

Inspection Report

Course provider: Buckinghamshire New University

Course approval: Social Work Degree Apprenticeship

Inspection dates: 10th – 12th October 2023

Report date:	21 st November 2023
Inspector recommendation:	Approved with conditions
Regulator decision:	Approved with conditions
Date of Regulator decision:	12 th December 2023
Date conditions met and approved:	2 nd April 2024

Contents

Introduction	3
What we do.....	3
Summary of Inspection	5
Language	5
Inspection.....	6
Meetings with students	6
Meetings with course staff.....	6
Meeting with people with lived experience of social work	6
Meetings with external stakeholders.....	6
Findings	7
Standard one: Admissions.....	7
Standard two: Learning environment.....	10
Standard three: Course governance, management and quality.....	13
Standard four: Curriculum assessment.....	17
Standard five: Supporting students	22
Standard six: Level of qualification to apply for entry onto the register.....	24
Proposed outcome.....	25
Conditions	25
Recommendations	26
Annex 1: Education and training standards summary.....	27
Regulator decision	34
Annex 2: Meeting of conditions.....	35
Findings	35

Introduction

1. Social Work England completes inspections as part of our statutory requirement to approve and monitor courses. Inspections form part of our process to make sure that courses meet our [education and training standards](#) and ensure that students successfully completing these courses can meet our [professional standards](#).
2. During the approval process, we appoint partner inspectors. One inspector is a social worker registered with us and the other is not a registered social worker (a 'lay' inspector). These inspectors, along with an officer from the education quality assurance team, undertake activity to review information and carry out an inspection. This activity could include observing and asking questions about teaching, placement provision, facilities and learning resources; asking questions based on the evidence submitted; and meeting with staff, training placement providers, people with lived experience and students. The inspectors then make recommendations to us about whether a course should be approved.
3. The process we undertake is described in our legislation; the Social Worker Regulations 2018¹, and the Social Work England [\(Education and Training\) Rules 2019](#).
4. You can find further guidance on our course change, approval and annual monitoring processes on our website.

What we do

5. When an education provider wants to make a change to a course, or request the approval of a new course, they are asked to consider how their course meets our education and training standards and our professional standards, and provide evidence of this to us. We are also undertaking a cycle of re-approval of all currently approved social work courses in England following the introduction of the Education and Training Standards 2021.
6. The education quality assurance officer reviews all the documentary evidence provided and will contact the education provider if they have any questions about the information submitted. They also provide advice and guidance on our approval processes.
7. When we are satisfied that we have all the documentary evidence required to proceed with an inspection we assign one registrant and one lay inspector. We undertake a conflict of interest process when confirming our inspectors to ensure there is no bias or perception of bias in the approval process.
8. The inspectors complete an assessment of the evidence provided and advise the officer if they have any queries that may be able to be addressed in advance of the inspection.

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2018/9780111170090/contents>

9. During this time a draft plan for the inspection is developed and shared with the education provider, to make sure it is achievable at the point of inspection.
10. Once the inspectors and officer are satisfied that an inspection can take place, this is usually undertaken over a three to four day visit to the education provider. We then draft a report setting out what we found during the inspection and if and how our findings demonstrate that the course meets our standards.
11. The inspectors may recommend in this report that the course is approved with conditions, approved without conditions or that it does not meet the criteria for approval. Where the course has been previously approved we may also decide to withdraw approval.
12. A draft of this report is shared with the education provider, and once we have considered any comments or observations they may wish to provide, we make a final regulatory decision about the approval of the course.
13. The final decisions that we can make are as follows, that the course is approved without conditions, the course is approved with conditions or that the course does not meet the criteria for approval. The decision, and the report, are then published.
14. If the course is approved with conditions, we will write to the education provider setting out how they can demonstrate they have met the conditions, the action we will take once we decide that the conditions are met, and the action we will take if we decide the conditions are not met.

Summary of Inspection

15. The Social Work Degree Apprenticeship at Buckinghamshire New University was inspected as part of the Social Work England reapproval cycle; whereby all course providers with qualifying social work courses will be inspected against the new Education and Training Standards 2021. The inspection team also considered proposed changes to the course as part of the inspection process.

Inspection ID	BNUR3
Course provider	Buckinghamshire New University
Validating body (if different)	
Course inspected	Social Work Degree Apprenticeship
Mode of study	Undergraduate
Maximum student cohort	45
Date of inspection	10 th – 12 th October 2023
Inspection team	Catherine Denny (Education Quality Assurance Officer) Priscilla McGuire (Lay Inspector) Jane Reeves (Registrant Inspector)

Language

16. In this document we describe Buckinghamshire New University as ‘the education provider’ or ‘the university’ and we describe the Social Work Degree Apprenticeship as ‘the course’.

Inspection

17. An onsite inspection took place from 10th – 12th October at the Uxbridge campus where Buckinghamshire New University is based. As part of this process the inspection team planned to meet with key stakeholders including students, course staff, employers and people with lived experience of social work.

18. These meetings formed the basis of the inspection plan, agreed with the education provider ahead of inspection. The following section provides a summary of these sessions, who participated and the topics that were discussed with the inspection team.

Conflict of interest

19. No parties disclosed a conflict of interest.

Meetings with students

20. The inspection team met with six students from years one and two of the course. One attendee was a student representative. Discussions included experience of admission to the course, placements, how the course team sought student views, curriculum, assessment, feedback and student support.

Meetings with course staff

21. Over the course of the inspection, the inspection team met with university staff members from the course team, senior leadership team, admissions, data and insights and student support services.

Meeting with people with lived experience of social work

22. The inspection team met with people with lived experience of social work who have been involved in the university experts by experience group. Discussions included involvement in admissions and interviews, training and support, involvement in assessment panels and how the members of the group are invited to contribute towards the design and evaluation of the course.

Meetings with external stakeholders

23. The inspection team met with representatives from placement partners including Slough Borough Council, Oxfordshire County Council, Hillingdon Council, Harrow Council and Buckinghamshire Council.

Findings

24. In this section we set out the inspectors' findings in relation to whether the education provider has demonstrated that it meets the education and training standards and that the course will ensure that students who successfully complete the course are able to meet the professional standards.

Standard one: Admissions

Standard 1.1

25. The education provider submitted an overview of the selection process for the course. Prior to prospective candidates engaging with university admissions processes, there was an internal expression of interest and selection criteria for them to meet via their employer. Once nominated by their employer, candidates would engage with the university managed admissions process which included tasks such as a written test, case study task and formal interview. The university also outlined their expectation that all candidates should have the necessary maths and English qualifications prior to joining the course, as the demands of the course were such that trying to gain these qualifications alongside study would be too demanding for learners.

26. The inspection team were assured by all stakeholders that admissions processes were delivered collaboratively by all stakeholders which included employer partners and people with lived experience of social work. Student representatives were able to reflect on their experiences of admission to the course and commented that the process was appropriately challenging to ensure that they were equipped to meet the demands of the course. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 1.2

27. Documentary evidence submitted in advance of the inspection included an initial needs assessment document which applicants were required to complete with details of prior experience relevant to the course. During the inspection, the course team explained that they didn't offer a formal Accredited Prior Experience or Learning (APEL) route for the apprenticeship as they did not feel it was possible to sufficiently meet the learning objectives of the course through prior study or training. Instead, the course team explained that apprentices' prior experiences were brought out within the classroom environment through group discussions and activities. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 1.3

28. As referenced in standard 1.1, the admissions process for the course was two tiered. Whilst employers managed internal screening processes, once formal applications were

made to the course, the university provided a consistent and comparable interview process. All interview panels included an academic, employer from a partnering local authority and a person with lived experience of social work. During meetings held as part of the inspection, the inspection team heard from employer representatives that they felt valued within admissions and interview processes. Representatives commented that the course team were open to working with partners and respected their knowledge and skills within practice. There was an ongoing open dialogue which ensured that admissions and selection processes remained fit for purpose.

29. During a meeting with representatives from the university Experts by Experience (EBE) group, the inspection team heard that members consistently sat on interview panels and had an active role in asking questions of candidates. All those involved in the process received training which supported them to undertake their role. Following interviews, all members of the panel were invited to comment on the candidate's response and suitability for the course. EBE group representatives commented that they contributed to the scoring process and where disagreements occurred between panel members, these were managed effectively, including offering second interviews where agreements could not be reached.

30. The inspection team also heard that representatives from the EBE network had provided feedback to the course team that some of the questions used in interviews were not fit for purpose. As a result, the course team agreed to review the questions in partnership with the group and these had changed for future cohorts. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.4

31. Upon nominating prospective candidates for the apprenticeship, employers were required to share an apprenticeship capture form with the university which provided confirmation that candidates had an up to date DBS check and had also undergone an occupational health assessment through their employer. In addition to the apprenticeship capture form, the university engaged with employers to identify any additional needs that candidates had so that these could be supported in conjunction with university student support services. During meetings with representatives from student support services, the inspection team heard that they were proactive in picking up or identifying needs and that there were multiple points of referral for support during the admissions process. The course team explained that they maintained oversight of occupational health needs and assessments due to the nature of social work courses. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.5

32. Through documentary evidence submitted ahead of the inspection visit, the course team outlined their plans for ensuring all members of interview panels had received

appropriate training in relation to Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). All academic staff were required to undertake mandatory training through the university which equipped them for their role on interview panels. Whilst members of the EBE network also had access to this via human resources, this was not always accessed, therefore a member of the course team provided bespoke sessions for members each academic year. The university liaised with employers regarding their organisational training to ensure that this had been undertaken by any representatives on interview panels.

33. As referenced in standard 1.4, the inspection team observed good practices in relation to recognition of reasonable adjustments for candidates from the course team and wider university services. During the inspection visit, the inspection team were also able to view a demonstration of data monitoring systems used by the university to gather data in relation to applicants, covering a wider range of personal and protected characteristics. The course team explained that the data supported them to review processes and ensure they remained appropriate for all candidates. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.6

34. During the documentary review of evidence, the inspection team were able to see copies of the programme handbook and work-based learning handbooks that had been developed for current and new versions of the programme. In addition to the handbooks, all applicants were expected to have access to an admissions document which provided detail about what to expect from the course. The course team also provided examples of PowerPoint presentations used by the course team during information sessions delivered via local authorities.

35. Whilst the inspection team recognised the value of the detail within the handbooks, the course provider indicated that these would be shared via the course page website which, at the time of review, was still under development. As a result, the inspection team required further assurance that information would be accessible to candidates to support them to make an informed decision about taking up the offer of a place on the course. Following discussion with the course team, the university were able to update the website during the inspection visit and review of this confirmed that current information was available to prospective candidates.

36. During a meeting with students who were studying on the course, the inspection team heard that they had received a wealth of information prior to accepting their place. They explained that they had appreciated the honesty of course team staff about the demands and realities of work based study and commented that documentation such as handbooks had answered any questions they had. As a result, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard two: Learning environment

Standard 2.1

37. The course provider submitted a copy of the course programme specification which included detail in relation to the number of contact hours all apprentices were required to engage with during the programme. This included reference to assessed work based learning opportunities which consisted of two placements and 30 skills days. During meetings held as part of the inspection, the course team and employer partners were able to provide a detailed overview of the mechanisms in place to ensure that there was appropriate contrast between placement experiences. Representatives from partner agencies also confirmed that they were clear about their role in the management and oversight of placements due to clear and consistent communication from the course team.

38. Whilst the course provider was able to demonstrate that skills days were planned into the programme, the inspection team heard that up to 15 of these days were shadowing experiences. Whilst the inspection team agreed that shadowing experiences were not inappropriate, they expressed concerns about how the course provider ensured that skills were developed through these days and consistently evidenced for students across the course. Consideration was given as to whether the finding identified would mean the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it was deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard, and we are confident that once the standard is met, a further inspection of the course would not be required. Full details of the condition can be found in the [conditions](#) section of this report.

Standard 2.2

39. Documentary evidence provided in advance of the inspection offered detail about the course providers approach to work based learning and placement experiences. During meetings held as part of the inspection, the inspection team were keen to further understand how the practice learning opportunities provided enabled students to gain the necessary skills and knowledge required to meet the professional standards.

40. During meetings with members of the course team, the inspection team heard that there were clearly defined roles for all staff involved in placement based learning. The addition of placement focused roles in the course team supported with the quality assurance of placements and provided reassurance that settings were appropriate and offered necessary challenge for apprentices. The inspection team also heard a consistent response from employer partners in relation to the management and oversight of placements. There was a shared confidence between the provider and practice colleagues and messages between both parties were consistent and clear. The inspection team agreed that the factors outlined above supported positive placement outcomes and clarity of understanding for students. As a result, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.3

41. Expectations in relation to the support available for apprentices whilst on placement were outlined within the work based learning handbook. The inspection team heard details about how the different staff roles within the university, such as placement tutors, apprenticeship partnership manager and course lead, successfully liaised with work based leads to ensure that expectations for support were understood. Participants in meetings held during the inspection described resources such as booklets and checklists being developed to support induction and processes that began prior to students starting their formal placement experience. This supported a proactive induction process which sought to support students and their placement needs rather than react to issues as they occurred.

42. Representatives from local authority partners explained that the university made expectations in relation to induction and workload clear and that these were reiterated year on year via training sessions delivered by a practice lead at the university. These were further supported by information sessions for practice educators who played a key role in the induction of students to placement. The inspection team heard that the approach to induction was often bespoke, allowing consideration for whether apprentices had been internally or externally appointed to the organisation and if an individual had additional needs which impacted their placement experience. All of the information shared by the course team and practice leads was supported by the views of apprentices the team spoke with, who explained that their induction to placement had been positive and supported effective practice. The inspection team were assured that this standard was met.

Standard 2.4

43. The work based learning handbook provided details of the types of social work tasks that students were expected to undertake whilst on placement. The course provider ensured that tasks were continuously reviewed by making this a focus in tripartite meetings which were attended by the apprenticeship partnership manager in liaison with practice educators and work based supervisors. The initial tripartite meeting documentation submitted by the course provider included prompts for conversations about workload, numbers of cases held by the apprentice and the support in place for these. During a meeting with employer partners, participants commented that the university provided clear guidance about workload expectations and that there were ongoing conversations with apprentices about their level of experience and appropriateness of tasks being undertaken.

44. During a meeting with university staff involved in the oversight of placement provision, the inspection team were informed that internal audits of placement audit forms were undertaken with a focus on reviewing apprentices experiences of workload and expectations. During these reviews, university staff picked up where there were inappropriate cases being held or high workloads and intervened by discussing directly with the placement provider. As a result, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.5

45. Documentary evidence outlined that all learners were required to pass their readiness for direct practice module prior to commencing their first placement. However, the documentary evidence did not provide clarity to the inspection team about what the assessment tasks entailed or how they were relevant to assessing readiness for practice. Through meetings held as part of the inspection, the inspection team sought to gain an understanding of the nature of these tasks and how they prepared students for direct practice.

46. The inspection team heard that students take part in a role play, based upon a case study, alongside members of the university EBE network, after which they complete a reflective essay. During meetings with EBE representatives, they explained that they were well prepared for this task and valued being integrated into the assessment of readiness for practice. Student representatives also commented that they found this experience to be positive and appropriately challenging. All students understood the requirement to pass this element of the course prior to commencing their first placement. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.6

47. The course team outlined how the practice lead undertook checks of the practice educator (PE) audit form to ensure that PEs were on the register and had maintained their currency. The responsibility of work place leads within organisations to support this standard was also outlined in contractual agreements developed as part of their engagement with the course. The placement team had also developed a spreadsheet which held information in relation to PEs, including qualifications, Social Work England registration, recent continuous professional development (CPD) and details of when they last engaged with the university in the role. This was checked routinely to maintain oversight of arrangements in place for apprentices.

48. During a meeting with PE representatives, the inspection team heard that the university regularly provided sessions for PEs to outline developments, share ideas and offer current training. PEs commented that the university had always adopted a proactive approach to support for the role and were supportive and responsive to their needs. Furthermore, the university also offered development opportunities which included opportunities to engage in practice panel discussions, be involved in admissions processes and invites to course development events. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.7

49. The work based learning handbook provided as part of documentary evidence outlined the procedure for raising concerns or complaints, including whistleblowing. Placement induction documentation and those linked to tripartite meetings offered further

opportunities to review policies and procedures as well as discuss concerns. Student representatives confirmed that they understood the processes in place. As a result, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard three: Course governance, management and quality

Standard 3.1

50. As part of the documentary review of evidence, the course provider directed the inspection team towards handbooks which demonstrated the roles, responsibilities and governance structures in place for the course. Whilst the inspection team could see details about course team staff who were involved in delivery, there was a lack of clarity in relation to reporting mechanisms and lines of accountability within the documentation provided.

51. During the inspection visit, the course provider submitted a diagram which provided further detail about the school management structure and this was further clarified during meetings with members of the senior leadership team. Representatives from the senior leadership team detailed the governance arrangements in place for the course which included an explanation about how different monitoring groups communicated with each other to maintain effective oversight. The university was also able to provide clear information in relation to the governance of apprenticeship courses, which included detailed minutes from discussions with university staff and local providers in relation to strategic planning. Whilst the course team and apprenticeship team were separate, there were effective working relationships in place to ensure that the delivery and resourcing of the course was effective.

52. The support for the course was also evident through conversations with senior leaders who recognised the value of the social work degree apprenticeship and were committed to supporting resourcing needs. This included maintaining regular opportunities for course team staff to provide feedback and discuss particular issues. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.2

53. The work based learning handbook outlined the processes in place for sourcing and maintaining placements which, due to the nature of the apprenticeship, was dependent upon employer commitment. Within the handbook, the inspection team were also able to view details of the processes in place to manage placement breakdowns and the key staff involved in such circumstances. During meetings with the course team and employer representatives, it was clear that all staff understood these arrangements and were able to give examples on where the process had been initiated and the support in place as a result.

54. The inspection team were provided with details of the contracts in place between the university and employers and agreed that these clearly outlined expectations and were

robust in detail. Formal agreements were also supported by regular information sessions, ongoing discussions between the university and employers and engagement in course monitoring meetings. This ensured that expectations remained clear and employer partners demonstrated an understanding about the level of provision that was required during placements. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.3

55. The course provider submitted details of the first tripartite meeting form as documentary evidence to support this standard. Within the meeting form, there were questions relating to student access to organisational policies and procedures as part of their induction. However, the inspection team queried how the university could be assured of the appropriateness of these policies or their implementation prior to placement commencing. As part of additional information submitted during the inspection process, the inspection team were able to review the apprenticeship 'team profile' which required employers to confirm the range of policies in place within their setting. Upon completing and submitting the profile to the university, the placement team completed checks to ensure the range of policies and procedures in place were appropriate to support placements. Further checks were then completed during placement meetings which were attended by university staff. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 3.4

56. The involvement of employers in the course was well evidenced during meetings held during the inspection visit. The inspection team heard that employers played an integral role in admissions processes and that information to support their involvement was clearly provided by university staff. In addition to their involvement in admissions, employers played a clear role in course development and design, as evidenced by a large stakeholder event held by the university to discuss the proposed changes to the apprenticeship. During the events, employer partners were informed about the changes being considered by the course team, as well as contributing any themes they felt were important also.

57. In addition to planned away days, the course lead for the apprenticeship held bi-annual meetings focused on gathering employer feedback. Organisational leads also commented that they were able to contact the course lead on a more ad-hoc basis to discuss social work priorities in practice, including the theoretical approaches being used in their setting. It was noted during the inspection that the feedback from employer partners was not reserved to those acting as placement leads but also PEs who felt confident to contribute to course level discussions. As a result, the inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 3.5

58. As outlined in relation to standard 3.4, the inspection team were provided with evidence that supported the engagement of employer partners in course monitoring, review and

evaluation activities. Employer representatives explained that records of trends in relation to placement issues could be fed back to the course team and that they were responsive to receiving this feedback.

59. In relation to the engagement of members of the university EBE network, the inspection team heard that the course team consistently communicated any changes or course developments to them through regular meetings. Representatives also explained that they had been involved in activities as part of the 'curriculum 23' refresh and had engaged in mind mapping and brainstorming activities alongside representatives from employer organisations. The EBE network also had the opportunity to engage in the assessment of students through activities such as role play and commented that they felt well supported in undertaking this role.

60. Student feedback and engagement was ensured via a range of mechanisms including module evaluations, committee meetings and through verbal or written feedback on placement activities. One example of a change made as a result of feedback from apprentices included a review of the timetable for the course, which enabled them to have periods in the academic calendar where they could book annual leave which would not impact upon their study. The course team were assured that this standard was met.

Standard 3.6

61. The course provider outlined how agreed numbers for the apprenticeship were driven by employer demand for the course and that university staff liaised with interested organisations to outline the expectations in relation to engagement with the course. Whilst the inspection team recognised that the nature of the course meant that employer placement capacity was a key driver, they were eager to understand whether there were any strategic plans for growth and if this had been considered alongside staffing and course team capacity.

62. During meetings with the senior leadership team, an outline was provided of how the university held strategic plans for the course alongside their other apprenticeship provision within the school. Discussions with employers about capacity began at specific points in the academic year to allow for forward planning and staffing growth if appropriate. The inspection team heard that numbers on the course had remained at a steady rate over recent years but that there was currently capacity for growth within the university if demand supported this. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 3.7

63. The course provider submitted details of their professional lead for the course who was appropriately qualified and on the Social Work England register. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 3.8

64. The inspection team reviewed the CVs of staff involved in course delivery. These highlighted that staff held a range of qualifications and relevant experience to support the delivery of an effective course. All staff were at a senior lecturer level or above and appropriate associate lecturers were also in place. The staff within the team also held appropriate responsibilities linked to delivery and there were mechanisms in place to refer to other colleagues where appropriate. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.9

65. The inspection team were provided with a demonstration of university data systems which outlined what data was available to the course team and an explanation about how this was used to influence the course. The inspection team recognised that the course team had access to dynamic data which provided useful insight into the course. This data had the capacity to be explored at both a school, course and individual level to allow for further scrutiny of key themes.

66. During a meeting with the course team, the inspection team heard that analysis of data had identified that academic writing skills were a weakness for some groups and that this had been tackled via the addition of access to targeted support and liaison with employers about the support needed. The inspection team also heard that some analysis of cohort data in previous years had demonstrated limited diversity, however this had improved with subsequent cohorts. The inspection team agreed that data was routinely used to evaluate student and course level information and that this was then used to inform action planning. As a result, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.10

67. The senior leadership team outlined their new commitment to ensuring that staff were engaged in research by supporting all to ensure that they were able to publish once a year. Where staff were new to academia, they were well supported by more experienced staff within the university. Members of the course team were able to provide specific examples of their current research interests and how these supported delivery of the course.

68. Alongside more formal routes in research and publication, the course team provided details of how their understanding of professional practice was maintained. Sessions where staff could work with people with lived experience of social work and colleagues within local authorities were arranged by the course lead, which enabled knowledge sharing and discussions about issues in practice. The course team also had opportunities to interact with colleagues in the voluntary sector.

69. In addition to supporting individual research and practice interests, the course lead ensured that knowledge and practice was shared amongst the wider course team through regular meetings and discussions about how the curriculum could be influenced by staff activity. The inspection team were assured that this standard was met.

Standard four: Curriculum assessment

Standard 4.1

70. The university submitted documentation which demonstrated the structure of the programme and the breadth of content being taught. In addition, the inspection team were able to review mapping of modular learning outcomes against the knowledge, skills and behaviours for the apprenticeship and relevant frameworks, including the professional standards. This was demonstrated for both the current and new versions of the course. During a presentation delivered by the course team, the inspection team were also provided with a comparison of the old modules against the new versions to support the inspection team to understand how proposed changes still met the necessary requirements.

71. As referenced in standard 2.1, the inspection team expressed concern about how the 15 shadowing days, which contributed towards skills development, were monitored to ensure they were meaningful and offered comparable learning experiences for apprentices. The inspection team proposed that, as these skills days were a significant contribution towards gaining experience in statutory settings, their delivery should be planned with purpose. Further to this, all students should have consistent opportunities to reflect on and record these experiences to demonstrate that they are working effectively towards meeting the professional standards. Consideration was given as to whether the finding identified would mean the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it was deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard, and we are confident that once the standard is met, a further inspection of the course would not be required. Full details of the condition can be found in the [conditions](#) section of this report.

Standard 4.2

72. As outlined in relation to standards 3.4 and 3.5, the inspection team were provided with a range of mechanisms for employers, practitioners and people with lived experience of social work to contribute towards the design, development and review of the curriculum. Representatives from the EBE network provided examples of how their input had impacted upon the design of the course, including contributing towards changes to admissions questions and bringing lived experience into role play tasks. Employer partners were also able to provide specific examples of their contributions which included delivery of skills day sessions, providing case studies, discussing changes to the content of the programme and offering feedback about the challenges with paperwork and processes in practice. The inspection team were assured that this standard was met.

Standard 4.3

73. During meetings held as part of the inspection, the inspection team heard about the course providers commitment to widening participation on the apprenticeship and removing barriers to learning for students. This included offering additional academic support for learners and maintaining close liaison with employers about the challenges apprentices might face. Members of university staff were also able to demonstrate how different teams worked together on issues in relation to access, as evidenced by an example of facilities staff working collaboratively with the course team to support students who required physical adaptations to the learning environment. The inspection team also observed that there was an inclusive admissions process for the course and both teaching and assessment strategies had been adapted to suit diversity of needs and promote inclusion.

74. The curriculum design demonstrated a commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) through the involvement of people with lived experience of social work, consideration of cultural differences which may impact approaches to parenting and a commitment to decolonising the curriculum. The course team saw evidence of this, review of legislation and consideration of other EDI topics through the updates to the course through 'curriculum 23'. The inspection team were assured that this standard was met.

Standard 4.4

75. As referenced in relation to standard 4.3, the inspection team learned about the 'curriculum 23' project that had led to the proposed changes to the course which were considered as part of the inspection. The inspection team were satisfied that this was a collaborative process that considered key developments in research and legislation, with key stakeholders, and was welcomed by those involved.

76. When reviewing the literature referenced within module descriptors, the inspection team observed that some texts did not reflect contemporary social work. The course team were able to provide examples of journal articles that students were also directed towards which were more current, though these did not reflect a significant proportion of the literature available on reading lists. The inspection team agreed that, on balance, the standard was met however agreed that a recommendation was appropriate in relation to ensuring that reading lists include up to date texts and reading materials. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [recommendations](#) section of this report.

Standard 4.5

77. The inspection team were able to review evidence of how the course team planned to deliver taught content through the curriculum which supported students to integrate theory

into practice. This included distinct sessions in relation to topics such as trauma, neglect and crisis intervention using case studies, as well as the requirement to complete reflective accounts in practice. During meetings held with PEs and students during the inspection visit, the inspection team also heard that the nature of the apprenticeship supported this standard as students would be learning about theories at university one day and then applying this in practice the following day.

78. The inspection team queried how PEs supported the integration of theory into practice on placement. PE representatives explained that this was the biggest theme of reflective supervision and that resources such as theory cards would be used to support student thinking. The university also provided handouts of the theories being taught on the course to support PEs to incorporate these into their work with students. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.6

79. Documentary evidence submitted by the course provider included information about a module which was dedicated to interprofessional practice titled 'collaborative working in social work'. The course provider outlined the range of professionals involved in the delivery of the module which included the police, health visitors, midwives and occupational therapists. Students commented that these sessions had a significant impact upon their own professional practice, providing an example of a visiting solicitor who led a lecture which included a role play exercise in court room skills.

80. Further to the taught content on the course, the inspection team heard that placements and shadowing days offered opportunities for multi-disciplinary learning across a range of teams. As part of their placement portfolio, students were also required to seek professional feedback from other professionals in their placement network which further encouraged reflection upon multidisciplinary learning opportunities. The inspection team concluded that this standard was met.

Standard 4.7

81. The course provider submitted module descriptors for the course which included details of the required learning and contact hours for each module. Upon reviewing the evidence, the inspection team agreed that the learning hours were appropriate and sufficient to cover the content outlined within the descriptor. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.8

82. The course provider submitted details of the assessment strategy for the current and new version of the course. Within the narrative to support the evidence, the course team outlined that they had chosen an assessment strategy that was, in its design, inclusive and

authentic with a range of assessment types embedded within it. When reviewing the details of the proposed assessments for the new course, the inspection team queried whether the design was robust, reliable and valid due to the weighting of presentations used. The inspection team questioned whether it was possible to assess specific skills accurately or assess the increasing complexity of course content whilst using presentations as an assessment method, and whether significant use of one assessment method might be a disadvantage to some students. Further to this, the inspection team queried whether judgements were reliable and valid without specific training for staff in the skill of assessing presentations which would produce consistent judgements. Consideration was given as to whether the finding identified would mean that the new version of the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it is deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard, and we are confident that once this standard is met, a further inspection of the course would not be required. Full details of the condition, its monitoring and approval can be found in the [conditions](#) section of this report.

Standard 4.9

83. The course provider submitted evidence of how their assessments were mapped to the curriculum and provided an overview to the inspection team of how they were sequenced throughout each year of the course. The inspection team agreed that the assessments were appropriately spaced over the academic year to avoid students becoming overwhelmed, for example whilst on placement.

84. As with standard 4.8, the inspection team queried whether the assessment strategy for the new course was appropriately sequenced to match student progression through the course. The inspection team were not able to see evidence of how presentations increased in complexity in line with study at level 6. As a result, the inspection team agreed that the condition applied to standard 4.8 was also relevant to this standard. Full details of the condition, its monitoring and approval can be found in the [conditions](#) section of this report.

Standard 4.10

85. The course provider outlined the different ways in which they provided feedback to students to support their progression throughout the course. This included formative feedback on essay plans and practice scenarios prior to assessment deadlines to enable students to gauge their progress before submitting for summative feedback. The inspection team reviewed the university policy in relation to feedback on formal assessments which detailed the expectation that this would be provided within 15 days. The external examiner report provided by the university also outlined that the quality of feedback provided was a strength and constructive for student development.

86. During meetings with student representatives, the inspection team heard that students were satisfied with the feedback offered throughout the course. This included formal feedback from members of the course team and members of the EBE network as well as that received in practice learning scenarios. Further to this, students also had the opportunity to receive feedback through individual and group tutorials as well as via tripartite meetings held. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 4.11

87. Documentary evidence reviewed by the inspection team included staff CVs, including the external examiner for the course, and the PE audit which verified that assessment of practice was undertaken by a suitably qualified PE. The inspection team also heard that the term for the external examiner for the course had been extended to allow them to review the changes to the assessment strategy over the following academic year. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.12

88. The inspection team were provided with evidence of how the course provider monitored key progression points throughout the course and analysed the data associated with this. The range of progression points for the course were varied and included mid-point review of placement practice, completion of the end point assessment portfolio and examinations. The inspection team were satisfied that the range of professionals involved in making judgements in relation to student progression were appropriate and all were appropriately qualified to inform judgements. The inspection team agreed, therefore, that this standard was met.

Standard 4.13

89. The course team outlined how students were provided with appropriate reading materials throughout their modules to support the development of an evidence informed approach to practice. In year two of the course, students also studied a dedicated research methods module which, upon successful completion, enabled them to analyse research reports necessary to inform social work practice and engage with research activity.

90. When reviewing details of the module for the new version of the course, the inspection team noted that the assessment for the module had been changed from a written research proposal to a poster presentation. The inspection team questioned whether this assessment method was adequate to measure whether students were able to apply the necessary skills in relation to research and evaluation. As a result, the inspection team agreed that the condition applied to standards 4.8 and 4.9 was also relevant to this standard. Full details of the condition can be found in the [conditions](#) section of this report.

Standard five: Supporting students

Standard 5.1

90. Documentary evidence submitted by the course provider in support of this standard included handbooks, admissions information and links to university wide resources which offered support in relation to student health and wellbeing, careers and disability and inclusion services. During meetings with representatives from these services, the inspection team heard details about how the teams adopted a proactive approach to offering support to students. This included working with the course team to identify needs disclosed at admissions stage and supporting those identified by the course team early in the course. Support services also provided details of a system in place which identified the specific needs or vulnerabilities of students and sent reminders of services available throughout the academic year. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.2

91. The course provider outlined the different job roles in place to ensure that students were able to access support to develop their academic skills. These included the provision of personal tutors, module leaders and the apprenticeship partnership manager. Staff across all job roles were able to signpost to appropriate services, such as dedicated tutors, or offer direct input to students themselves. Details of the wider support available was also outlined within the programme handbook, along with links where students could see more in depth information about services and details of how to request support.

92. During meetings with the course team and wider support services, the inspection team heard details of how the university had considered the unique nature of apprenticeship learners and adapted the course to suit their needs. The course team outlined that many apprentices were mature learners or had time out of education and so module content was adapted to reflect this. This included providing sessions on academic writing and referencing. Stakeholders involved in meetings throughout the inspection agreed that apprentices were well supported in their return to education, and this was supported by the views of apprentices themselves. The inspection team also heard details about the development of library resources for students and the addition of a dedicated subject librarian for the school who was having a positive impact on the resources available to support students with their studies. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.3

93. Information in relation to monitoring ongoing suitability of apprentice students was outlined within the work based learning handbook. The course team provided details of the process in place with employer partners to ensure that DBS checks had been undertaken and the declarations required to confirm there had been no changes to suitability prior to commencing any placement. This was supported by examples of documentation in place

with the university, apprentice and employer. Whilst there had not been any fitness to practice cases in relation to the apprenticeship, the course team were able to detail the process in place should the situation arise. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 5.4

94. Documentary evidence submitted in advance of the inspection outlined the processes in place to support students with identified needs. This included the referral process to the disability and inclusion team and the provision of a reasonable adjustments plan. As outlined in standard 5.2, the course team adapted the curriculum in recognition of the fact that many apprentices may have had time away from education. This included the addition of a written task early in the course which was used as a means of identifying if students might require additional support or intervention. Representatives from the disability and inclusion team were able to provide details of the screening and assessment processes in place where potential needs were highlighted, which the inspection team agreed were appropriate.

95. During meetings with university staff, the inspection team were able to hear examples of some of the adjustments that had been implemented for apprentice students. These included physical adjustments to the learning environment which required different teams from the university to work collaboratively to support student needs. The inspection team were confident that the processes in place were effective and had reduced barriers to learning for specific students. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.5

96. The work based learning and programme handbooks provided details about next steps for students post qualification (including information about the regulator), applying to join the register and CPD requirements. Student representatives commented that they were pleased to receive the handbook upon joining the course and felt the information within it was detailed and helpful. The inspection team also heard about the partnership between the course team and employer partners to support recently qualified social workers during their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE). The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 5.6

97. Information contained within the work based learning handbook detailed the requirements for students to attend all placement days and skills days in order to meet the minimum requirements of the course. In instances where placement days were missed, the handbook detailed the arrangements in place for students to catch up on missed learning. During a meeting with student representatives, the inspection team heard that apprentices understood the requirement to attend all practice learning sessions, however there was

some confusion about the impact of missing other taught sessions on the course. Some representatives also expressed concern that they were unable to record catch up time on their electronic apprenticeship record. The inspection team agreed that, on balance, the standard was met but agreed a recommendation was appropriate to offer clarity about wider attendance requirements on the course. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [recommendations](#) section of this report.

Standard 5.7

98. The inspection team reviewed the university feedback policy alongside a copy of a report from the external examiner for the course. The external examiner described feedback as being comprehensive, with a clear rationale for the marks awarded to students. Student representatives also spoke positively about their experiences of feedback from the course team and agreed that this was received when expected. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 5.8

99. The inspection team reviewed the university academic appeals policy. During a meeting with student support services, detail was provided about the role of the student hub and their ability to support students who wished to make an academic appeal. The inspection team agreed that the processes in place were appropriate and, as a result, agreed that this standard was met.

Standard six: Level of qualification to apply for entry onto the register

Standard 6.1

100. As the qualifying course is BSc Social Work Degree Apprenticeship the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Proposed outcome

The inspection team recommend that the course be approved with conditions. These will be monitored for completion.

Conditions

Conditions for approval are set if there are areas of a course that do not currently meet our standards. Conditions must be met by the education provider within the agreed timescales.

Having considered whether approval with conditions or a refusal of approval was an appropriate course of action, the inspection team are proposing the following conditions for this course at this time.

	Standard not currently met	Condition	Date for submission of evidence	Link
1	Standards 2.1 and 4.1	The education provider will provide evidence that demonstrates that the use of shadowing experiences for skills days can demonstrate development and progression of skills and that students have comparable experiences across the course.	12 th March 2024.	Paragraph 37 Paragraph 70
2	Standards 4.8, 4.9, 4.13	The education provider will provide evidence that staff are appropriately guided to implement the assessment strategy, including how to assess presentations accurately and consistently, and that the criteria for these assessments produce reliable results. The education provider will also evidence that consideration has been given to the validity of the new assessment strategy in providing students with the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the professional standards.	12 th March 2024.	Paragraph 82 Paragraph 83 Paragraph 89

Recommendations

In addition to the conditions above, the inspectors identified the following recommendations for the education provider. These recommendations highlight areas that the education provider may wish to consider. The recommendations do not affect any decision relating to course approval.

	Standard	Detail	Link
1	Standard 4.4	The inspectors are recommending that the university consider reviewing the reading lists for modules to ensure that they include contemporary social work literature.	Paragraph 75
2	Standard 5.6	The inspectors are recommending that the university consider reviewing the information provided to students regarding attendance requirements across all aspects of the course.	Paragraph 97

Annex 1: Education and training standards summary

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
Admissions			
1.1 Confirm on entry to the course, via a holistic/multi-dimensional assessment process, that applicants: i. have the potential to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the professional standards ii. can demonstrate that they have a good command of English iii. have the capability to meet academic standards; and iv. have the capability to use information and communication technology (ICT) methods and techniques to achieve course outcomes.	☒	☐	☐
1.2 Ensure that applicants' prior relevant experience is considered as part of the admissions processes.	☒	☐	☐
1.3 Ensure that employers, placement providers and people with lived experience of social work are involved in admissions processes.	☒	☐	☐
1.4 Ensure that the admissions processes assess the suitability of applicants, including in relation to their conduct, health and character. This includes criminal conviction checks.	☒	☐	☐
1.5 Ensure that there are equality and diversity policies in relation to applicants and that they are implemented and monitored.	☒	☐	☐
1.6 Ensure that the admissions process gives applicants the information they require to make an informed choice about whether to take up an offer of a place on a course. This will include	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
information about the professional standards, research interests and placement opportunities.			
Learning environment			
2.1 Ensure that students spend at least 200 days (including up to 30 skills days) gaining different experiences and learning in practice settings. Each student will have: i) placements in at least two practice settings providing contrasting experiences; and ii) a minimum of one placement taking place within a statutory setting, providing experience of sufficient numbers of statutory social work tasks involving high risk decision making and legal interventions.	☐	☒	☐
2.2 Provide practice learning opportunities that enable students to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to develop and meet the professional standards.	☒	☐	☐
2.3 Ensure that while on placements, students have appropriate induction, supervision, support, access to resources and a realistic workload.	☒	☐	☐
2.4 Ensure that on placements, students' responsibilities are appropriate for their stage of education and training.	☐	☐	☐
2.5 Ensure that students undergo assessed preparation for direct practice to make sure they are safe to carry out practice learning in a service delivery setting.	☒	☐	☐
2.6 Ensure that practice educators are on the register and that they have the relevant and current knowledge, skills and experience to support safe and effective learning.	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
2.7 Ensure that policies and processes, including for whistleblowing, are in place for students to challenge unsafe behaviours and cultures and organisational wrongdoing, and report concerns openly and safely without fear of adverse consequences.	☒	☐	☐
Course governance, management and quality			
3.1 Ensure courses are supported by a management and governance plan that includes the roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability of individuals and governing groups in the delivery, resourcing and quality management of the course.	☒	☐	☐
3.2 Ensure that they have agreements with placement providers to provide education and training that meets the professional standards and the education and training qualifying standards. This should include necessary consents and ensure placement providers have contingencies in place to deal with practice placement breakdown.	☒	☐	☐
3.3 Ensure that placement providers have the necessary policies and procedures in relation to students' health, wellbeing and risk, and the support systems in place to underpin these.	☐	☐	☐
3.4 Ensure that employers are involved in elements of the course, including but not limited to the management and monitoring of courses and the allocation of practice education.	☒	☐	☐
3.5 Ensure that regular and effective monitoring, evaluation and improvement systems are in place, and that these involve	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
employers, people with lived experience of social work, and students.			
3.6 Ensure that the number of students admitted is aligned to a clear strategy, which includes consideration of local/regional placement capacity.	☒	☐	☐
3.7 Ensure that a lead social worker is in place to hold overall professional responsibility for the course. This person must be appropriately qualified and experienced, and on the register.	☐	☐	☐
3.8 Ensure that there is an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff, with relevant specialist subject knowledge and expertise, to deliver an effective course.	☒	☐	☐
3.9 Evaluate information about students' performance, progression and outcomes, such as the results of exams and assessments, by collecting, analysing and using student data, including data on equality and diversity.	☒	☐	☐
3.10 Ensure that educators are supported to maintain their knowledge and understanding in relation to professional practice.	☒	☐	☐
Curriculum and assessment			
4.1 Ensure that the content, structure and delivery of the training is in accordance with relevant guidance and frameworks and is designed to enable students to demonstrate that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the professional standards.	☐	☒	☐
4.2 Ensure that the views of employers, practitioners and people with lived experience of social work are incorporated into the design,	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
ongoing development and review of the curriculum.			
4.3 Ensure that the course is designed in accordance with equality, diversity and inclusion principles, and human rights and legislative frameworks.	☒	☐	☐
4.4 Ensure that the course is continually updated as a result of developments in research, legislation, government policy and best practice.	☒	☐	☒
4.5 Ensure that the integration of theory and practice is central to the course.	☒	☐	☐
4.6 Ensure that students are given the opportunity to work with, and learn from, other professions in order to support multidisciplinary working, including in integrated settings.	☒	☐	☐
4.7 Ensure that the number of hours spent in structured academic learning under the direction of an educator is sufficient to ensure that students meet the required level of competence.	☒	☐	☐
4.8 Ensure that the assessment strategy and design demonstrate that the assessments are robust, fair, reliable and valid, and that those who successfully complete the course have developed the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the professional standards.	☐	☒	☐
4.9 Ensure that assessments are mapped to the curriculum and are appropriately sequenced to match students' progression through the course.	☐	☒	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
4.10 Ensure students are provided with feedback throughout the course to support their ongoing development.	☒	☐	☐
4.11 Ensure assessments are carried out by people with appropriate expertise, and that external examiner(s) for the course are appropriately qualified and experienced and on the register.	☒	☐	☐
4.12 Ensure that there are systems to manage students' progression, with input from a range of people, to inform decisions about their progression including via direct observation of practice.	☒	☐	☐
4.13 Ensure that the course is designed to enable students to develop an evidence-informed approach to practice, underpinned by skills, knowledge and understanding in relation to research and evaluation.	☐	☒	☐
Supporting students			
5.1 Ensure that students have access to resources to support their health and wellbeing including: I. confidential counselling services; II. careers advice and support; and III. occupational health services	☒	☐	☐
5.2 Ensure that students have access to resources to support their academic development including, for example, personal tutors.	☒	☐	☐
5.3 Ensure that there is a thorough and effective process for ensuring the ongoing suitability of students' conduct, character and health.	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
5.4 Make supportive and reasonable adjustments for students with health conditions or impairments to enable them to progress through their course and meet the professional standards, in accordance with relevant legislation.	☒	☐	☐
5.5 Provide information to students about their curriculum, practice placements, assessments and transition to registered social worker including information on requirements for continuing professional development.	☒	☐	☐
5.6 Provide information to students about parts of the course where attendance is mandatory.	☒	☐	☒
5.7 Provide timely and meaningful feedback to students on their progression and performance in assessments.	☒	☐	☐
5.8 Ensure there is an effective process in place for students to make academic appeals.	☒	☐	☐
Level of qualification to apply for entry onto the register			
6.1 The threshold entry route to the register will normally be a bachelor's degree with honours in social work.	☒	☐	☐

Regulator decision

Approved with conditions.

Annex 2: Meeting of conditions

If conditions are applied to a course approval, Social Work England completes a conditions review to make sure education providers have complied with the conditions and are meeting all of the [education and training standards](#).

A review of the conditions evidence will be undertaken and recommendations will be made to Social Work England's decision maker.

This section of the report will be completed when the conditions review is completed.

	Standard not met	Condition	Recommendation
1	Standards 2.1 and 4.1	The education provider will provide evidence that demonstrates that the use of shadowing experiences for skills days can demonstrate development and progression of skills and that students have comparable experiences across the course.	Condition met.
2	Standards 4.8, 4.9, 4.13	The education provider will provide evidence that staff are appropriately guided to implement the assessment strategy, including how to assess presentations accurately and consistently, and that the criteria for these assessments produce reliable results. The education provider will also evidence that consideration has been given to the validity of the new assessment strategy in providing students with the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the professional standards.	Condition met.

Findings

101. In relation to the condition set against standards 2.1 and 4.1, the course provider submitted a copy of their newly developed shadowing task template. The document outlined the expected shadowing tasks required of all apprentices and included space for the apprentice to reflect upon the skills and knowledge acquired. The inspection team

agreed that the documentation was clear, offered comparable experiences and presented a good opportunity to capture learning. As a result, the inspection team agreed that this condition was met.

102. In relation to the condition set against standards 4.8, 4.9 and 4.13, the course provider outlined how they had ensured that presentations used as part of their assessment strategy had clear learning outcomes and were developmental throughout the course. This was supported by documentary evidence which included module and grading descriptors for the different levels of the course. Furthermore, the course provider outlined how presentation assessments required the students to submit notes in advance which could be reviewed by markers to ensure the learning outcomes for the level of study were met. The rationale for the use of presentations included reference to the skills required within the workplace as well as considering the inclusivity of the assessment strategy for learners with neuro diversity needs.

103. In order to ensure that presentations could be moderated, the course provider explained that all would be recorded for external and internal moderation purposes to ensure consistency within and across modules. Training for PWLE colleagues involved in assessment panels was also provided to ensure a clear understanding of their role.

104. The inspection team agreed that the evidence provided offered assurance that all stakeholders involved in the assessment of presentations would have a clear understanding of how to assess at different levels and that moderation activities would ensure consistency across the course. The inspection team also noted that the course provider had offered a clear rationale for the development of their assessment strategy and, as a result, agreed that this condition was now met.

Regulator decision

Conditions met.