



Health and Care Professions Council: Consultation on the revised threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register (SET 1) for Operating Department Practitioners

Council of Deans of Health written submission – April 2021

The Council of Deans of Health welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. The Council represents over 90 UK university faculties engaged in education and research for nursing, midwifery and the allied health professions.

Currently there are 54 approved Operating Department Practice (ODP) programmes at 27 providers.¹ 20 providers are only offering degree-level programmes. 7 providers are offering diploma-level programmes. Of these 6 are also offering degree-level programmes. Only 1 provider is only offering a diploma-level programme. This is also the only provider of ODP education in Scotland.

Written response

Question 1: Do you agree that SET 1 for ODPs should be increased from diploma level to degree level (that is, a move from Level 5 to Level 6 for FHEQ and from Level 8 to Level 9/10 for SCQF) Please provide comments.

Agree. The Council strongly supports an increase in the threshold level for education (SET 1) for ODPs from diploma-level to degree-level.² A transition to a degree-level threshold to enter the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) Register for ODPs is needed to ensure the threshold level qualification is aligned to the knowledge, skills, and behaviour necessary to undertake the role of an ODP.

The diploma curriculum is out of step with the needs of the profession considering developments in the evidence base of the profession, patient safety, service delivery, technological innovation, the perioperative environment, human factors education and pharmacology. This will be made more

¹ <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/education/approved-programmes/approved-programmes-results/?Professions=270450008&ProviderQueryString=&IntakeModes=Open>

² This was our position in 2013 when this matter was previously subject to consultation. Please see [here](#).

apparent with welcome expected changes to the Standards of Proficiency for the profession considering the HCPC's recent consultation on this matter.³

A change to the threshold education level will benefit patient safety, as degree-level healthcare education is correlated with improvements in patient outcomes. It will also mean equity of status with other allied healthcare professions. This is likely to make the ODP profession more attractive to potential students who want to acquire a degree-level education and the benefits this entails. It may also provide a progression route for assistant practitioners with an operating theatre specialism, who want to top up and acquire a degree-level education. This could help with growing this important but vulnerable workforce.

Raising the educational threshold qualification would also be advantageous to meeting workforce needs. Degree-level education would increase what ODPs can offer to the workforce and benefit ODPs who wish to move into first assistant or surgical care practitioner roles creating a more flexible future workforce. It will also provide more opportunities for interdisciplinary education and team working.

Degree-level healthcare education provides graduates with some common key benefits. These graduate attributes are acquired as a direct result of degree-level educational experience. This 'graduateness'⁴ includes communication, research, problem solving and leadership skills, critical thinking, professionalism and independence. This prepares graduates for leadership and care co-ordination and provides them with a firm understanding of good practice and the confidence to speak out. This ensures evidence-based practice and quality improvement, which gives added value to the healthcare workforce and enhances patient protection. Healthcare professions, including the ODP profession, require the higher-level skills obtained through degree-level education.

Question 2: If the threshold were to increase, what length of time would be needed to implement this change?

The Council believes a period of 2 years would be needed to implement this change across the UK. Although several HEIs do offer both the diploma and degree programme, all HEIs currently providing diploma level programmes will need time to re-map programmes, liaise with practice partners to ensure they are organisationally ready, develop new placement options, and ensure practice educators have the right skills and knowledge to educate the workforce.

³ The Council's response to the 2020 consultation on standards of proficiency is [here](#). In this response we indicated that amongst other matters, the ODP standards should be enhanced to include ODPs being able to participate in the management of clinical emergencies and more than just the initial management of service users undergoing cardiac arrest.

⁴ Ramsay, M., 2016. Graduateness: a systematized literature review of the concept applied to nursing in the United Kingdom, University of Dundee. Ramsey defines 'graduateness' as: *the successful attainment of a higher education degree. From that educational process graduates develop key attributes. Those attributes may be common to all graduates, shared among those who have studied related subjects or be subject specific. These transferrable skills-sets and attitudes are markers of graduate-level performance and/or disposition, contributing to making these individuals desirable to employers.* This is defined in relation to nursing. However, the concept has applicability to all healthcare professions in which students acquire a Degree-level qualification.

Only 1 provider is only offering a diploma-level programme. This is also the only provider of ODP education in Scotland. This provider will need time to seek approval for a degree-level programme if they wish to continue to provide ODP education. There will also be workforce implications of a 'fallow year' in Scotland when no ODPs will qualify and join the HCPC register. This is an issue for the Scottish Government to manage and should not preclude the necessary change to the threshold level of education for this important profession.

Question 3: If the threshold were to increase, what support do you think the HCPC should provide to:

- a) ODP professional bodies
- b) Education Providers
- c) Employers
- d) Students
- e) Prospective applicants
- f) The UK government and the Devolved Administrations
- g) Any other stakeholders

Education Providers

The HCPC should provide clear communications and implementation timelines for education providers throughout the transition period. Any changes in quality assurance and regulatory processes must be communicated to education providers in a timely manner.

Employers

The HCPC should ensure employers, particularly HR departments, fully understand the advanced skillset of ODPs. Tailored communications and FAQs on ODPs and their skillset would be useful to ensure registrants can fully benefit from their professional qualification and registration. This includes opportunities for career development and advancement.

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, ODPs have often been redeployed to different service areas to assist with the pandemic response. The HCPC should ensure employers across the UK are aware of this, the transferability of the ODP skillset, and how ODPs can be deployed in different service areas. This would be useful for the HCPC to do for all the professions it regulates.

Students

Current students studying for a diploma require clear communications from the HCPC that their intended qualification will continue to be recognised and they will be able to join the register after completion as a valuable part of the workforce. Arrangements will also need to be made for those starting the diploma in September 2021 who wish to transfer onto degree level programmes. Some starting the diploma later this

year may also need longer than two years to complete due to breaks in learning due to health issues, caring responsibilities, and academic resubmission. Guidance from the HCPC on this would be helpful.

Prospective applicants

The diploma qualification can be preferred by mature students and those from widening participation backgrounds. Adequate student support across three-year programmes via usual arrangements in the UK nations will mitigate against this change having any potential negative impact on applications from different student groups.

Any other stakeholders – current registrants

Current ODP registrants must not be forgotten in this transition. The HCPC should ensure there are clear and consistent communications to current registrants. Those who hold a diploma-level qualification will continue to be able to practise and their qualification will continue to be recognised. This must be made clear. The HCPC should work with partners, including education providers and employers, to signpost opportunities for those who may want to upskill to a degree-level qualification or undertake additional CPD opportunities.

Question 4: Do you consider there are any aspects of our proposals that could result in equality and diversity implications for groups or individuals based on one or more of the following protected characteristics, as defined by the Equality Act 2010 and equivalent Northern Irish legislation? If yes, please explain what could be done to change this.

We would particularly be interested in any reflections on how different groups may be disproportionately impacted by closing off the Diploma Higher Education pathway into the ODP profession.

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

The HCPC should undertake a full equality impact assessment of the change to degree-level programmes only.

Question 5: Do you have any other comments about the SET 1 threshold for ODPs?

The HCPC should use the revision of the ODP threshold education level to degree-level education as an opportunity to promote and raise the profile of the profession with the public, the wider workforce, and prospective students. The Council and its members are keen to engage with this work going forward.

The change to SET 1 for the ODP profession also gives the higher education sector the opportunity to think about the increased use of simulation and interprofessional learning in ODP programmes and the development of fast-track post-graduate pre-registration programmes for those with prior experiential learning.

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