



Inspection Report

Course provider: London Metropolitan University

Course approval: PGDip Step Up to Social Work

Inspection dates: 30th May – 1st June 2023

Report date:	26 th July 2023
Inspector recommendation:	Approved
Regulator decision:	Approved
Date of Regulator decision:	18 th September 2023

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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, new course 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 appearance 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- or 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, without conditions or that it does not meet the criteria for 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 decision about the approval of the course.
13. The 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. Course details: London Metropolitan University wish to run a 14-month PGDip Step Up to Social Work programme.

Inspection ID	LMU417
Course provider	London Metropolitan University
Validating body (if different)	
Course inspected	PGDip Step Up to Social Work
Mode of Study	Full time
Maximum student cohort	29
Proposed first intake	January 2024
Date of inspection	30 th May – 1 st June 2023
Inspection team	Joseph Hubbard (Education Quality Assurance Officer) Louise Hernon (Registrant Inspector) Glenn Mathieson (Lay Inspector)
Inspector recommendation	Approval (with recommendations)
Approval outcome	Approved

Language

16. In this document we describe London Metropolitan University (LMU) as ‘the course provider’ or ‘the university’ and we describe the PGDip Step Up to Social Work as ‘the course’ or ‘the Step Up’.

Inspection

17. A remote inspection took place from 30th May – 1st June 2023. As part of this process the inspection team planned to meet with key stakeholders including students, course staff, employer partners 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 four MSc student reps, as the MSc is the current course that is most similar to the proposed Step Up. Discussions included placement experiences, readiness for practice, reasonable adjustments, course evaluation and improvement, pastoral and academic support, and assessment.

Meetings with course staff

21. Over the course of the inspection, the inspection team met with university staff members from the course team, admissions team, senior management, practice-based learning team, and support services. Due to the substantial employer involvement in the Step Up programme, local authority staff with roles in the programme management also attended several meetings.

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 course through the university's BeSpoke group. Discussions included admissions, readiness for practice, module content, and assessment.

Meetings with external stakeholders

23. The inspection team met with representatives from the North East London Teaching Partnership, and Step Up placement partners including the London Boroughs of Newham, Havering, Redbridge, and Waltham Forest.

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 university provided documentary evidence for this standard confirming their entry requirements and application process. The Department for Education (DfE) prescribes a multi-dimensional application process for the Step Up, involving a written assessment, role play exercise, and interview. Applicants must have a 2:2 degree and English and maths GCSE at grade C (or equivalent). The details of the admissions process were triangulated at inspection through meetings with the admissions team, course team, and students. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.2

26. The university's documentary evidence submission confirmed that Step Up applicants must have 6 months' full time (paid or voluntary) experience working directly with vulnerable people. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met based on the documentary evidence.

Standard 1.3

27. Documentary evidence confirmed that placement providers will be heavily involved in the management of the admissions process for Step Up, in line with the nature of the course. Employers and people with lived experience of social work (PWLE) from the BeSpoke group will also be represented on interview panels. At inspection, BeSpoke members stated that their involvement with admissions for current social work courses at the university is meaningful and their input is respected. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 1.4

28. The university provided documentary evidence including a suitability declaration form which requires a declaration of any relevant health conditions, criminal convictions, and previous disciplinaries. Employer references are also sought, and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are completed.

29. At inspection, the university and placement partners outlined the steps taken in instances where applicants declare a conviction. The inspection team agreed that the university staff and placement partners they met with had a clear shared understanding of the procedure in these cases, but it was confirmed during the inspection that there is no formal written policy in place. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met, with a recommendation around formalising the decision-making process for convictions with a written policy. This will help ensure a consistent approach is always applied in the decision-making around these instances. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the proposed outcomes section of this report.

Standard 1.5

30. Documentary evidence was provided prior to the inspection showing that the DfE employ recruitment consultants Capita to monitor and assist with Step Up recruitment. Capita utilise a number of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) procedures covering topics such as inclusive recruitment processes and removing inequitable barriers. Implementation of these principles has resulted in measures such as the removal of candidate names from applications, and a reduction in the entry requirements from a 2:1 to a 2:2 honours degree.

31. The DfE collects and analyses data regarding applicants' protected characteristics; they are currently working to address a drop off in the number of global majority ethnicity students at the assessment centre stage. All assessment centre panel members receive unconscious bias training, which is refreshed before every recruitment cycle. Promotional materials for the programme feature diverse imagery and explicitly encourage applications from a diverse range of applicants. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 1.6

32. Prior to inspection, the university provided evidence in the form of the Step Up programme website and example slides of a briefing document. A number of these briefing sessions are run by the regional partnership, with the purpose of ensuring applicants are provided with all necessary details regarding the course. The briefing slides and Step Up website include information regarding the course structure, bursary, attendance requirements, and assessment. The website also provides comprehensive information about the intensity of the course and refers to Social Work England registration and the professional standards. The inspection team concluded that the standard was met.

Standard two: Learning environment

Standard 2.1

33. Review of the documentary evidence provided prior to inspection confirmed that all students will complete two placements in statutory settings plus 30 skills days, totalling 200 days of practice learning. The university's mapping form states that each placement partner

borough has confirmed they have capacity to fulfil their share of the placement requirements, and that the university will ensure each student's placements are contrasting. The placement handbook contains definitions of high risk and legal interventions, to ensure a shared understanding of the requirements for a statutory placement. Placement learning is mapped to the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS) within the handbook, and placement tutors are equipped to support placements in providing learning opportunities aligned with the two PCF levels. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 2.2

34. As discussed in the previous standard, all students will complete two contrasting placements in statutory settings. The placement handbook contains mapping of placement outcomes with the PCF and KSS, and the Practice Learning Agreement (PLA) establishes learning objectives. Quality assurance is undertaken of potential and existing placements through the Quality Assurance of Practice Learning (QAPL) process. Statutory placements are also required to map their placement role responsibilities against a PCF mapping tool.

35. At inspection, current MSc students who had been on placement within teams who will also provide placements for the Step Up spoke positively about their placement learning experiences meeting their needs. Practice educators were clear about the PCFs being woven into all of the placement processes and into their work with students. Practice educators confirmed that the final placement report includes a section on objectives for the student's Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE). The inspection team were satisfied that the standard was met.

Standard 2.3

36. The university's documentary submission stated that they use the Pan-London Common Paperwork Templates, which are reviewed annually by the Social Work Education Network (SWEN). This includes an induction schedule for each student, and the PLA which covers supervision, workload expectations, resources and support. The student's placement learning team will use these documents to establish expectations and monitor fulfilment of these at PLA Meetings. The PLA includes a section for outlining any reasonable adjustments the student may require.

37. At inspection, students spoke highly of the supervision and support in place both on placement and from their placement tutors. Practice-based learning staff were able to provide examples of how they prevent and manage any issues arising with workload or level of responsibilities. However, the inspectors did note that there is no safeguarding policy included within the PLA policy checklist. As a safeguarding policy is not explicitly required under this standard, the inspection team agreed that the standard is met with a recommendation to consult with the Pan-London network about adding this to the list of

policies in the PLA. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) section of this report.

Standard 2.4

38. As discussed within the previous standard, the placement handbook maps placement learning opportunities to the PCFs and highlights expected differences between first and second placements. Practice educators and placement tutors use the PLA to support placements in providing learning opportunities aligned with the relevant PCF level and the student's learning needs. The PLA meetings identify student achievements and ensure agreed learning needs are appropriate for their stage of training. Consistency of placement responsibilities across the placement partners will also be monitored at regular steering group meetings.

39. At inspection, practice-based learning staff confirmed that the appropriateness of students' responsibilities are discussed and checked at the initial, mid-way, and final PLA meetings. This can also be raised by the student through their placement tutor or practice educator at any time between meetings, and staff will advocate for students where necessary to ensure the amount and nature of their work is appropriate. Students confirmed that they have felt supported in this respect, and practice educators confirmed that they are very conscious of giving due care to this aspect of the PLA. The inspection team were satisfied that the standard was met.

Standard 2.5

40. Course documentation provided by the university confirms that the programme includes a Readiness for Direct Practice module. The module features the involvement of BeSpoke members who assess role play tasks and co-facilitate sessions on communication skills. The module content covers unconscious bias, professional boundaries, the role of regulation, communication, and fitness to practise. The module features a summative and formative assessment, and students are not eligible to begin placement unless they have passed the Readiness for Direct Practice module.

41. The placement application form requires students to declare any health conditions that may impact on their ability to practise safely. Any disclosed health conditions are reviewed by the course team, university disability services, and the placement provider to ensure any necessary adjustments are in place. Applicants to the programme are required to undertake DBS checks, and prior to placement they must complete a DBS disclosure form and register with the DBS update service. Students who do not pass the Readiness for Direct Practice module first time are given individual tutorials and the opportunity to reflect on any necessary skill development.

42. At inspection, employer partners stated that they have established a working group to discuss placements, and to pre-empt and prevent common issues around student readiness.

MSc students discussed not having felt fully prepared for the realities of statutory placement, but acknowledged that some aspects cannot be grasped until placement begins. The course team discussed having introduced placement-themed 'open door' sessions to address this, where students can get extra support with the adjustment period once on placement. Previous students and current social workers also co-facilitate some programme teaching to provide insight into real world practice for students ahead of placement. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 2.6

43. Evidence provided ahead of the inspection indicated that the QAPL placement form records practice educators' qualifications, but it was not clear how or whether practice educator registration numbers or currency was checked. This was discussed at inspection, and the practice-based learning team were able to confirm that annual compliance checks are undertaken on practice educators' registration and currency. A range of CPD opportunities are provided to practice educators through the North London Teaching Partnership, and participation of this is recorded and evidenced. Additionally, rolling practice education refresher programmes are available and any practice educators who have not had a student within the past 2 years must attend a refresher programme before they can be allocated a student. The inspection team were satisfied that the standard was met.

Standard 2.7

44. Documentary evidence provided prior to the inspection confirmed that the Placement Learning Agreement requires students to sign confirming they have read the whistleblowing policy. The placement handbook outlines the process for addressing any placement concerns through a placement concerns meeting and/or a cause for concern meeting, and specifies the timescales for this procedure. At inspection, students provided a number of positive examples of these procedures working well in practice for themselves and other students when necessary. Students also demonstrated awareness of the whistleblowing policy and confirmed they had gone through this during their inductions. The inspection team determined that this standard was met.

Standard three: Course governance, management and quality

Standard 3.1

45. The university provided documentary evidence for this standard ahead of the inspection including an organogram which clearly laid out the roles and responsibilities for management of the course. There is a QAPL process for student feedback on placements and a quality assurance strategy for placements. A comprehensive course enhancement document for postgraduate social work courses was provided, which outlined identified

actions for improvement. Stakeholder meetings are held involving both employers and PWLE in course evaluation and quality assurance processes.

46. At inspection, members of senior management talked through the various aspects of regular quality assurance activity all programmes are subject to, including initial validation, periodic revalidation, and annual CEP (Course Evaluation Process). They confirmed that module feedback is also gathered in autumn and spring, and module leaders are expected to make what adjustments they reasonably can in response, and feed back to students about the impact of their input. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.2

47. Documentary evidence provided prior to the inspection indicated that PLAs are in place for all placements, and these include learning objectives and consents. The placement handbook maps placement to the PCFs and professional standards, and contains details of the cause for concern process to be followed in response to possible placement breakdown. There is a sustainability strategy in place for placement provision, and each local authority placement partner has agreed to provide a set number of placements for the Step Up. There is an audit process for placements which identifies placement opportunities, and the QAPL process includes extra checks for any local authority with a less than good Ofsted rating. At inspection, course team staff, employer partners, and students demonstrated a clear common understanding of processes for responding to potential placement breakdown. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 3.3

48. Review of induction documents and PLAs provided prior to inspection confirmed that these check for necessary health and safety policies and procedures. The placement handbook also includes information regarding reasonable adjustments. Placements are quality assured through various processes as outlined in the previous standard to ensure they can provide the necessary environment and support for students.

49. At inspection, practice-based learning staff confirmed that they undertake various quality checks on all placements to try and ensure adequate support is in place. If a placement isn't meeting a student's needs in terms of support or learning opportunities, the university will initially try to work with the placement to improve the situation. If this does not prove effective in resolving the issues, the university will find students an alternative placement opportunity.

50. Practice-based learning staff and practice educators were able to provide examples of how reasonable adjustments have been put in place for MSc students on placement. MSc students, including those who have had placements at local authorities which will also be used for the Step Up, confirmed that they have received robust support in accordance with their PLAs. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.4

51. The nature of the Step Up programme gives rise to substantial employer involvement in course management and monitoring. Documentary evidence provided by the university confirmed that employers are involved in various elements of the programme, such as admissions and practice assessment panels. Employer partners are also represented on the stakeholder group, which meets regularly to discuss and address topics such as placement quality and student needs. During the inspection, employer partners confirmed they have meaningful involvement in decisions around module content, and described the university as ingrained in the local community and in touch with meeting local needs. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.5

52. As discussed within standard 3.1, there is a QAPL process for student feedback on placements and a quality assurance strategy for placements. A comprehensive course enhancement document for postgraduate social work courses was provided prior to inspection, which outlined identified actions for improvement. Stakeholder meetings are held involving both employers and PWLE in course evaluation and quality assurance processes. Students provide feedback through module feedback surveys twice per year and contribute to wider improvements to provision through student representatives.

53. At inspection, members of senior management talked through the various aspects of regular quality assurance activity all programmes are subject to, including initial validation, periodic revalidation, and the annual CEP (Course Evaluation Process). They confirmed that module feedback is also gathered from students in autumn and spring, and module leaders are expected to make what adjustments they reasonably can in response, and feed back to students about the impact of their input.

54. The course team stated that beyond the formal module evaluations and student representative meetings, they seek feedback from students on a regular basis throughout the year and make changes dynamically so that current students benefit from the improvements. Students echoed this, confirming that formal student representative meetings are effective routes for feedback, but that staff also seek and act on feedback informally throughout the year. Members of the BeSpoke group confirmed that they are involved in course improvement work through stakeholder meetings and feel heard and valued in that process. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.6

55. The university's documentary evidence submitted for this standard included a detailed research-informed workforce planning document. The Department for Education centrally allocates the number of students to be admitted to Step Up programmes each cycle, and the employer partners locally have agreed the maximum number of Step Up places they will

each accommodate. Numbers for the first cohort are set to be lower than the eventual target of 29, which reflects a dip in Step Up applicants nationally. Senior management are conscious of this and monitoring for any impact on student experience from a smaller cohort. The inspection team concluded that this standard was met.

Standard 3.7

56. Documentary evidence provided prior to inspection confirmed that the lead social worker is registered with Social Work England and their CV confirms they are appropriately qualified for the role. As the programme lead had not yet been recruited at the time of inspection, the inspection team queried whether overall professional responsibility for the course would change hands to the programme lead once recruited. The university confirmed that overall professional responsibility for the course will remain with the named lead social worker. The inspection team therefore concluded that the standard was met.

Standard 3.8

57. The inspectors' review of the staff CVs provided within the university's documentary evidence confirmed that staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. Teaching staff have a wide range of experience and research interests, and specialist visiting lecturers come in to cover specific areas of expertise as needed. At inspection, senior management confirmed that all staff have a minimum of 50 hours allotted to CPD (Continuing Professional Development) per year and 180 hours to scholarly activity. Staff numbers are determined according to a 1:30 staff to student ratio, and resources needed from services such as marketing and IT are applied for and approved through the professional services department. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.9

58. Documentary evidence provided for this standard included a Course Enhancement Process (CEP) Vision and Action Plan for the university's postgraduate social work courses. This document included a number of aims and actions around degree awarding gaps for students with protected characteristics. Comprehensive attainment data for all social work programmes is collected and available for staff to review using a Microsoft PowerBI dashboard. As well as recording and acting on this programme-wide data, the social work team have developed an individual student dashboard tool which can be used to review individual students' performance. This dashboard allows staff and students to have oversight of individuals' progress, what marks they would need to improve their degree grading, and how they may be supported to achieve those marks. At inspection, support services staff and course team staff were able to provide examples of a number of projects and schemes in place for improving outcomes for students with protected characteristics. The university's Disability and Dyslexia Service (DDS) reported that recent attainment and

retention figures indicate disabled students are outperforming non-disabled students. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 3.10

59. The university's documentary submission included a comprehensive outline of the course team's range of ongoing scholarly, practice, and training activities. During the inspection, senior management staff confirmed that all staff undertake an annual developmental appraisal process. During this process, staff identify and discuss areas of development as well as new qualifications or training they may wish to pursue. As discussed in Standard 3.8, the university's workload model allocates each staff member 50 hours per year for CPD and personal improvement activity, as well as 180 hours for scholarly activity. Senior staff also stated that they place importance on teaching staff for professional programmes maintaining their engagement with practice. To this end all academic staff are placement tutors, as well as engaging with an Academics Into Practice strand with the North East London Teaching Partnership. The inspection team agreed that this standard had been met.

Standard four: Curriculum assessment

Standard 4.1

60. The documentary evidence provided prior to inspection included module learning outcome documents which map every module on the programme to the PCF requirements and the Social Work England professional standards. Module specifications indicated that the content of the course covers areas of both children's and adults' social work, reflective of a generic social work qualification as required. A course specification document outlines how applicable guidelines and frameworks have been taken into account for each module on the course. The course includes a readiness for practice module which centres on ethics, values, and communication. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.2

61. The university's documentary evidence submission indicated that key stakeholders, such as PWLE and employer partners, are involved in the development and review of the curriculum. Employers and PWLE attend regular curriculum development days and stakeholder meetings, and practitioners sit on Practice Assessment Panels. Outside of these channels, both stakeholder groups are involved in the delivery of admissions processes and course teaching. At inspection, both PWLE and employer partners confirmed they feel their contributions are valued and respected, and that they are able to effect meaningful change to the programme.

62. However, members of the BeSpoke group did raise two issues they have encountered in the course of their involvement with the university. They reported problems with the

physical accessibility of some areas of the campus, which have impacted on BeSpoke members' ability to safely attend some sessions. The course team and senior management confirmed that this has been escalated to senior university management for resolution, and that in the interim an accessibility guide is being produced to assist people in identifying the best routes through buildings for their mobility needs. The other issue raised was around the robustness of mental health support available for BeSpoke members, particularly in terms of debriefing after involvement in potentially distressing sessions. Members acknowledged that they are given debriefs after certain sessions, but that these are with members of teaching staff with no mental health training. Inspectors determined that while the clear regular involvement of both stakeholder groups confirmed the standard was met, these two issues did warrant recommendations to improve stakeholders' experience of involvement. Full details of the recommendations can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) section of this report.

Standard 4.3

63. Documentary evidence provided prior to inspection included the university's Access and Participation Plan, Education for Social Justice Framework (ESJF), and details of the university's Centre for Equity and Inclusion. A self-evaluation document which formed part of the internal course review process outlines the social work courses' grounding in the ESJF, and ongoing work to decolonise the curriculum. The document states that the ESJF has been embedded in the development of all modules on the course, with consideration given to the inclusivity of areas such as assessment, teaching, theory and leadership. The Step Up course specification emphasises the programme's grounding in and commitment to social justice and anti-oppressive practice. The guidance for this standard states that course providers may wish to consider the accessibility of the physical environment of the course; the issue raised in Standard 4.2 regarding campus accessibility has been addressed through the relevant recommendation for that standard. The inspection team determined that this standard was met.

Standard 4.4

64. Review of the documentary evidence for this standard confirmed that there is a periodic review process through which the staff team update module content to ensure this reflects current best practice, research, and legislation. Course staff members maintain their currency in these areas to inform their teaching content through engagement with research, attending and hosting conferences, and other CPD activities. Module reading lists and learning outcomes are mapped to the Social Work England professional standards and updated to reflect recent academic and practice developments. At inspection, course staff confirmed that module content is reviewed and updated annually, and that there is a two-day curriculum development event held every year. The inspection team agreed this standard was met.

Standard 4.5

65. The professional standards mapping document completed by the university identifies the theoretical content of each module and how it relates to service delivery. The two placement modules are designed to foster students' integration of theory and practice through weekly supervision and reflective writing alongside casework. The final placement report assesses students' progress in all domains, including critical reflection and analysis. During the inspection, practice educators were able to provide examples of models and exercises they use to support students in embedding their knowledge of theory into casework while on placement. The inspection team determined that this standard was met.

Standard 4.6

66. The university's documentary submission provided examples of the involvement of other disciplines in course content and teaching, such as housing and leadership and community. The submission also notes that one of the competencies students are required to develop on placement is interprofessional working, with feedback gathered from the professionals each student has worked with to assess this competency. The university also provided a position paper outlining a new Interprofessional Education in Health and Social Care programme which is currently under development. The position paper was produced between the social work, dietetics, physiotherapy, and nursing teams and the programme aims to ensure health and social care graduates from the university work collaboratively and safely with other professions.

67. At inspection, the course team spoke in more detail about the interprofessional education programme, confirming that simulation suites are currently under construction for use as part of the programme. It is expected that the beginnings of the programme will be able to start around September this year when the next nursing cohort enrol. The course team also confirmed that as the BSc and MSc Social Work are accredited by the Chartered Institute of Housing, students from the Leadership and Community programmes work alongside social work students on housing-related content. MSc students confirmed that their taught content has included guest speakers such as domestic abuse specialists and parenting experts.

68. As there is evidence of opportunities for interprofessional working on the course, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met. Due to the interprofessional learning programme being in its infancy, the inspection team felt a recommendation would be beneficial around continuing work to maximise opportunities for learning with students from other professions. Full details of the recommendations can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) section of this report.

Standard 4.7

69. Documentary evidence for this standard confirmed that each module specification includes the designated hours for structured learning, and that these conform to university-wide requirements. Minimum attendance expectations are made clear within the course information provided on the Step Up programme website. At inspection, the course team confirmed that there is a university-wide process where attendance is recorded on PowerBI, and if it drops below 50% this is flagged to the school office, academic tutor, and placement team where applicable. Teaching staff stated that they also monitor individual students' attendance informally and use a pragmatic and relationship-based approach to addressing any concerns. They emphasised the importance of identifying and taking into account potential contextual factors, such as the impact of the cost of living crisis on students' ability to travel to campus. If a student's attendance continues to be a concern, they are notified that their place on the course is at risk, and support is put in place to help the student resolve the concern wherever possible.

70. The course team acknowledged that there is scope to improve their attendance monitoring processes, and they would like to develop this area further. The inspection team noted that this standard does not require a specific number of hours in structured academic learning. They agreed that should attendance issues impact on a student's ability to meet required competence levels, this would be appropriately identified through both attendance monitoring and the student's assessments. The inspection team therefore agreed that the standard was met. The inspectors did however note a discrepancy between the university-wide attendance monitoring threshold for concern of 50% and the Step Up's minimum attendance requirement of 80%. The inspection team is therefore recommending the course team consider how they might ensure Step Up students' attendance is monitored in line with the Step Up minimum requirement. This recommendation also applies to standard 5.6. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) section of this report.

Standard 4.8

71. Review of the documentary evidence for this standard confirmed that a diverse range of assessment methods are used across the programme. Formative assessment methods are particularly diverse, including game show style quizzes, debates, self-reflective cycles, presentations, and Padlet feedback. Formative assessments are timed to ensure students receive constructive input and have a solid grasp of assessment requirements prior to summative assessment deadlines. Assessments for each module have been reviewed against the Education for Social Justice Inclusive Assessments Framework to ensure they are fair and do not disadvantage students with protected characteristics. A review took place to determine how the overall assessment burden could be minimised while maintaining all necessary learning. Meaningful reductions were possible through careful mapping of learning outcomes across modules to avoid duplication.

72. At inspection, students discussed the negative impacts of assessment bunching within the MSc programme, particularly the difficulty of juggling family life with back-to-back assignments around the Christmas period. The documentary submission for this standard noted that the timing of assessments has been reviewed and amended to minimise assessment bunching, reduce unnecessary stress and increase students' available time for each assessment. An assessment map was provided showing only one instance across the programme where two assessments are due the same week, therefore the inspection team were reassured that this issue has been addressed in respect of the Step Up programme. MSc students spoke positively about the quality of assessment feedback they have received, and about the availability of tutors for discussion of feedback where requested. The inspection team were satisfied that the standard was met.

Standard 4.9

73. The university's documentary evidence included an assessment map outlining how and when students are assessed throughout the course, and module specifications include the assessment methods for each module. Assessments are mapped comprehensively, to both the Step Up curriculum and the individual module learning outcomes. Assessments are designed and sequenced to progress in line with students' development across the programme. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.10

74. Review of the university's documentary evidence confirmed that there is a feedback charter in place, underpinned by the Education for Social Justice Framework, outlining the principles of how feedback will be given. As well as formative and summative assessment feedback, there are additional feedback opportunities provided within modules such as scheduled individual tutorials. Rubrics are in place to ensure feedback structure is standardised and mapped against specific learning outcomes.

75. Work has been undertaken to action external examiner feedback around inconsistent depth of feedback across modules; all staff now provide detailed narrative feedback against each learning outcome. First and second markers, pre-moderation, and moderation are in use to further monitor and ensure consistency of feedback. As discussed in Standard 4.8, MSc students spoke positively at inspection about the quality of feedback they have received, and the availability of tutors for discussion of feedback where requested. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 4.11

76. Prior to the inspection, the university provided staff CVs and details of external examiners; these confirmed that staff carrying out assessments are appropriately qualified, and external examiners are qualified and registered. The Social Work England register was checked to confirm external examiners' registration. The inspection team concluded that

the documentary evidence provided in advance of the inspection was sufficient to demonstrate that this standard was met.

Standard 4.12

77. The university's documentary evidence outlined systems in place at university level to manage student progression, including subject standards boards, award boards, and progression boards. There is also a student status spreadsheet operated within the social work team to monitor student progress across academic modules, placement learning, and other relevant factors such as enrolment and bursary status. Each student's personal academic tutor is required to record significant information regarding their tutees using a tutor feedback form. Student status meetings are held regularly with course leads to ensure the team are aware of any issues with a student's progression and able to address them promptly.

78. On placement, practice educators do most of the monitoring of students' progression, particularly through the PLA meeting, mid-way meeting, and direct observation of practice. People with lived experience of social work, practitioners, and other professionals all contribute to decisions regarding student progression through feedback included in the student's placement practice portfolio. Following each placement, a student's progression is considered at a Practice Assessment Panel (PAP), which serves to quality assure placement outcome decisions. Students have the opportunity to re-submit failed assessments and repeat failed modules or placements where appropriate. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 4.13

79. Review of the documentary evidence confirmed that the approach for this programme is to embed research skills across the course content, rather than including a module specifically dedicated to research skills and knowledge. The intention to weave 'research-mindedness' throughout the course is reflected in individual module specifications which feature regular references to evidence-based models and theories.

80. At inspection, the course team elaborated on this approach, stating that teaching staff speak to students about enquiry and research from the beginning of the course, and foster skills around sourcing and analysing literature. The commitment to embedding evidence-based practice throughout the course is a standing agenda item in course team meetings to ensure this is maintained. Practice educators stated that students from the MSc programme adopt an appropriately evidence-based approach while on placement, and discussed ways they help further develop students' grasp of key areas, such as the nature of evidence and application of research in practice. The inspection team determined that this standard was met.

Standard five: Supporting students

Standard 5.1

81. Documentary evidence provided by the university confirmed that students have access to wellbeing and counselling services, disability and inclusion services, learning and development provision, and careers advice. At inspection, staff confirmed that while the university do not have an internal occupational health service, there is provision for students to be referred to an external occupational health provider where appropriate.

82. Support services staff stated that there is no waiting list for dyslexia assessments, but that the waiting list for a first counselling appointment is approximately five months. Measures are being put in place to reduce this, such as a triage model whereby students with urgent needs are able to access counselling more quickly, and a new counselling services manager has recently been appointed. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met, with a recommendation around continuing to prioritise a reduction in the counselling services waitlist, so that students can access support promptly. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) section of this report.

Standard 5.2

83. The university's documentary evidence submission confirmed that students have access to a range of resources to support their academic development, including an academic tutor for each student, and an academic mentor for the subject who provides skills development sessions. There is a Get Ahead programme, geared particularly towards students who have not been in academic study for some time, which offers support with areas such as academic skills, writing, and time management. During the inspection, support staff outlined how the subject specialist librarian is embedded into the curriculum with timetabled sessions in place for both students and staff. Students can also book 1-to-1 sessions with the subject librarian for further support where needed.

84. There is a comprehensive disability service available to provide practical and academic support for students with disabilities. A range of bursaries are available to students, as well as financial advice and support. There are two named staff contacts for care leavers, to provide support and signposting as necessary. Work is also currently underway to provide further support for students with childcare responsibilities, including provision of childcare funding to improve retention of parent students. Students spoke highly of their personal tutors' availability and the consistency of keeping the same personal tutor throughout their course. The inspection team determined that the standard was met.

Standard 5.3

85. Review of the documentary evidence prior to inspection confirmed that there is a comprehensive fitness to practice procedure in place, which includes consideration of

potential needs related to disability. A suite of documentation around fitness to practice includes guidance for students and staff, and there is a cause for concern stage where an action plan can be put in place to provide an opportunity for improvement where applicable. Students are required to sign health and suitability declarations as part of the course application and again before starting any placements. References are obtained from applicants' most recent employers where applicable, and all offer holders are required to undergo a DBS check which is a condition of their place on the programme.

86. During the inspection, admissions staff outlined the procedure in place for instances when an applicant declares a conviction. The inspection team were satisfied that there was a robust process in place for these situations, however staff confirmed there is no central written policy in place formalising the procedure. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met, with the same recommendation as Standard 1.4 to develop a written policy for decision-making around declared convictions. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) section of this report.

Standard 5.4

87. Prior to inspection, the university provided details of the process by which reasonable adjustments are put in place. Students are invited to declare any relevant conditions or disabilities during application to the course, and on an ongoing basis should anything change once on the course. More broadly, the course team state they are committed to the principles of universal design and have made changes accordingly such as providing closed-captioned recordings of all lectures. Any students who disclose a need for reasonable adjustments are referred, with their permission, to the Disability and Dyslexia Service who complete an assessment and prepare a reasonable adjustments plan. This information was triangulated with course team staff and students at inspection, and support services staff were able to provide further detail. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.5

88. Review of the documentary evidence confirmed that clear information is provided on the Step Up website and Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) regarding the course curriculum, placements, assessments, and Social Work England registration requirements. This is complemented by information provided through a series of induction events during the first week of the programme. Final year students are invited to an employability conference where further information is provided by Social Work England and the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) regarding professional registration and continuing professional development. The inspection team determined that the standard was met.

Standard 5.6

89. The Step Up programme website and placement handbook both contain information regarding attendance requirements, noting there is an 80% minimum attendance

requirement and compulsory attendance for all placement days and skills days. As discussed within Standard 4.7, the course team confirmed during inspection that there is a university-wide process where attendance is recorded on PowerBI, and if it drops below 50% this is flagged to the school office, academic tutor, and placement team where applicable.

90. With regard to the previously noted discrepancy between the university's attendance monitoring concern threshold of 50% and the Step Up attendance requirement of 80%, the inspection team agreed the recommendation from Standard 4.7 was also applicable to this standard. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met, and recommends the course team consider how they might ensure Step Up students' attendance is monitored in line with the Step Up minimum requirement. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) section of this report.

Standard 5.7

91. As discussed within Standard 4.10, review of the university's documentary evidence confirmed that there is a feedback charter in place, underpinned by the Education for Social Justice Framework, outlining the principles of how feedback will be given. As well as formative and summative assessment feedback, there are additional feedback opportunities provided within modules such as scheduled individual tutorials. Rubrics are in place to ensure feedback structure is standardised and mapped against specific learning outcomes. Work has been undertaken to action external examiner feedback around inconsistent depth of feedback across modules; all staff now provide detailed narrative feedback against each learning outcome. First and second markers, pre-moderation, and moderation are in use to further monitor and ensure consistency of feedback.

92. As noted within Standard 3.9, an individual student dashboard tool is in place which allows staff and students to have oversight of individuals' progress, what marks they would need to improve their degree grading, and how they may be supported to achieve those marks. MSc students spoke positively at inspection about the quality of feedback they have received, and the availability of tutors for discussion of feedback where requested. Practice educators confirmed that there is a section of the final placement report form dedicated to insights for the student to bring forwards into their ASYE. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 5.8

93. Review of the evidence provided prior to inspection confirmed there is a formal academic appeals process in place within the university's academic regulations. At inspection, senior management were able to provide an example of a successful appeal, indicating that the process is in use and effective. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

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

Standard 6.1

94. As the qualifying course is a Step Up to Social Work PGDip, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Proposed outcome

The inspection team recommend that the course be approved. Any conditions 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 are binding and must be met by the education provider within the agreed timescales.

The inspectors propose that no conditions are necessary for the approval of the course at this time.

Recommendations

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	1.4, 5.3	The inspectors are recommending that the university formalise the decision-making process around declared convictions with a written policy.	Paragraph 29 Paragraph 86
2	2.3	The inspectors are recommending that the university consult with the Pan-London network about adding safeguarding to the list of policies in the Practice Learning Agreement template.	Paragraph 37
3	4.2	The inspectors are recommending that the university continue prioritising work to improve the physical accessibility of the campus.	Paragraph 62

4	4.2	The inspectors are recommending that the university increase the robustness of the mental health support available for BeSpoke members, and any other people with lived experience of social work involved in course delivery.	Paragraph 62
5	4.6	The inspectors are recommending that the university continue working to maximise opportunities for learning with students from other professions.	Paragraph 68
6	4.7, 5.6	The inspectors are recommending that the university consider how they might ensure Step Up students' attendance is monitored in line with the 80% minimum requirement.	Paragraph 70 Paragraph 90
7	5.1	The inspectors are recommending that the university continue to prioritise a reduction in the counselling service waiting list.	Paragraph 82

It should be noted that all qualifying social work courses will be subject to re-approval under Social Work England's [2021 education and training standards](#).

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.