

Health Education England Consultation on Standards for the Non-Regulated Foot Health Workforce



A summary for College of Podiatry Members

Introduction

On 23 November 2020, Health Education England (HEE) launched a consultation on introducing standards for the non-regulated foot health workforce.

The objective of this is to improve access routes into podiatry training from the support workforce and to explore how to expand the foot health support workforce to meet patient need.

Background to Consultation

Podiatry has faced numerous and well documented recruitment and retention challenges in England over recent years. Furthermore, an ageing podiatry workforce is impacting leaver rates. There has been a decline in applications to podiatry programmes in England (2016-2019). If the current trajectory continues, HEE estimates that by 2024, 20% of NHS podiatry posts will be vacant.

In addition, podiatry registrants to the HCPC register have flatlined in the period between 2016 and 2019. The number of podiatrists registered on November 2020 was 3.9% less than in September 2019. This is all at a time when the NHS Podiatry caseload is becoming more difficult to manage.

If no action is taken, vacancy rates within the NHS are likely to reach levels that would compromise service sustainability and patient safety.

HEE has brought together the Foot Health Consortium, of which the College of Podiatry is part, to collaborate and safeguard the future of NHS foot services in England. Other initiatives include:

- The development of the Podiatry degree level apprenticeship.
- The SIHED programme to boost awareness of Podiatry as a career option.
- Armed forces into AHP training programme.

Service re-design

There are examples from around England of how better utilisation of the support workforce allows NHS Podiatry to meet service demand in a safe and effective way.

Torbay and South Devon trust have redesigned their podiatry service to better utilise the podiatry support workforce. This has been possible in part to the introduction of a foundation degree level 5 apprenticeship. The Trust have been able to offer solutions to an immediate workforce challenge and have been proactive in offering a route into podiatry for those support staff wishing to train as a podiatrist. This has improved capacity within the podiatry team, reduced vacancies and supported the Trust to meet key NICE guidelines.

It is hoped that introducing draft standards for the whole non-regulated health workforce will support more Trusts to deliver improved patient outcomes.

Foot Health Practitioners

There are estimated to be over 5000 foot health practitioners operating in England. 1622 foot health practitioners are on the Professional Standards Association accredited register, meaning an overwhelming majority of these practitioners are not registered.

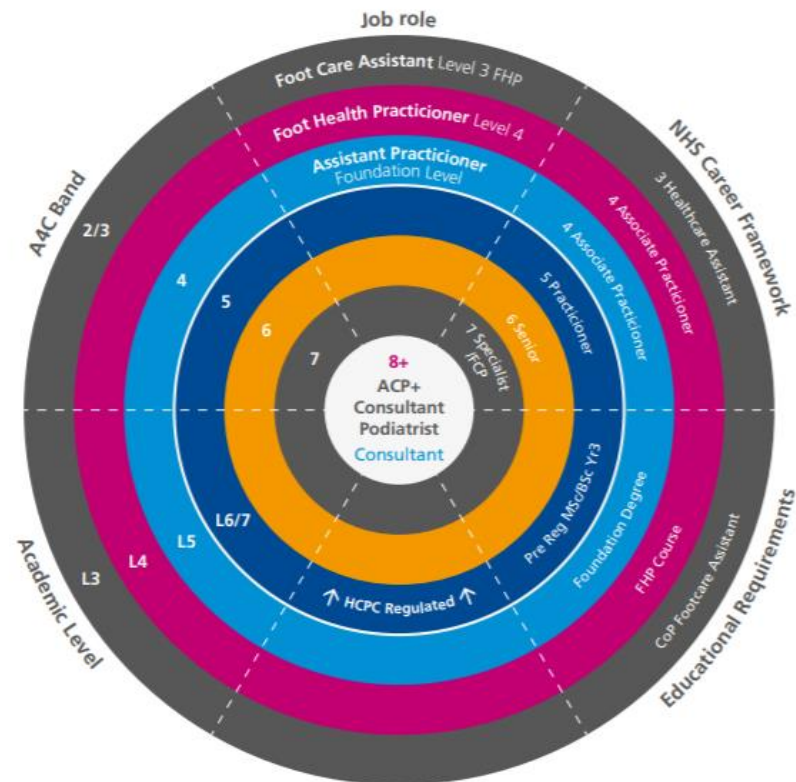
Furthermore, there is a huge variety in education and training of foot health practitioners. Some have been educated to level 3, some level 4 and many have not been accredited to any educational level at all.

If the NHS is to use foot health practitioners as part of the support workforce, it will be necessary to properly map out a scope of practice for foot health practitioners at every level. Within this, the ability of foot health practitioners to upskill to assistant practitioners, and for the support workforce to train as podiatrists, needs to be clearly laid out.

Foot Health Map

HEE have produced an image of the foot health maps which clearly shows the levels of practice which are being proposed. Please see this below:

Foot Health Care Map



Development of the standards

HEE commissioned the standards, which were written by the Standards Writing Group (made up of leading podiatrists in the NHS, independent and higher education sectors, foot health practitioners, NHS AHP leads and academics).

A set of standards has been written for:

- Foot Care Assistants/Assistant practitioners (Podiatry) (Level 3)
- Foot Health Practitioners (Level 3 and level 4)
- Assistant Practitioners (Level 5)

Within each set of standards there are a set of:

- Educational standards (which set out what a practitioner in each of the roles and levels above should know, understand and be competent to do, set out in the areas of key transferable skills, practical skills and knowledge and understanding).
- Clinical standards (which set out for each of the groups and levels above what practitioners should know, understand and be able to do in relation to clinical footcare treatments).

Purpose of the standards

1. Higher Education Institutions can develop training programmes which can be quality assured against the standards.
2. Pathways can be developed for assistants and practitioners to upskill and progress between the standards to become HCPC registered podiatrists.
3. Existing foot health practitioners may be able to be assessed by educational providers; and if they meet the standards, may be recognised as working to a defined level of practice.
4. The NHS will be supported to use the foot health workforce to meet demand.
5. There will be increased clarity about what unregulated foot health workforce can do.

Link to the draft standards

The draft standards can be read in full here:

https://www.hee.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/documents/HEE_Foot_Health_Standards.pdf

How to respond to the consultation

The College is asking as many members as possible with an interest in this subject to respond to the consultation.

Consultation questions are based on the educational and clinical standards for each of the levels which have been mapped [Foot Care Assistant (L3), Foot Health Practitioner (L3/L4) and Assistant Practitioners (L5)]. There is also a question on the overall implementation of this.

The deadline for responses is **midday on 15 February 2021**.

Responses can be made using an online survey here:

<https://healtheducationyh.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/foot-health-education-training-standards-consultation-20-7>

If you are unable to access the survey, you can email comments in writing to:

sharon.kibble@hee.nhs.uk