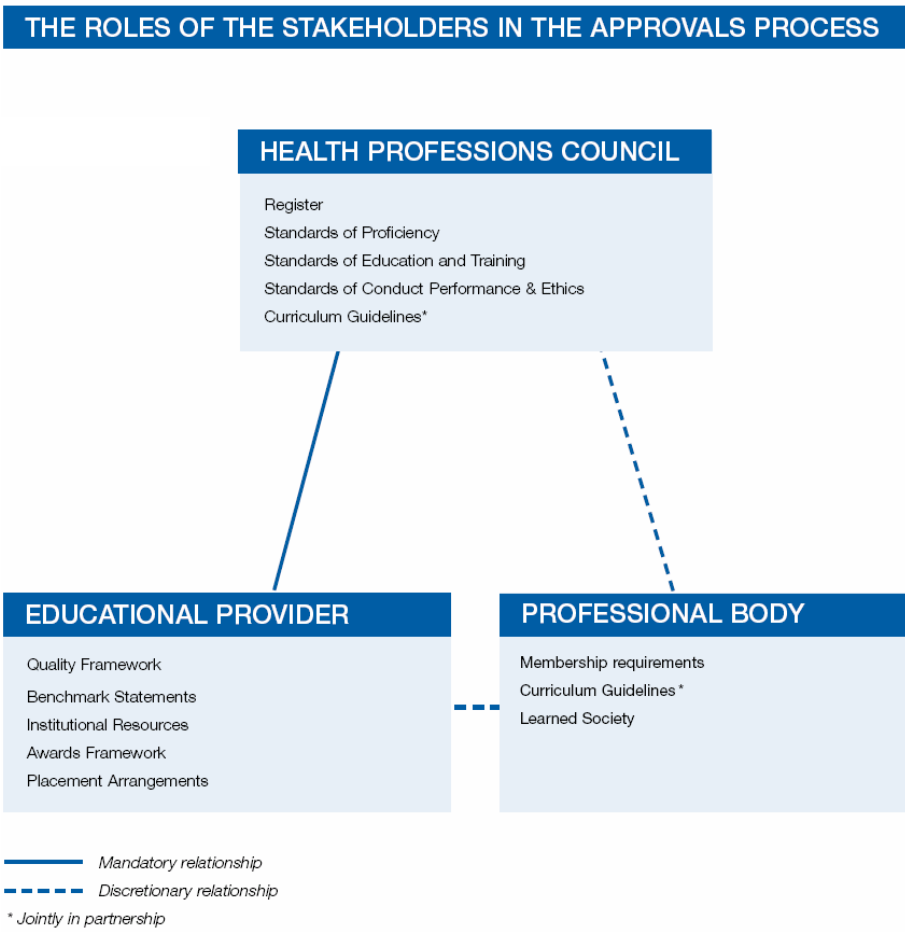
- 2.1 Approvals of new programmes will be made as they arise, but the Council (in collaboration with other stakeholders) will encourage education providers to group programmes together in order that the approvals may be dealt with in one event.
- 2.2 When multi-professional approval events take place, the panels will be carefully composed to make sure that each programme gets the required level of scrutiny to make sure that they meet the Standards of Education and Training and curriculum guidance of the profession.

3. Approval process

- 3.1 In accordance with the Order, the Council will approve programmes normally on an open-ended basis subject to satisfactory annual monitoring. Further approval would be needed if:
 - 3.1.1 there are major changes to a programme;
 - 3.1.2 material issues arise from annual monitoring; and/or
 - 3.1.3 concerns about a programme are raised from visits or monitoring processes.
- 3.2 It is the Council's strategic intent to work collaboratively with relevant stakeholders in the approvals process. This is summarised in Figure 3.

One key stakeholder will be the education provider with whom the Council has a mandatory relationship in the approvals process. Other key stakeholders are the professional bodies, with whom the Council has a discretionary relationship. The intention of Council is to engage the expertise and knowledge of the professional bodies in the development of the curriculum guidance, Standards of Education and Training, and Standards of Proficiency.
- 3.3 A key element of the approval process will be an approval event which will be held at the awarding educational institution. The HPC executive will work with the appropriate authority, for example the Academic Registrar or equivalent, within the educational institution to organise the approvals event.

Figure 3



4. Approval panel

4.1 An Approvals Committee has been set up as a non-statutory committee of the Education and Training Committee to oversee the organisation and management of the approval process. It will advise on the size, composition and membership of the approval panel for specific approval events.

It will draw membership of the approval panel from the list of HPC visitors, making sure that the panel has the required expertise to make decisions about the ability of a programme to meet the requirements of the Standards of Education and Training. It is generally expected that the education provider will supplement the HPC panel with additional members in order that both academic and regulatory approval can be considered at the same event.

4.2 Visitors are 'partners' appointed by the Council to visit education providers and report on programmes. They will normally operate in panels rather than individually.

4.3 The Order provides criteria for their appointment and for avoiding conflicts of interest. There must be at least one visitor who is a registrant from the relevant part of the Register and all visitors in a panel must be selected with due regard for the education and training to be reported on. Lay people (members of the public) may also be appointed as visitors.

5. Curriculum guidance

5.1 The Council is proposing to develop curriculum guidance by July 2005, working in partnership with other stakeholders including professional bodies. The guidance is to give education providers more detailed profession-specific information on programme content and delivery in order that the learning outcomes meet the standards of proficiency. It is the Council's intention to review curriculum guidance every three years.

6. Documentation required for programme approval

6.1 The Council expects that a single set of documents can be agreed between the Council and education providers for approval purposes.

These are likely to include:

- the business plan covering the programme;
- the curriculum;
- evidence that the programme can meet the Standards of Education and Training with regard to:
 - the level and integrity of the qualification;
 - admissions procedures;
 - programme duration;
 - programme management and staffing;
 - physical resources;
 - practice placements;
 - assessment and examinations; and
 - external examiners' reports as appropriate.

7. Approval reports

7.1 The HPC visitors will produce a report from the approval event, for submission to the Approvals Committee. The Council must publish the visitors' report and proposes to publish summaries of the visitors' reports in the annual report of the Education and Training Committee.

8. Register of programmes

8.1 The Council will continue to publish a register of courses which lists approved programmes, qualifications and education providers. No further information will be contained within this register.

9. Monitoring

9.1 The purpose of annual monitoring is to ensure that the programme continues to run as approved and continues to conform to the Standards of Education and Training. The Council is keen to adopt a "light touch" approach and, as such, the process should normally be documentary based as opposed to regular scheduled visits. It is intended, so far as possible, to use and build upon education providers' own processes for monitoring where they can provide the data needed.

9.2 We will not normally undertake an annual monitoring visit, but we reserve the right to under exceptional circumstances.

9.3 We will, however, visit institutions on a cyclic basis participating in the education provider's internal periodic review procedures.

10. Major changes

10.1 Where there are major changes to an approved programme, the Council expects that it would need to be re-approved.

Major changes will include:

- One off or cumulative changes affecting more than 25% of the programme
- Change to programme title
- Addition of new route/pathway within existing provision
- Changes to delivery modes eg distance learning; length of programme
- Relocation of site of delivery
- Material change to student numbers
- Significant reduction in resources
- Significant change in the admissions requirement
- Changes to overall aims, objectives, learning outcomes
- Significant change to assessment strategy

11. Minor changes

11.1 Other changes will be dealt with administratively and may not require a visit.

Minor changes will include changes to:

- Admissions requirements
- Module title
- Module credit value
- Module level
- Module relationships eg pre or co-requisites
- Module aims and learning outcomes
- Module assessment strategy including assessment criteria, modes and weighting
- Teaching and learning strategy – where there are no resource implications
- Replacement of an existing module or addition of a new module
- Up to a maximum of 25% of the programme

12. External examiners

12.1 External examiners are appointed by education providers to monitor the assessment process for the academic and the practice elements of programmes and to ensure that professional and academic standards are met. There should be a minimum of one external examiner who is on the relevant part of the register for each approved programme. Their primary function in the context of the Order is to provide on-going assurance that the programme continues to meet the criteria for approval.