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## Approval process report

### University of Sunderland, Hearing aid dispenser 2024-25

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#### Executive Summary

This is a report of the process to approve a hearing aid dispenser programme at the University of Sunderland. This report captures the process we have undertaken to assess the institution and programme(s) against our standards, to ensure those who complete the proposed programme(s) are fit to practice.

We have

- Reviewed the institution against our institution level standards and found our standards are met in this area
- Reviewed the programme(s) against our programme level standards and found our standards are met in this area following exploration of key themes through quality activities
- Recommended all standards are met, and that the programme(s) should be approved
- Decided that all standards are met, and that the programme(s) is approved

Through this assessment, we have noted:

- The areas we explored focused on:
  - There is evidence of the integration of theory and practice using video content, including practice-based scenarios and simulations. This supports theory-based learning and the application of theory to practice.
- The programme(s) meet all the relevant HCPC education standards and therefore should be approved

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<b>Previous consideration</b>	Not applicable as this approval was not based on any previous consideration
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<b>Decision</b>	The Education and Training Committee (Panel) is asked to decide whether the programme(s) is approved
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<b>Next steps</b>	The provider's next performance review will be in the 2026-27 academic year.
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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 approval process undertaken by the HCPC to ensure that the programme(s) detailed in this report meet our education standards. The report details the process itself, evidence considered, outcomes and recommendations made regarding the programme(s) approval / 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 approval process

Institutions and programmes must be approved by us before they can run. The approval process is formed of two stages:

- Stage 1 – we take assurance that institution level standards are met by the institution delivering the proposed programme(s)

- Stage 2 – we assess to be assured that programme level standards are met by each proposed programme

Through the approval process, we take assurance in a bespoke and flexible way, meaning that we will assess whether providers and programmes meet standards based on what we see, rather than by a one size fits all approach. Our standards are split along institution and programme level lines, and we take assurance at the provider level wherever possible.

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

### **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 panel members to support this review:

Joanna Lemanska	Lead visitor, Hearing aid dispenser
Peter Abel	Lead visitor, Biomedical scientist
Temilolu Odunaike	Education Quality Officer

## **Section 2: Institution-level assessment**

### **The education provider context**

The education provider currently delivers 14 HCPC-approved programmes across five professions and including two Independent and Supplementary Prescribing programmes. It is a Higher Education provider and has been running HCPC approved programmes since 2006.

All their HCPC-approved provision sits within the School of Nursing and Health Sciences, one of four schools within the Faculty of Health Sciences and Wellbeing. The proposed programme will also sit in this school.

The proposed programme is a top-up programme. The taught content of the new programme is to convert an audiologist to a hearing aid dispenser. We understand it would not be possible to assess clinical practice as learners would be required to register with HCPC in advance of commencement of independent private practice. The education provider has confirmed that there are no new clinical competencies required of the programme as the associated learning outcomes will have been undertaken prior to enrolment on the top-up programme.

Given the programme does not contain practice-based learning, we will not assess SET 5: Practice-based learning as part of this approval process.

### Practice areas delivered by the education provider

The provider is approved to deliver training in the following professional areas. A detailed list of approved programme awards can be found in [Appendix 2](#) of this report.

	Practice area	Delivery level		Approved since
<b>Pre-registration</b>	Biomedical scientist	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate	<input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate	2006
	Chiropodist / podiatrist	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate	<input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate	2024
	Occupational therapy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate	<input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate	2019
	Paramedic	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate	<input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate	2018
	Physiotherapist	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate	<input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate	2019
<b>Post-registration</b>	Independent Prescribing / Supplementary prescribing		2020	

### 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.

This data is for existing provision at the institution, and does not include the proposed programme(s).

Data Point	Benchmark	Value	Date	Commentary
Learner number capacity	582	607	2024-25	<p>The benchmark figure is data we have captured from previous interactions with the education provider, such as through initial programme approval, and / or through previous performance review assessments. Resources available for the benchmark number of learners was assessed and accepted through these processes. The value figure is the benchmark figure, plus the number of learners the provider is proposing through the new provision. The data shows the education provider is recruiting learners as expected.</p>
Learner non-continuation	3%	3%	2020-21	<p>This data was sourced from a data delivery. This means the data is a bespoke HESA data return, filtered bases on HCPC-related subjects The data point is equal to the benchmark, which suggests the provider's performance in this area is in line with sector norms. When compared to the previous year's data point, the education provider's performance has dropped by 2%.</p> <p>We did not explore this data point through this assessment because there is evidence that the education provider is still performing as expected in this area.</p>

<p>Outcomes for those who complete programmes</p>	<p>92%</p>	<p>95%</p>	<p>2021-22</p>	<p>This data was sourced from a data delivery. This means the data is a bespoke HESA data return, filtered bases on HCPC-related subjects The data point is above the benchmark, which suggests the provider is performing above sector norms. When compared to the previous year’s data point, the education provider’s performance has improved by 2%</p> <p>We did not explore this data point through this assessment because the data shows the education provider is performing as expected in this area.</p>
<p>Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) award</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>Silver</p>	<p>2023</p>	<p>The definition of a TEF award is “Provision is of high quality, and significantly and consistently exceeds the baseline quality threshold expected of UK Higher Education.”</p> <p>We did not explore this data point through this assessment because the data shows the education provider is performing as expected in this area.</p>
<p>Learner satisfaction</p>	<p>79.4%</p>	<p>87.6%</p>	<p>2024</p>	<p>This National Student Survey (NSS) positivity score data was sourced at the subject level. This means the data is for HCPC-related subjects The data point is above the benchmark, which suggests the provider is performing above sector norms. When compared to the previous year’s data point, the</p>

				<p>education provider's performance has improved by 8%. We recognise this as a significant improvement</p> <p>We did not explore this data point through this assessment because we noted education provider has consistently improved in this area over the past few years.</p>
HPCPC performance review cycle length	N/A	2026-27	5 years	<p>At their last performance review, the education provider received the maximum review period of 5 years. We considered that they were performing well across all the areas.</p>

We did not consider data points / intelligence from other organisations through this approval review.

### The route through stage 1

Institutions which run HCPC-approved provision have previously demonstrated that they meet institution-level standards. When an existing institution proposes a new programme, we undertake an internal review of whether we need to undertake a full partner-led review against our institution level standards, or whether we can take assurance that the proposed programme(s) aligns with existing provision.

As part of the request to approve the proposed programme(s), the education provider supplied information to show alignment in the following areas.

#### Admissions

#### **Findings on alignment with existing provision:**

- **Information for applicants –**
  - The admission policy outlines the key principles guiding the education provider's admissions processes for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at its UK campuses. It covers entry criteria, the application process, support for disabilities and specific learning differences, criminal records, admission of minors, scholarships, data protection, and contact information.
  - The policy emphasises the education provider's commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusivity, and includes Codes of Practice for

applicants with disabilities and those declaring a criminal record. It also details the complaints and appeals process, with oversight provided by the Marketing, Recruitment, and Admissions Group.

- Programme-specific information is available on webpages and through open days. The information provided is regularly updated to ensure accuracy, helping applicants to make informed choices about programmes.
- The information provided highlights the professional nature of programmes, the standards expected upon completion, the need to demonstrate good health and character, and the reasonable adjustments available for applicants with specific needs.
- This aligns with our understanding of how the institution runs and will apply to the new programme.
- **Assessing English language, character, and health –**
  - The Admissions Policy details the assessment process for English language proficiency and the applicant's suitability for a professional environment, including criminal convictions checks. It also includes a code of practice for applications from individuals with disabilities, learning difficulties, or long-term health conditions.
  - The education provider added that where a programme differs from the standard policy, this is detailed on the programme webpage and in the programme specification. Such differences include:
    - Specific entry qualifications including GCSE Maths and English
    - Health declaration form
    - A self-declaration form about conduct.
    - Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check
  - This aligns with our understanding of how the institution runs and the same will apply to the new programme.
- **Prior learning and experience (AP(E)L) –**
  - The Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) Policy defines APL and how it can be achieved. The policy outlines how prior learning can contribute to an award by the education provider. The APL application process involves discussions with the Programme leader and team to determine how learning outcomes can be achieved and assessed, along with providing appropriate evidence and relevant programme information.
  - After submission, the application is reviewed by the Programme leader and other staff, with final decisions recorded by the Programme Assessment Board and communicated to the learner.
  - The policy also describes alternative submission methods, and the appeals process against an APL decision, with Programme Assessment Boards monitoring the use of APL.
  - This is in alignment with our understanding of how the institution runs. The education provider noted no changes to how the new programme aligns.
- **Equality, diversity and inclusion –**

- The education provider noted the Admissions Policy aligns with their Education and Diversity Policies. These are set at institution level and apply to all programmes. The admissions process aims to align applicants' abilities and aptitudes with the programme's demands using transparent and justifiable criteria. The education provider also offers Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) staff development workshops to equip staff with the necessary knowledge and skills. These help to:
  - Ensure all staff understand the importance of equality, diversity, and inclusion, the main forms of discrimination, and compliance with laws and legislation.
  - Raise awareness among Senior Managers about the importance of inclusion for staff and learners.
  - Equip the EDI Group to create a positive and inclusive working environment through Ally training and awareness of marginalised groups.
  - Embed the principles of EDI within all programmes offered by the education provider.
- This aligns with our understanding of how the institution runs. We think this as the education provider has noted no changes to the new programme.

**Non-alignment requiring further assessment:** The new programme is a theory only conversion module. Therefore, we would expect the vast majority of the standards of proficiency would have been met before applicants join the new programme. This would ensure learners have achieved the competencies required to practise as a hearing aid dispenser. We will need to assess the education provider's APEL policy to ensure this has been considered for this programme. We will therefore require that visitors assess this in stage 2.

### Management and governance

#### **Findings on alignment with existing provision:**

- **Ability to deliver provision to expected threshold level of entry to the Register<sup>1</sup> –**
  - The education provider has robust procedures in place to quality assure programmes, ensuring threshold entry routes to the Register are met. Academic Regulations provide a framework for undergraduate level modules. Exceptions to these regulations, to meet Professional, Statutory, and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) requirements, must be approved by the Academic Board. These exceptions are recorded as programme-specific regulations. For example, the education provider noted health programmes have programme specific regulations specifying English language requirements and preventing compensation of modules and work-based learning assessments.

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<sup>1</sup> This is focused on ensuring providers are able to deliver qualifications at or equivalent to the level(s) in SET 1, as required for the profession(s) proposed

- The education provider has a Programme Enhancement Plan process which ensures and enhances the quality of taught programmes in line with the Office for Students Quality Assessment. Programme teams must address issues from external examiner reports, learner satisfaction, retention/achievement, graduate outcomes data, and collaborative partner delivery. Reports are reviewed by Programme Studies Boards, with ongoing evaluation throughout the academic year. The process supports immediate intervention and addresses strategic concerns at the faculty or institution level.
- The education provider's curriculum design framework ensures that curricula are inclusive and aligned with graduate attributes and future employment. The Generic Descriptor Framework assesses learner performance against appropriate learning thresholds. Together, these frameworks ensure that internal and external quality standards are met, making the provision viable, sustainable, and aligned with the education provider's Strategic Plan.
- The above are institution-wide policies and processes which will apply to the new programme in the same way.
- **Sustainability of provision –**
  - The education provider has a University Strategic Plan which aims for programmes to be educationally and financially sustainable, with a career-focused curriculum. They noted their School of Nursing and Health Sciences has been keen to drive programme and learner growth. To ensure sustainability, the faculty executive collaborates with the education provider executive to provide appropriate staffing and facilities. The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Commercial) oversees developments, while the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) oversees quality metrics. New programmes are included in the faculty plan, learner number planning, and staffing plans.
  - The education provider noted they have processes and guidance for designing, developing, and periodically reviewing programmes at the institutional level. These processes ensure that programmes are fit for purpose, sustainable, meet internal and external quality standards, and align with the education provider's aims and mission.
  - This aligns with our understanding of how the institution runs and the education provider has noted the new programme will follow the same approach.
- **Effective programme delivery –**
  - The Faculty Plan ensures that staff recruitment aligns with programme development and learner enrolment, ensuring sustainability. The Staff Recruitment Strategy and Staff Recruitment and Selection Procedure help to attract, select, and retain suitable candidates to lead the programme. Health professionals are recruited into academic teams to ensure qualified staff manage programmes.
  - The Framework for Academic Workloading supports academic duties, professional development, and practice. Staff can work up to one day a

week in practice with NHS Trusts to maintain clinical competency. The Faculty Plan includes faculty structure and management, with HCPC-approved provision in the School of Nursing and Health Sciences.

- This is in alignment with our understanding of how the institution runs and the education provider has noted no changes to how the new programme aligns with existing institutional policies and processes in this area.
- **Effective staff management and development –**
  - With all of their HCPC-approved provision sitting within the School of Nursing and Health Sciences, the education provider noted Monthly Senior Management Team Meetings facilitate regular communication between the Head of School and Team Leaders. Team Leaders manage the workload of academic staff, ensuring appropriate expertise for module delivery, shared administrative responsibilities, and equitable time for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and research.
  - The education provider's performance review process identifies training needs and development opportunities, including mentoring support. The school also has an induction programme for new staff, introducing them to key personnel and providing an overview of services and teaching practices.
  - The education provider's Learning and Teaching Strategy is implemented through the Student Success Plan, aiming to provide transformative education. Academic development for staff is supported by the Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT). This offers guidance and training on module evaluation, lecture recording, peer observation, research-active curriculum development, and virtual learning environment standards. CELT also provides CPD and taught programmes, including a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (Health Professions Education), and supports the design of learning materials.
  - This aligns with our understanding of how the institution runs and will apply to the new programme in the same way.
- **Partnerships, which are managed at the institution level –**
  - The School of Nursing and Health Sciences holds strategic and operational meetings with the NHS and other healthcare providers to set and monitor forward planning, practice-based learning capacity, and quality. Updates are provided for practice assessors across programmes, and the School collaborates with NHS England on practice-based learning quality monitoring processes and systems.
  - The education provider noted they have policies and guidance to approve and monitor practice-based learning settings. However, they noted the new programme is a theory only conversion module and therefore there would be no specific practice-based learning opportunities as part of the proposed programme practice-based learning competency is assessed as part of the approved Audiology

programme required to enrol on the new programme. As outlined above, there is a referral to stage 2 for the education provider's APEL policy.

- This aligns with our understanding of how the institution runs and the new programme will follow same approach.

**Non-alignment requiring further assessment:** None.

### Quality, monitoring, and evaluation

#### **Findings on alignment with existing provision:**

- **Academic quality –**
  - The education provider has a Module Evaluation Policy that outlines the use of module evaluations at an institutional level to enhance programmes and improve the learner experience in teaching and learning. Staff Student Liaison Committees and Programme Studies Boards review the evaluation data, which is reported centrally for quality assurance and enhancement. Learner feedback is collected and made available in real-time via the online PowerBI system. Additionally, module leaders and tutors gather ongoing feedback from learners during modules to respond promptly.
  - Programmes undergo periodic review every six years to ensure quality and standards, supporting strategic planning. Reviews are conducted by a panel of internal and external academics, learners, and employer representatives. The policy is applied institution-wide, detailing the requirements and process. PSRB accreditation/re-accreditation events may align with this review process or occur independently.
  - The external examiner policy ensures the standards of awards and the quality of the assessment process at an institutional level, while also supporting curriculum development. Programme teams recruit external examiners with the necessary academic and professional expertise, who must be on the relevant part of the Register. These examiners are formally appointed by the Academic Development and Quality Sub Committee. The policy outlines the duties of external examiners, including the production of annual reports. This process helps maintain high standards and continuous improvement in academic programmes.
  - This aligns with our understanding of how the institution runs and will apply to the new programme in the same way.
- **Practice quality, including the establishment of safe and supporting practice learning environments –**
  - The education provider's Fitness to Practice Policy deals with learners' health, conduct, and competence which may affect their fitness for professional practice, and as a result, impact safety and wellbeing of service users. It outlines the process for raising concerns, conducting investigations, holding panel hearings, and navigating appeals. Additionally, learners receive guidance on raising concerns via the

HCPC website and employer Whistle Blowing policies for workplace safety and safeguarding issues.

- The education provider noted the new programme is a theory only module. Practice-based learning competency is assessed as part of the (BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science – Audiology programme or equivalent) required to enrol on the new programme. As noted earlier under education provider context, this single module top-up programme does not contain practice-based learning element. Therefore, we will not be assessing practice-based learning in this approval.
- **Learner involvement –**
  - Policies around learner engagement are applied at the institutional level. The Student Learning Engagement policy outlines how data on learner engagement, including attendance and use of the virtual learning environment, is used to support learners and enable early academic or support intervention.
  - The Student Representation and Feedback Policy describes the joint accountability and responsibility of the education provider and the Students' Union in ensuring learner representation within the education provider community. This policy details the roles and selection process of learner representatives. It also covers the membership and function of the Student Representation Steering Group and the remit of the Student-Staff Liaison Committee. Training for learner representatives is provided by the Students' Union. These policies aim to enhance learner engagement and representation across the education provider.
  - Learners are represented within the University committee structure as:
    - Sabbatical officers of the Students' Union represent learners as full members of the Academic Board and its subcommittees.
    - School Coordinators are full members of the Faculty Academic Committee (FAC) for their faculty and the Student Representation Steering Group.
    - Learner course representatives are full members of each Module Studies Board (MSB) and Programme Studies Board (PSB), with two representatives per Board.
  - For learners on the new programme to be part of the University committee structure, the education provider noted they will invite these learners alongside other learners to participate in the Student Voice Feedback Forums (SVFF). Feedback will be collected at key points within the module (mid-point and endpoint), as well as on an ongoing basis. Ongoing feedback will be addressed as needed, while all feedback will be reviewed and acted upon during SVFF meetings. Updates and actions will be communicated to current learners, and programme updates from previous cohorts will be included in the programme handbook for new learners.
  - Learners provide feedback on their modules through the Virtual Learning Environment and CANVAS. This feedback is reviewed by Staff Student Liaison Committees and Programme Studies Boards.

The evaluation results are then reported centrally. This process is part of the institution's quality assurance and enhancement efforts.

- This aligns with our understanding of how the institution runs and the new programme will follow the same approach.
- **Service user and carer involvement –**
  - The education provider has a Strategy for Patient, Carer, and Public Involvement (PCPI) which is applied at the Faculty of Health Sciences and Wellbeing. The education provider noted the faculty's PCPI programme is robust, involves around 200 participants, and is based on NHS constitution values and Tew's ladder of involvement.
  - PCPI participants collaborate with academic staff at a partnership level, contributing to module development, interviews, induction, examinations, and relevant modules throughout the learners' programmes. They are also involved in interprofessional learning events.
  - The education provider noted the new programme aligns the standards of proficiency for hearing aid dispensers with the entry requirements of the BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science – Audiology programme or its equivalent. The inclusion of PCPI participants is based on the mapped undergraduate programme.
  - Feedback from PCPI participants is integrated into the programme, with learners providing feedback through module evaluation forms, emails, or directly to the academic lead. Staff work with the academic lead to enhance sessions based on this feedback, which is shared among learners, staff, and PCPI participants.
  - This is in alignment with our understanding of how the institution runs and the education provider has not noted any changes for the new programme.

**Non-alignment requiring further assessment:** It is unclear whether service users and carers are involved in the new programme. Therefore, this will be referred to stage 2 review.

### Learners

#### **Findings on alignment with existing provision:**

- **Support –**
  - The education provider offers a variety of services, processes, and facilities to support learners. The Student Journey provides comprehensive support services for both staff and learners. The Gateway serves as a one-stop shop for learner enquiries, accessible via dedicated web pages for distance learners.
  - Learner support begins at the application stage and continues through enrolment, academic and personal assistance throughout the programme. An institution-wide Student Handbook is provided to detail these services.

- Policies around learner support include:
  - Personal Academic Tutor Policy
  - Virtual Learning Environment 'US Start'
  - Extenuating Circumstances Regulations and Guidance
  - Student Complaint Procedure; and
  - Student Complaint Investigation Protocol
- The Personal Tutorial Support Policy defines the minimum entitlement to personal tutorial support for undergraduate learners. It explains the purpose of tutorial meetings and outlines the expectations for both personal tutors and learners. Each learner is assigned a Personal Tutor at the beginning of their programme, with contact details provided upon enrolment. Essential information about personal tutorials is available through Programme Handbooks and the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). This policy ensures learners have access to consistent and structured support throughout their studies.
- The Student Casework Team follows institutional policies and procedures to investigate learner complaints. These policies define the scope, timelines, available support, and steps for informal or formal resolution, as well as the valid grounds for submitting a complaint. The complaints process also applies to issues arising during practice-based learning, with relevant information provided in the Work-based Learning Handbooks.
- Learners and service users may be invited to participate in educational activities such as role-play scenarios. Learner consent is governed by the School of Nursing and Health Sciences' Learner Consent Policy, while service user consent is outlined in the Strategy for Patient, Carer and Public Involvement.
- This aligns with our understanding of how the institution runs and will apply in the same way to the new programme.
- **Ongoing suitability –**
  - The education provider noted that learners enrolled in health professions programmes must complete self-declaration documents regarding their health and conduct and undergo DBS checks as specified in the admissions section. They are also required to notify the education provider of any changes to their records during their studies.
  - The Fitness to Practise Procedure, applicable across the institution, addresses issues related to learners' health, conduct, and competence that may impact their professional practice. This procedure includes steps for raising concerns, conducting investigations, holding panel hearings, and the appeals process.
  - Learners who commit academic or disciplinary offences that may affect their fitness to practise can be referred under the education provider's Fitness to Practise Procedure. Learners are instructed on the code of conduct required by their professional body and the education provider's student code of conduct and expected behaviours.
  - The education provider's Fitness to Practice Policy specifies that relevant professional bodies must be informed in cases of fitness to

practice issues. The British Academy of Audiology (BAA) is the main professional body representing the specialism and supports policy and education formation, alongside the British Society of Audiology (BSA).

- The Academy of Healthcare Science (AHCS) is the primary registration route for NHS Audiologists. Although registration with the AHCS is voluntary and does not confer a protected title, it is commonly required for job applications. Therefore, registration with the AHCS is an entry requirement for the new programme. This is outlined in the Programme Specification.
- This aligns with our understanding of how the institution runs and the education provider has not noted any changes as to how the above apply to the new programme.
- **Learning with and from other learners and professionals (IPL/E) –**
  - The Interprofessional Learning (IPL) Strategy is implemented at the faculty level. It outlines the pedagogical approach to IPL, the involvement of Patient Carer and Public Involvement participants, and the processes for quality enhancement.
  - The new programme aligns the standards of proficiency for hearing aid dispensers with the entry requirements of the BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science – Audiology programme or its equivalent. The IPL strategy is based on the mapped undergraduate programme.
  - This aligns with our understanding of how the institution runs and the new programme will follow the same approach.
- **Equality, diversity and inclusion –**
  - The education provider's equality and diversity policies are applicable to all programmes and are monitored by Programme Studies Boards. Learners are required to study these policies, relevant laws, and their implications for practice and their roles as practitioners.
  - The Inclusive Programme Design Disabled Students - Guide ensures guidance on inclusive programme design is provided, covering the creation of learning materials and assessments. Occupational Health assessments ensure that appropriate support measures and reasonable adjustments are implemented as needed.
  - This is in alignment with our understanding of how the institution runs and the same will apply to the new programme.

**Non-alignment requiring further assessment:** It is unclear how learners on the new programme will learn with and from other learners and professionals. Therefore, we will review this through the stage 2 assessment.

### Assessment

#### **Findings on alignment with existing provision:**

- **Objectivity –**
  - The education provider's assessment and marking policies are applied at the institutional level. The Assessment Policy outlines the basic

requirements for assessment, including academic standards, learning outcomes, and assessment criteria.

- The Marking Policy details the approach to anonymous marking and moderation, as well as the role of the external examiner. These policies are implemented at the programme level by Module and Programme Studies Boards and Assessment Boards. The programme-level assessment strategy is specified in the Programme Specifications. This ensures a consistent and fair assessment process across the education provider.
- This is in line with our understanding of how the institution runs and will apply to the new programme in the same way.
- **Progression and achievement** –
  - The education provider's Academic Regulations outline the conditions for learner progression and achievement. Any exceptions to these regulations, such as those required to meet Professional, Statutory, and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) requirements, must be approved by the Academic Board and are documented as programme-specific regulations. These exceptions are included in the Terms of Reference and actions/decisions of Module and Programme Boards.
  - Programme requirements are communicated to learner through Programme Specifications and/or Programme Handbooks.
  - Information on attendance monitoring is provided in the Student Handbook, with programme-specific requirements detailed in Programme Specifications and/or Programme Handbooks. Attendance during online learning is monitored through the virtual learning environment.
  - This is in alignment with our understanding of how the institution runs. The new programme will also follow this approach.
- **Appeals** –
  - The Academic Appeal Process is implemented at the institutional level. It outlines the grounds for appeal, the procedure involving both faculty and institution-level stages, and the associated timeframes.
  - This aligns with our understanding of how the institution runs. There will be no changes to how the new programme aligns.

**Non-alignment requiring further assessment:** None.

### **Outcomes from stage 1**

We decided to progress to stage 2 of the process without further review through stage 1, due to the clear alignment of the new provision within existing institutional structures, as noted through the previous section.

Education and training delivered by this institution is underpinned by the provision of the following key facilities:

- The education provider noted they have access to a wide range of physical resources. These include of Audiometric equipment including Audiometers, Tympanometers, Video Oscopes, Noah software for hearing aid programming and Affinity Compact test box equipment. They also use a number of simulation audiometers (OTIS).
- As the proposed programme is a top-up for graduates of a BSc (Hons) Audiology programme, we understand only online resources are needed. These include the Virtual Learning Environment, Canvas, for accessing materials and submitting work, and Teams for live sessions. The on-campus library offers a range of Audiology textbooks, mostly available as e-books.
- In terms of staffing resources, we understand the person with overall responsibility for the programme is a HCPC registered biomedical scientist. We will review this in stage 2 to consider how the education provider determines their suitability to lead the programme. The programme lead is supported by other staff members who are NHS qualified Audiologists and registered with the Academy for Healthcare Science.

**Risks identified which may impact on performance:** None.

**Outstanding issues for follow up:**

The new programme is a theory only conversion module. Therefore, we would expect the vast majority of the standards of proficiency would have been met before applicants join the new programme. We will need to assess the education provider’s APEL policy to ensure this has been considered for this programme. We will therefore require that visitors assess this in stage 2.

It is unclear whether service users and carers are involved in the new programme. Therefore, this will be referred to stage 2 review.

It is unclear how learners on the new programme will learn with and from other learners and professionals. Therefore, we will review this through the stage 2 assessment.

**Section 3: Programme-level assessment**

**Programmes considered through this assessment**

Programme name	Mode of study	Profession (including modality) / entitlement	Proposed learner number, and frequency	Proposed start date

Certificate of Proficiency in Hearing Aid Dispensing	DL (Distance Learning)	Hearing Aid Dispenser	25 learners, 1 cohort per year	09/06/2025
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## Stage 2 assessment – provider submission

The education provider was asked to demonstrate how they meet programme level standards for each programme. They supplied information about how each standard was met, including a rationale and links to supporting information via a mapping document.

## Quality themes identified for further exploration

We reviewed the information provided, and worked with the education provider on our understanding of their submission. Based on our understanding, we defined and undertook the following quality assurance activities linked to the quality themes referenced below. This allowed us to consider whether the education provider met our standards.

We have reported on how the provider meets standards, including the areas below, through the [Findings section](#).

### Quality theme 1 – integration of theory and practice

**Area for further exploration:** The education provider explained that this standard did not apply, as the programme does not include a clinical practice element.

The visitors understood that there is no clinical practice involved in the programme, and the rationale for this was clearly explained. However, they considered there are several skills (e.g., those associated with the sale of hearing aids) that cannot be learned through theoretical teaching alone. For example, we requested evidence to demonstrate how learning outcome 3 in HCS316 Advanced principles of audiological assessment would be met without any practice or service users / service representative involvement:

- Plan rehabilitation programmes for a range of implants and hearing aids and formulate effective and appropriate management strategies for rehabilitating of adults with hearing loss and/or tinnitus.

The visitors therefore requested the education provider submit evidence to demonstrate how this standard was met.

**Quality activities agreed to explore theme further:** We explored this area through email clarification. We considered this the best approach for the education provider to address the query raised by the visitors.

**Outcomes of exploration:** We understood from the response that video content, including practice-based scenarios and simulations, will be integrated throughout the programme to support theory-based learning and the application of theory to practice. This content, created with the education provider's Patient, Carer and Public Involvement (PCPI) programme, will feature examples of both good and bad practices in areas such as health and safety, hearing aid sales, and ethical practice. Learners will reflect on these examples and apply the lessons to their own practice.

The education provider added that the programme also includes live online seminars where learners will present and discuss reflective case examples with peers and academic/clinical staff. These sessions will require learners to apply their knowledge to real-life scenarios, helping to contextualise theoretical principles. They noted this approach promotes peer-to-peer learning, reflection, and the development of best practices, thereby supporting the integration of theory and practice.

The visitors were satisfied that the programme allows for the integration of theory and practice. Therefore, they determined that the quality activity had addressed the gap identified.

## Section 4: Findings

This section details the visitors' findings from their review through stage 2, including any requirements set, and a summary of their overall findings.

### **Conditions**

Conditions are requirements that must be met before providers or programmes can be approved. We set conditions when there is an issue with the education provider's approach to meeting a standard. This may mean that we have evidence that standards are not met at this time, or the education provider's planned approach is not suitable.

The visitors were satisfied that no conditions were required to satisfy them that all standards are met. The visitors' findings, including why no conditions were required, are presented below.

### **Overall findings on how standards are met**

This section provides information summarising the visitors' findings against the programme-level standards. The section also includes a summary of risks, further areas to be followed up, and areas of good practice.

### **Findings of the assessment panel:**

- **SET 1: Level of qualification for entry to the Register** – this standard is covered through institution-level assessment.
- **SET 2: Programme admissions** –
  - The education provider noted that their institution's Admission Policy provides clear information on admission processes for all undergraduate programmes. In addition, the Website Proforma submitted detailed the entry requirements for the programme. This includes a range of indicative appropriate audiology qualifications (at or above degree level), which must include successful completion of a clinical audiology practice-based learning and competency logbook. Applicants who have alternative qualifications will be considered on a case-by-case basis, with their programme content mapped against the education provider's BSc (Hons) Audiology programme. From seeking further clarification, we understood formal APEL does not apply to this programme, and that all specific SOPs will be met through previously acquired qualifications. As referred from the stage 1 assessment, we received the APEL policy which also confirmed this.
  - The main entry route onto the top-up programme is the completion of the BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science – Audiology programme. This programme is accredited by the National School of Healthcare Science, and graduates are eligible to register with the Academy for Healthcare Science (AHCS) as Clinical Physiologists in Audiology. The education provider has undertaken a mapping exercise against this audiology programme to ensure graduates have the required knowledge, skills and experience to undertake the top-up programme to become a hearing aid dispenser.
  - The visitors were satisfied with the information provided and determined that the programme-level standard within this SET area is met.
- **SET 3: Programme governance, management and leadership** –
  - The programme is a single-module programme intended for qualified professionals who have already completed the practical component. As there is no practice-based learning element, standards around collaboration with practice education providers (SET 3.5) and capacity and availability of practice -based learning (SET 3.6) do not apply.
  - In relation to service users and carers' involvement [referred from stage 1 assessment](#), the education provider explained that their Patient, Carer and Public Involvement (PCPI) programme is embedded across all their Healthcare Science programmes so the new programme will also benefit from this. More specifically, service users and carers will:
    - participate in informal interview discussions to help assess applicants' suitability for the programme;
    - contribute to developing and delivering teaching materials, ensuring theory-based learning integrates practical examples that reflect their needs; and

- their input will inform annual Programme Enhance Plans, shaping programme changes to align with current practice and legislation.
  - The staff curriculum vitae (CVs) submitted demonstrated there are two members of staff committed to the programme who are appropriately qualified and experienced, with one of them being on the HCPC Register as a hearing aid dispenser.
  - The staff CVs also showed they have the necessary knowledge and extensive clinical experience required to teach and assess learners on the programme.
  - The programme is delivered fully online. The virtual learning environment (VLE), Canvas, is available to learners to access teaching materials and for submission of formative work. Microsoft Teams is a secure platform used for delivering live lectures but can also be recorded.
  - The visitors were satisfied that both the staffing and physical resources available would ensure effective delivery of the programme.
  - Therefore, the visitors determined that all standards within this SET area are met.
- **SET 4: Programme design and delivery –**
  - All SOPs are appropriately mapped to the learning outcomes of the Certificate of Proficiency in Hearing Aid Dispensing programme and the entry requirement for the BSc (Hons) Audiology qualification with successful completion of clinical audiology practice-based learning.
  - From seeking further information and as highlighted through the [referral from stage 1 assessment](#), we noted how the entry requirements ensure that the SOPs delivered by previous qualifications are covered so we are assured that learners who complete the top-up programme will meet all the SOPs for hearing aid dispensers.
  - The detailed SOPs mapping and the curriculum content demonstrated that learners understand and meet the expectations of professional behaviour (including the standards of conduct, performance and ethics). For example, the education provider noted the first section of the programme is dedicated to developing learner understanding of the regulatory framework and registration requirements of HCPC and hearing aid dispensers.
  - The education provider noted that the programme aims to help learners bridge the knowledge gap between NHS and Private Sector clinical practice. Learners will already possess essential clinical competencies and core values like patient-centred care, confidentiality, and professional development. These values will be monitored through seminars and case study sessions. Through further clarification, we understood applicants will need to provide a reference confirming their clinical skills, knowledge, and behaviours are current and relevant to the speciality.
  - The programme content is designed to ensure learners gain the knowledge, skills, and behaviours required for registration as a hearing

aid dispenser, aligned with module learning outcomes. It is regularly reviewed and updated in response to changes in clinical practice, stakeholder expectations, and professional standards set by bodies such as the HCPC and the British Society of Hearing Aid Audiologists

- (BSHAA). Updates are implemented through the Programme Enhancement Plan, Improvement Plan, and Annual Module Review Reports to maintain compliance and support professional development.
- Aside aligning with the education provider's annual programme review process, annual module review, and external moderation policy, the education provider noted their Programme Enhancement Plan would help to ensure the programme remains relevant to current practice. The education provider noted the programme team will monitor changes to current HCPC standards and also liaise with relevant employer stakeholders to ensure currency. The visitors were satisfied the education provider has a robust module review as well as other processes that would ensure the programme reflects current practice.
- As noted through [quality theme 1](#), the education provider has several ways of ensuring practice will be embedded in the programme, including pre-recorded materials and live online reflective sessions based on real-life scenarios. This shows that theory and practice are linked and support each other.
- The programme is delivered entirely through online teaching. The education provider offers a wide range of online learning / teaching activities including lectures, podcasts, reading materials, quizzes, and other engagement materials. Seminars will involve interactive discussions on case studies and patient management options. Following these sessions, discussion boards will be encouraged to facilitate group and peer learning.
- The education provider explained how reflective and independent thinking will be developed throughout the programme using appropriate reflection frameworks and case studies. Learners will individually reflect on six case studies, each covering different module topics. They will evaluate the positive and negative aspects of practice, impacts, and necessary action plans for clinical practice. Case study details will be provided before live seminars, where learners will present and discuss their reflections with peers. These discussions, overseen by academic staff, aim to enhance reflective thinking and ensure participation and accuracy.
- Evidence-based teaching is clearly embedded in the programme, including the development of analytical skills and the ability to update knowledge using relevant literature.
- As [referred from stage 1 assessment](#), to ensure learners are able to learn with and from professionals and other learners from other professions, learners will participate in live online seminars where they will present and discuss reflective case examples with peers. They will apply theoretical knowledge to real-life scenarios both individually and collaboratively. These sessions include interaction with academic staff

and HCPC-registered hearing aid dispenser clinical professionals. The education provider noted these sessions will foster peer learning, reflection, and best practice whilst also supporting the integrating theory and practice. Additionally, learners would have regular opportunities on their audiology programmes to learn with and from other professionals (e.g. Biomedical Science, Cardiac Physiology, Pharmacy).

- From reviewing the initial submission and the response to the quality activity, the visitors were satisfied that all the standards within this SET area are met.
- **SET 5: Practice-based learning –**
  - As noted through the [education provider context](#), the programme does not contain practice-based learning, therefore, we did not assess SET 5: Practice-based learning as part of this approval process.
- **SET 6: Assessment –**
  - There is a wide range of formative assessments. From seeking further clarification, we understood the final multiple-choice questions (MCQ) test is the summative assessment. A pass mark of 70% will be required to demonstrate content understanding.
  - Standards of professional behaviour are delivered as part of module content. Understanding of our standards of conduct, performance, and ethics (SCPEs) will be initially assessed through a formative multiple-choice quiz, which will include links to further reading. There is also an opportunity to assess the SCPEs as part of the wider summative assessment so that learners can understand expectations of being a regulated professional by the time they complete the programme.
  - There is a wide range of assessment methods including formative multiple choice quizzes following delivery of each section of the programme. The programme team will monitor learner engagement during seminar sessions and provide group feedback at the end of each session. The summative assessment includes an in-person multiple-choice exam that assesses all learning outcomes necessary to meet the standards of proficiency.
  - The visitors were satisfied that the assessments will ensure that learners who successfully complete the programme meet the standards of proficiency for hearing aid dispensers and the standards of conduct, performance and ethics. Therefore, the visitors determined that all standards in this SET area are met.

**Risks identified which may impact on performance:** None.

## Section 5: Referrals

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

There were no outstanding issues to be referred to another process.

### **Recommendations**

We include recommendations when standards are met at or just above threshold level, and where there is a risk to that standard being met in the future. They do not need to be met before programmes can be approved, but they should be considered by education providers when developing their programmes.

The visitors did not set any recommendations.

## Section 6: Decision on approval process outcomes

### **Assessment panel recommendation**

Based on the findings detailed in section 4, the visitors recommend to the Education and Training Committee that all standards are met, and therefore the programmes should be approved.

### **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 programme is approved.

**Reason for this decision:** The Panel accepted the visitor's recommendation that the programme should receive approval.

## Appendix 1 – summary report

If the education provider does not provide observations, only this summary report (rather than the whole report) will be provided to the Education and Training Committee (Panel) to enable their decision on approval. The lead visitors confirm this is an accurate summary of their recommendation, and the nature, quality and facilities of the provision.

<b>Education provider</b>	University of Sunderland		
<b>Case reference</b>	CAS-01707-D6T3L6	<b>Lead visitors</b>	Joanna Lemanska, Peter Abel
<b>Quality of provision</b>			
<p>Through this assessment, we have noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The areas we explored focused on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ There is evidence of the integration of theory and practice using video content, including practice-based scenarios and simulations. This supports theory-based learning and the application of theory to practice.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>The programme(s) meet all the relevant HCPC education standards and therefore should be approved</p>			
<b>Facilities provided</b>			
<p>Education and training delivered by this institution is underpinned by the provision of the following key facilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The education provider noted they have access to a wide range of physical resources. These include of Audiometric equipment including Audiometers, Tympanometers, Video Otoscopes, Noah software for hearing aid programming and Affinity Compact test box equipment. They also use a number of simulation audiometers (OTIS).</li> <li>• As the proposed programme is a top-up for graduates of a BSc (Hons) Audiology programme, we understand only online resources are needed. These include the Virtual Learning Environment, Canvas, for accessing materials and submitting work, and Teams for live sessions. The on-campus library offers a range of Audiology textbooks, mostly available as e-books.</li> <li>• In terms of staffing resources, we understand the person with overall responsibility for the programme is a HCPC registered biomedical scientist. We will review this in stage 2 to consider how the education provider determines their suitability to lead the programme. The programme lead is supported by other staff members who are NHS qualified Audiologists and registered with the Academy for Healthcare Science.</li> </ul>			
<b>Programmes</b>			

<b>Programme name</b>	<b>Mode of study</b>	<b>First intake date</b>	<b>Nature of provision</b>
Certificate of Proficiency in Hearing Aid Dispensing	DL (Distance Learning)	09/06/2025	• Taught (HEI)

Appendix 2 – list of open programmes at this institution

<b>Name</b>	<b>Mode of study</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Modality</b>	<b>Annotation</b>	<b>First intake date</b>
BSc (Hons) Applied Biomedical Science	FT (Full time)	Biomedical scientist			01/09/2006
BSc (Hons) Biomedical Science Practice	FT (Full time)	Biomedical scientist			01/09/2023
BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science (Blood Science)	FT (Full time)	Biomedical scientist			01/09/2011
BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science (Cellular Science)	FT (Full time)	Biomedical scientist			01/09/2011
BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science (Genetic Science)	FT (Full time)	Biomedical scientist			01/09/2011
BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science (Infection Science)	FT (Full time)	Biomedical scientist			01/09/2011
BSc (Hons) in Occupational Therapy	FT (Full time)	Occupational therapist			01/09/2019
BSc (Hons) in Paramedic Science and Out of Hospital Care	FT (Full time)	Paramedic			01/04/2018
BSc (Hons) in Physiotherapy	FT (Full time)	Physiotherapist			01/09/2019
BSc (Hons) Occupational Therapy (Accelerated)	FTA (Full time accelerated)	Occupational therapist			01/09/2022
BSc (Hons) Occupational Therapy (Apprenticeship)	WBL (Work based learning)	Occupational therapist			01/09/2022
BSc (Hons) Podiatry (Apprenticeship)	WBL (Work based learning)	Chiropodist / podiatrist		POM - Administration; POM - sale / supply (CH)	01/05/2024
Enhanced Prescribing for health professionals	PT (Part time)			Independent prescribing	01/06/2020
Prescribing for Health Professionals	PT (Part time)			Independent prescribing	01/07/2020