

## **Nigel Harrison, Reviewer, shares his experience of the approval processes**

At my first approval event. I was the only HLSP reviewer and I am sure that I was as anxious as the university staff and placement providers present. I remember wondering if I appeared professional and focused as I tried hard to relax the course team. I have found it useful to use the sections in the HLSP handbook entitled 'reviewer panel meeting', 'outcome meeting' and 'reporting' as prompts to explain the processes involved. I would have really valued more opportunity to practice this during the reviewer training, together with practice at completing the approval documentation and how to address questions that I have been asked 'as a representative of the NMC'. It has seemed strange to be viewed as a voice of the NMC when only a few days previously, I may have telephoned the NMC for advice myself.

I was not totally prepared for the amount of time which is needed to prepare for and write up approval events. Some education providers structure their documentation around the NMC standards or map against them which is very useful. It is problematic when a lot of superficial and sometimes irrelevant information is provided in an effort to demonstrate evidence of standards. I have found it very time consuming wading through excessive numbers of documents sometimes unveiling contradictory information. The HLSP audit trail templates have helped me to focus on the information required and discard the rest. While I respect that each university has its own templates and processes for validation events, I applaud those which are simple, systematic and focused. An occasional omission has been failure to include clinical practice documents, which are essential. It has been reassuring that course teams have used the questions identified through my audit trail as a prompt to provide further evidence or make changes to documentation. However, at approval events there is limited time to do justice to reviewing a lot of new information tabled on the day. There seems to be a list developing here of what constitutes good practice.

I have been amazed at the variation in the format of approval events. I have experienced occasions whereby the university have in their eyes 'already validated the course in accordance with the university academic regulations' resulting in the approval visit feeling more like an NMC event, rather than a conjoint validation. I have had situations where the approval panel reported that they had no questions and requested to share my audit trail questions! On one occasion, the two university panel members left half way through the event, leaving only the three NMC visitors as panel members. One chair openly stated 'This is all new to us, I don't know what you want', and a panel member stated that they were not sure why they were there. This makes it difficult to have confidence in the education providers. On such occasions, I have been relieved at HLSP's ability to respond at the end of a telephone call, offering me guidance and support. In this case, I and the other NMC reviewers clarified with the chair that we were unable to make a judgement on the ability of the course team to fulfil the requirements of the universities academic regulations and that we were primarily there to make judgements on the NMC standards. Such phrases may be useful in a question and answer section on the HLSP website.

On another occasion when there was a difference in interpretation between myself and the university around the NMC standards, I was pleased to have access to an NMC adviser through HLSP, to make a decision regarding whether to approve or not approve a course.

Finally, a valuable lesson I have learnt is how helpful it is to confer with the other reviewers involved prior to an approval event. A telephone call or e-mail to share the audit trail has helped us to identify similar and different lines of questioning and avoid duplication at the event. I have welcomed other reviewers support and rationales when deciding the outcome of an approval event and distinguishing between setting a condition or a recommendation. The NMC standards have proved invaluable as a reference point to inform such decisions but again some examples and discussion at future training events may be helpful.

I hope I have provided a balanced perspective of my personal experience as an NMC reviewer. It seems timely after completion of the first year for us all to review progress with the new HLSP processes.

Nigel Harrison  
Associate Head for Academic Functions, University of Central Lancashire