

# Accreditation Process for Foot Health Workforce Education



## Providers Consultation 2023

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# Glossary

<b>AP</b>	Assistant Practitioner
<b>AQA</b>	Academic Quality Assurance Committee
<b>FCA</b>	Foot Care Assistant
<b>FHP</b>	Foot Health Practitioner
<b>FHSW</b>	Foot Health Support Workforce
<b>GDPR</b>	General Data Protection Regulation
<b>HEE</b>	Health Education England
<b>HEIs</b>	Higher Education Institutions
<b>NHS</b>	National Health Service
<b>QAA</b>	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
<b>RCPod</b>	Royal College of Podiatry
<b>RQF</b>	Regulated Qualifications Framework
<b>SETs</b>	Standards for Education and Training

# 1. Introduction

The Standards for the Foot Health Workforce (also known as the 'Foot Health Standards') were created to expand the role of the foot health support workforce. The key objective of the standards is to ensure that the NHS recognises the knowledge and skills of the wider foot health support workforce (FHSW). The Standards provide thresholds at each level of practice for safe and effective patient care. Standardising foot health practice assures the public and employers regarding the level of care provided. Currently, not all of the foot health support workforce is able to work in the NHS due to variations in training and practice levels. The provision of accredited pathways that align training to the Standards for the Foot Health Workforce will provide a recognised threshold of practice.

The accreditation of both clinical and education standards for all newly qualified foot care assistants (FCAs), foot health practitioners (FHPs) and assistant practitioners in podiatry (APs) have been established for educational providers. Going forward, newly qualified practitioners who have completed a programme at an accredited educational provider will be able to work in the NHS. The Royal College of Podiatry (RCPod) has developed an accreditation pathway for existing and future programmes of education relevant to foot health support worker roles.

To implement this work there is a need to support education providers in accrediting their programmes appropriately to the level of study and subsequent qualification. The overall aim is to ensure employer, professional and public confidence in the existing and future foot health support workforce by quality-assuring Standards of Education and Training (SETs) in line with the Standards for the Foot Health Workforce.

## 2. Purpose

This guidance details the process that the RCPod uses to quality assure education and training programmes in the UK and the requirements for the Accreditation of Qualifications and Apprenticeships (AAQA) for the foot health support workforce.

The AAQA requirements cover the approval and accreditation of qualifications, apprenticeships and training programmes offered up to level 5 in higher education institutions (HEIs) and other settings, including Further Education and employment.

Through the accreditation processes, the RCPod works with learning organisations to determine whether programmes leading to qualification as a foot health support worker (FHSW) have met the FHSW Standards for Education and Training. This enables the RCPod to be assured that programmes are mapped to the Standards for the Foot Health Workforce and that those who are awarded a qualification are recognised as having completed an accredited FHSW programme.

The primary purpose of AAQA is to set out the required overall standard to be achieved by education programmes if they are to be accredited by the RCPod.

When reviewing an education programme for the purpose of accreditation, members of the RCPod academic quality assurance committee (AQA) assess whether that programme provides the required standards of education and training that underpin eventual qualification as a foot health support worker.

The RCPod has published a set of Standards for Education and Training (SETs). These standards are the accreditation tool that the RCPod uses to ensure that providers only allow students to be awarded a qualification if they demonstrate they meet a set of educational standards and the outcomes, which have been defined in the foot health support worker Standards.

## 3. Accreditation

Accreditation of education programmes, by recognised professional and statutory bodies, is a mark of assurance that the programmes meet the standards set by the relevant profession. The accreditation process is essentially one of peer review; it is applied to individual programmes of learning, not to the organisation or HEI overall.

In the UK, the RCPod monitors and maintains the standards for education in the podiatry profession and its support workforce, setting the overall requirements for accreditation. The RCPod use the accreditation process to assess whether specific educational programmes, delivered at a specific site or sites, provide the required criteria as defined by the Standards for the Foot Health Workforce for eventual qualification in one of the foot health support worker categories.

The RCPod undertake face-to-face visits every five years, but reserves the right to initiate a visit earlier than the five-year cycle under the following circumstances:

1. The Academic Quality Assurance Committee feel there is a major concern
2. The programme undergoes a major change
3. The programme moves to another provider
4. The provider moves to a new site.

The RCPod will undertake a paper review or hold a virtual meeting with the programme team within the five-year period if this is deemed a more appropriate course of action.

Where Institutions offer more than one programme/route/level of study the RCPod will assess all programmes/routes/levels at the same event to lessen the burden on both the professional body and the Institution.



In terms of clinical practice, the RCPod does not set target numbers for each of the clinical activities a student would be expected to undertake during their training. It is expected that students carry out procedures as many times as necessary for the training provider to be satisfied with their competence; providers must also be able to demonstrate/evidence this compliance to RCPod through the monitoring and accreditation processes.



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## 4. Accreditation visiting panel

The RCPod uses visiting panels to undertake accreditation or re-accreditation of programmes that lead to qualification in a foot health support worker role. Panels are comprised of members of the RCPod Academic Quality Assurance Committee (AQA). The panels typically consist of three members and the make-up of these panels is at the discretion of the RCPod. Bespoke panels are drawn together by the AQA team for the specific needs of the education provider being inspected, based on their experience and expertise. Visiting panels will make a recommendation as to whether a foot health support worker programme is 'sufficient' for accreditation. Following the completion of the report, providers are sent a feedback form asking to provide comment on the accreditation process and the panel. If the education provider would like to give feedback on the visit or a member of the panel, they should contact both [benjamin.bullen@rcpod.org.uk](mailto:benjamin.bullen@rcpod.org.uk) and [alison.hart@rcpod.org.uk](mailto:alison.hart@rcpod.org.uk).



## 5. Learning outcomes

To achieve accreditation a programme must deliver the learning outcomes that the learning provider has specified. The outcomes specified by each organisation must be derived from the learning outcomes, set out in the Standards for the Foot Health Workforce.

The level at which the learning outcomes will be delivered is that expected from the relevant qualifications as they are described in the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF), the apprenticeship standards and the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies, published by QAA.

The frameworks include qualification descriptors for:

- Level 3 qualifications
- Level 4 qualifications
- Apprenticeships
- Foundation degrees.

## 6. Qualifications that meet the underpinning knowledge, understanding and practical requirements

The types of qualification that can meet the knowledge, understanding and practical requirements for qualification or registration are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Qualifications that meet the knowledge and understanding requirements for**

Qualification level	Qualification category
Level 3 qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foot Care Practitioner</li> <li>• Foot Health Practitioner</li> <li>• Assistant Practitioner</li> </ul>
Level 4 qualifications	
Level 5 Foundation degrees	
Level 4 and 5 Apprenticeships	



## 7. Information reviewed during accreditation

In considering applications for accreditation, RCPod shall:

- Accredite only programmes which provide awards granted based on clearly defined learning outcomes mapped to the Standards for the Foot Health Workforce.
- Ensure that the programme is at the appropriate level in the applicable UK qualifications framework or at an equivalent level within an appropriate international framework
- Monitor the accuracy of the awarding institution's published information about the programme's approved or accredited status and registration
- Visit the awarding institution as part of the assessment if necessary, and
- Ensure that where recognition will attest to the acquisition of competence, the programme covers the relevant competence standards derived from the Standards for the Foot Health Workforce.

In making a judgment, The RCPod shall consider evidence from a range of indicators.

These shall include:

- The learning outcomes of the programme(s)
- The teaching and learning processes
- The assessment strategies employed
- The admissions process; including DBS, health requirements and widening participation.
- The human, physical and material resources involved
- The learning provider's regulations regarding progression and the award of qualifications and/or degrees
- Quality assurance arrangements
- Feedback from meetings with students (If available)



- How any previous accreditation recommendations and requirements have been dealt with
- Entry to the programme and how cohort entry extremes will be supported
- The awarding institution's regulations regarding progression, qualification and award.

The RCPod will normally expect to see the following evidence for each programme presented for accreditation:

- Programme specification or equivalent showing programme aims, learning outcomes and curriculum structure
- A mapping or explanation showing where and how each FHWS learning outcome is assessed within the programme
- For each unit or module that contributes to the achievement of learning outcomes:
  - The unit or module specification
  - Examination papers and coursework assessments with marking schemes/guides
  - Samples of marked student work covering the full range of student achievement
- Where programmes include major projects:
  - Student project handbook(s)
  - A representative sample of project reports (if available)
  - The completed marking scheme or feedback sheet for each project.
- Information about industry involvement in programme design and delivery Information about student and staffing numbers, outline CVs for all staff who teach on the programme to show their highest academic qualifications and teaching qualifications
- Information about specialist practical facilities used by students on the programme, if applicable
- Information about library resources (print and digital) available to students on the programme
- The academic regulations for student progression and award of a qualification or foundation degree, if applicable
- Arrangements for student academic and pastoral support



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- Quantitative data showing student progression rates from entry through each level or year of study to qualification
- Information about the operation of quality assurance processes at programme level, in particular, the arrangements for:
  - Programme approval
  - Annual monitoring
  - Periodic review
- Information about student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement processes
- The external examiner or equivalent reports and responses from the department for the three most recent years
- The organisation will need to provide student feedback on the programme for the visitors. This could take the form of either a questionnaire, personal statements provided by the learning organisation or another appropriate arrangement which will need to be agreed upon by the RCPod prior to the event
- Evidence that the programme is at an appropriate level commensurate with the Regulated Qualifications framework, the apprenticeship standards and/or the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies, published by QAA.
- Any other information/evidence the HEI or learning organisation wishes to provide that they deem relevant to the accreditation process
- The RCPod is committed to minimising the administrative burden of accreditation, for example by accepting and using data collected by the learning organisation and/or HEI for other purposes.

## 8. Assessment

Assessment should be designed to minimise opportunities for students to be in breach of academic integrity, including plagiarism, self-plagiarism and contract cheating and inappropriate use of artificial intelligence (AI). Wherever possible, a suitable variety of assessment methods should be used to minimise opportunities for students to incorporate plagiarised work, either within the level of study or across levels. Policies and procedures relevant to academic integrity should be clear, accessible, and actively promoted rather than simply made available.

Assessments should also be designed for learning (formative assessment). This refers to the process of identifying and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their instructors, to decide what point the learners have reached in their learning, where they need to go next, and how best to get there. Consideration should be made to developing assessment tasks that are initially simulations of real-world problems that students will face in their careers, incorporating increasingly “live” scenarios during the educational journey. Assessments should focus on understanding, application, and mastery of the discipline rather than the ability to simply memorise information.

## 9. Alternatives to campus-based provision

Programmes that are not campus-based may also be accredited. Examples of such programmes include:

- Distance, blended or elearning programmes
- Degree Apprenticeships
- Other work-based programmes.

The same accreditation aims and standards apply as for any other types of programme. Assessment of examinations must be at the same standard as any equivalent programme being delivered. The general provisions regarding such accreditation are set out on this page, followed by specific provisions.

Any quality systems which are purpose-built for the programme type must be assessed for effectiveness.

The RCPod will notify the learning provider as early as possible about any additional or different requirements for information, evidence or visiting arrangements compared to campus-based provision. The RCPod will ensure that its accreditors have the appropriate professional experience to carry out accreditation of the type of programme under review. It should be stressed that the primary aim is the achievement of the learning outcomes.

Programmes must be underpinned by a sound delivery platform. There must be evidence that the communications systems in place enable interaction between students and their tutors as well as their peers, so that students are not disadvantaged by comparison with campus-based students.



The awarding learning provider is responsible for the academic standards of its awards and the quality of provision leading to them. The arrangements for assuring quality and standards should be as rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny as those for programmes provided wholly within the responsibility of a single HEI and through class-based modes of teaching. Particular attention should be paid to the awarding HEI or learning organisation's procedures for approving and reviewing any delivery partner and its agents.

The visitors must meet with students during the accreditation visit. This may be a face-to-face meeting, or it may use a suitable alternative such as MS Teams.

Visitors must assure themselves that robust systems are in place to ensure the authenticity of students, especially where any examinations are taken off campus or outside the UK.



## 10. Pre-visiting procedures and documents

The College Education and Quality Officer will contact providers to plan suitable dates for the programme visit.

Following the agreement of the visit date, the AQA team will send out (relevant to the level of programme seeking accreditation):

- a. This guidance
- b. A draft visiting timetable
- c. Standards for Education and training mapping evidence log and guidance
- d. A copy of the
- e. Standards for the Foot Health Workforce
- f. Competency Outcomes for Foot Health Support Workers
- g. Module mapping of learning outcomes (Institutions may have their own equivalent which can be used): The table below should demonstrate where students are taught and assessed against the relevant learning outcomes and Standards for the Foot Health Workforce
- h. Assessment matrix mapping table (Institutions may have their own equivalent which can be used): The table below should demonstrate how the students are assessed against the relevant learning outcomes.

Providers are requested to send back the information and completed mapping documentation tables electronically six weeks in advance of the date of the visit. The RCPod will include a deadline on the email we send out.

Review team/visitors review paperwork. Any comments or points of clarification with the paperwork will be added to a report which will be sent to the programme team for a response prior to the event. This should negate the necessity to discuss and go through the paperwork at the event.

1.	Documentation
1.1	The following will need to be submitted 6 weeks in advance of the date of the visit:
	a) Programme Specification
	b) Module Specifications
	c) Programme Handbook
	d) Student Handbook
	e) Placement Handbook
	f) Mapping documents (relevant to the level of programme seeking accreditation) Standards of Education and Training (SETs) for Foot Health Support Workers Foot Health Support Worker Standards mapping Module mapping of Learning outcomes matrix Assessment mapping matrix
	h) External examiners' reports
	i) Staff CVs
	J) Any other information/evidence the HEI wishes to provide that they deem relevant to the accreditation process

Further to the above, RCPod may require additional information and will request this in advance of the visit as needed with as much notice as possible. This process aims to make the submission of documentation less burdensome to providers. However, the RCPod expects that providers keep the necessary documentation and student information up to date, regardless of whether they are being visited. A draft timetable for completion will be sent to providers prior to the visit. The RCPod aims to give at least six weeks' notice wherever possible.

## 11. The programme visit

During visits, the visiting panel meets with staff involved with the management and delivery of the programme and with students enrolled on it.

### Example of a visiting timetable

#### Day 1:

Campus facilities and placement site visits

#### Day 2:

On campus meetings

Time	Room	Meeting
<b>9.30am</b>		Visiting team arrive
<b>9.45am</b>		Private meeting of the visiting team This will take place before any meetings with the provider. This will enable them to look at any documentation not available prior to the visit (e.g., confidential and sensitive information)
<b>10.15am</b>		Meeting with senior management
<b>11.15am</b>		Meeting with students
<b>12.30pm</b>		<b>LUNCH</b> and private meeting of the visiting team
<b>13.30pm</b>		Meeting with programme team
<b>14.30pm</b>		Private meeting of the visiting team
<b>15.00pm</b>		Informal feedback to programme team
<b>15.30pm</b>		<b>CLOSE</b> of event

Where practical, meetings should be limited to eight or fewer attendees. The panel will want to hear from everyone during the meetings. The panel reserves the right to request meetings with staff without senior managers or programme leads in attendance.

The first meeting with the provider will usually be with the senior management team. This meeting allows for general introductions and an overview of the programme.

The visiting timetable (if applicable) should allow for an early opportunity to meet with current students throughout the course of the visit. The ACG team will advise on the number and selection process of the students. This would normally be done by the RCPod education and quality officer requesting a list of students by candidate number so that the panel can choose a random selection of students to attend the meeting(s).

The second meeting with the provider will usually be with the programme leads. This meeting allows the panel to ask questions and explore any omissions, issues or areas for clarification in the paperwork. The programme leads should use this opportunity to ask the panel questions about any aspect of the visit they are unsure about and to raise issues at the outset of the process.

In addition to the staff directly involved with the delivery and assessment of the programme, the panel will also need to speak to any staff supporting placement education such as NHS managers and placement educators. Videoconference or teleconference may be used if travel to the main organisation's site is not practical.

Visiting the facilities is not necessary unless there have been some major changes from the previous visit, or if the accreditation is for a new provider. Visitors can request to see certain aspects of the facilities, but the programme team will be notified prior to the visits so that they can plan.

Visits to one or two placement sites may be necessary (where possible visits should be kept to one day).

On occasion, the timetable may need to be revised at short notice if additional meetings or an opportunity for the visiting panel members to discuss findings in private is required.

In our correspondence with education providers, the RCPod will explain the scope and remit of the visit.

## 12. Accreditation Outcomes

Formal feedback will not be given at the visit. The panel members will reconvene at their earliest opportunity to discuss their findings from the visit and formal written feedback will be issued no later than 4 weeks after the visit, wherever practicable.

### Outcome A

In order to determine that an individual requirement has been met, the visiting panel must agree that:

*“There is sufficient appropriate evidence derived from the visiting process. This evidence provides the visitors with broad confidence that the provider demonstrates the requirement. Information gathered through meetings with staff and students is supportive of documentary evidence and the evidence is robust, consistent and not contradictory. There may be minor deficiencies in the evidence supplied but these are likely to be inconsequential.”*

### Outcome B

The visiting panel will determine that an individual requirement has been partly met if:

*“Evidence derived from the visiting process is either incomplete or lacks detail and, as such, fails to convince the visiting panel that the provider fully demonstrates the requirement. Information gathered through meetings with staff and students may not fully support the evidence submitted or there may be contradictory information in the evidence provided. There is, however, some evidence of compliance and it is likely that either (a) the appropriate evidence can be supplied in a short time frame, or (b) any deficiencies identified can be addressed and evidenced in the annual monitoring process.”*

## Outcome C

The visiting panel will determine that an individual requirement is not met if:

*“The provider cannot provide evidence to demonstrate a requirement, or the evidence provided is not convincing. The information gathered at the visit through meetings with staff and students does not support the evidence provided or the evidence is inconsistent and/or incompatible with other findings. The deficiencies identified are such as to give rise to serious concern and will require an immediate action plan from the provider. The consequences of not meeting a requirement in terms of the overall sufficiency of a programme will depend upon the compliance of the provider across the range of requirements and the possible implications for student achievement, safety and safety of the public.”*

The visit will end with a private meeting of the visiting panel. Should the panel agree that there are urgent issues that need to be addressed immediately, we will inform you of this at the end of the visit.

Outcomes from the visit will be sent within four weeks of the visit and take the form of an outcomes letter.



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## 13. Visitor outcomes letter and AQA's decision

The RCPod visitors' outcomes letter will contain the RCPod's final recommendation to the AQA regarding the sufficiency of a programme and is based on the achievement of the Standards for Education and Training. Outcomes highlight where there is insufficient, contradictory or inadequate evidence to demonstrate a requirement. Comments on library facilities, funding or admissions are not usually discussed in the letter unless these relate directly to any failure to meet a requirement under the Standards of Education and Training and/or Standards for the Foot Health Workforce. The Outcomes letter will contain a recommendation to the AQA from the visiting panel regarding the sufficiency of a programme for accreditation of future graduating/completing cohorts.

## 14. Major changes or threats to delivery

Providers are required to have a framework in place to manage the quality of their programme(s). This includes making appropriate changes to ensure the curriculum continues to map across to the Standards for the Foot Health Workforce and adapts to changing legislation and external guidance. In circumstances where a revision of a qualification will involve a major change or a significant restructure of the delivery of the award, the RCPod must be contacted and advised, in writing, of the changes. A risk assessment will then be undertaken as to whether a further paper-based RCPod assessment is required to assure the AQA that the relevant standards are being maintained. The Standards for Education include a requirement for providers to contact the RCPod should any serious threats to the delivery of the programme be identified.

Major changes and/or threats to the delivery of the programme may include the following:

- Significant curriculum alterations
- Significant increase or decrease in student numbers
- Significant decrease in staff
- Revised time frame for delivery (increasing or decreasing weeks of study by more than 10%)
- Remodelling a course from a part-time design to a full-time one or vice versa
- The adoption of a new assessment strategy, and/or
- The implementation or removal of work/placement-based modules or significant revising of outreach provision.



## 15. Timescales

When the visiting dates have been set, the lead member from the RCPod team will share a timetable outlining stages of the process for the duration of the visit and outcomes writing process. It is intended that this will give a clear indication of when learning providers can expect to receive their final outcomes letter. The letter will normally be completed up to four weeks after the visit has been carried out, though competing operational commitments and AQA availability may extend this timeframe. The RCPod will communicate with you as early as possible if we do not think we can achieve the original timetable and indicate when you will have a final version.

## 16. Achievement of requirements and actions

Outcomes letters contain commentary on the rationale for requirements being deemed **met, partly met or not met** and will commend good practice where this is identified. They also contain actions in the form of recommendations and/or conditions required of the provider. These actions focus on areas that impact the achievement of the Standards for Education and Training, particularly where it has been determined that requirements have been partly met or not met. Where an action is needed for a requirement to be met, the term 'must/condition' is used within the outcomes letter to describe the obligation on the provider to undertake this action. For such actions, a specific timescale will be stipulated by which the action must be completed, or when an update on progress must be provided to the RCPod. In their observations on the content of the letter, the provider should confirm the anticipated date by which these actions will be completed. Where an action would improve how a requirement is met, the term 'should/recommendation' is used and for these actions there will be no due date stipulated. Providers will be asked to report on their progress in addressing the required actions through the annual monitoring process. Serious concerns about a lack of progress may result in further visits.

## 17. Visitors' recommendation to the Academic Quality Assurance Committee

Demonstration of the Standards for Education and Training and underlying requirements are central to the visiting panel's recommendation regarding the ongoing approval of a programme for accreditation. However, the recommendation will not be solely based on a provider meeting a specific number of requirements; it will be made with consideration of the programme as a whole.

Programmes that lead to qualification as a foot health practitioner, foot care assistant or assistant practitioner are found 'sufficient and recommended for accreditation'.

The recommendation will be made with regard to the safety of patients: either those treated by students on the programme or implications for future patients of those who pass the programme.

The visiting panel will recommend that a programme is either:

A 'Approved/Sufficient' for registration, with or without some actions required;

B 'Approved/Sufficient' for registration, for one cohort only, pending further actions and further quality assurance activity, including additional visit(s) or programme resubmission; or

C Not 'approved/sufficient' for registration.



By recommending option A, that a programme is sufficient for registration, the visiting panel has agreed that those who successfully complete the programme are fit to practise and that the Standards for Education and Training for the Foot Health Workforce have been met or will be met subject to the addressing of a number of actions required. The visiting panel is assured that patient safety will not be compromised by the programme.

The visiting panel may recommend that a programme is enough for one cohort only (option B). This option is recommended if the visiting panel has reached the conclusion that, while the graduating/completing cohort is deemed to have reached the level of safe beginner, future cohorts may not reach this standard and the provider is required to address a number of actions to provide further assurances.

The recommendation that a programme is not sufficient for registration (option C) will be made if the visiting panel has serious concerns related to patient safety and the programme/provider has not demonstrated a number of the Standards for Education and Training and has been unable to respond effectively to concerns raised during the visiting process. If the panel find serious issues leading to a B or C decision, they will set out clear actions required in order to bring about immediate improvements to allow the current cohort of students to graduate/complete. The type of action required will depend upon the issues identified. Most commonly, these will be the need for remedial work or additional clinical activity.

## 18. AQA's decision

The AQA may seek further information and advice from the provider or the visiting team before making a decision about the sufficiency of a programme. Where serious concerns have arisen, the AQA may highlight that risks remain high and further monitoring and visits of a programme are required. If the visiting panel recommends that a programme is not sufficient for approval, this will be referred to the AQA. For programmes leading to qualification, the RCPod retains the power to remove approval/accreditation. Following consideration by the AQA, the provider and the visiting panel are notified of the sufficiency decision.

## 19. Benefits of accreditation

The RCPod is aware that the accreditation process has both tangible and intangible value to the organisation. The process:

- Provides the opportunity to engage with the wider programme team and its stakeholders
- Allows the RCPod to monitor the academic and clinical standards of foot health education provision
- Provides an opportunity for the RCPod to ensure that the foot health standards are implemented in full and the HEI/learning organisation is responsive to future development
- Facilitates a strong working relationship with the RCPod
- Ensures that the RCPod is closely linked to the wider delivery of foot health providers and has the opportunity to encourage them to progress the profession in appropriate ways
- Allows the RCPod to have a mutually beneficial and closer working relationship with the education providers
- Enables further commercial opportunities such as shared CPD and short course approval to be considered.