

Course provider:
London Metropolitan University

Extraordinary Inspection:
BSc Social Work, MSc Social Work,
PG Dip Social Work

Report date:	05/11/2021
Inspector recommendation:	No further action
Regulator decision:	No further action
Date of Regulator decision:	23/12/2021

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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 2019](#) 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 (referred to as 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 the Social Workers Regulations 2018¹ and the Social Work England [Education and Training Rules 2019](#).
4. You can find further guidance on course changes, new course approval, concerns and annual monitoring processes on our [website](#).

¹ [The Social Workers Regulations 2018 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

Pre-Inspection Review

5. In 2019 Social Work England received three concerns in relation to social work education at London Metropolitan University. The people who raised these concerns did not feel that the education provider was meeting the education and training standards 2019, and the concerns included examples in relation to admissions, course governance and management, and student assessment.

6. Having considered the context of the concerns raised it was decided that the courses would be inspected during the first year of the reapproval cycle, which is the periodic inspection of all social work courses in England against the education and training standards. This was initially planned to commence from September 2020 but as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic the reapproval cycle was delayed until September 2021, at which point the concerns were revisited and reviewed by an education quality assurance inspector acting in an advisory capacity.

7. The advisory inspector recommended that it would be appropriate to investigate the concerns further, and it was agreed that the concerns should be investigated under our concerns process. Details of the concerns were shared with the education provider, who had 28 calendar days in which to respond.

8. The two inspectors (registered social worker and 'lay' inspector) were able to review the concerns and the response by the education provider to the concerns, which included a submission of documentary evidence. Additional documentary evidence was requested and provided, on the basis that several documents referenced within the education provider's response were omitted from the initial submission.

9. The inspectors met twice during their review to discuss the information provided and the standards that were potentially engaged by the concerns. The first meeting focused on establishing the context for the concerns and the areas for investigation. The second meeting reviewed the inspectors' feedback reports and allowed discussion of their final recommendation.

10. Following their review of the evidence provided, the inspectors agreed that, given the nature of the concerns, an extraordinary inspection would be necessary to assess whether social work education at London Metropolitan University met the education and training standards across several areas, which are outlined in the appendix of this report.

11. Inspectors agreed that it would be beneficial to speak with senior managers, course staff and students to triangulate the documentary evidence provided. Without these meetings, the inspectors did not feel confident that they could assess whether the course would continue to meet the education and training standards.

12. When reaching their recommendation, the inspectors considered which education and training standards had been potentially engaged by the concerns and identified those that would require further investigation.

Summary

Inspection findings from London Metropolitan University

13. London Metropolitan University ('the education provider') were inspected against the education and training standards 2019 as part of a focused, extraordinary inspection into concerns raised about their provision of qualifying social work education.

Inspection ID	CON21
Course provider	London Metropolitan University
Courses inspected	BSc (Hons) Social Work MSc Social Work PG Dip Social Work
Date of inspection	4 August 2021
Mode of study	Full time
Inspection team	Rebecca Mulvaney (Education Quality Assurance Officer) Gail Fleming (Lay Inspector)) Mohamed Khan (Registrant Inspector)
Inspector recommendation	No further action
Approval outcome	No further action

Language

14. In this document we describe London Metropolitan University as 'the university' or 'the education provider'.

Inspection

15. A remote inspection took place on 4 August 2021. As part of this process the inspection team arranged to meet with key stakeholders including students, course staff and people with lived experience of social work involved in the course.

16. 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

17. No parties disclosed a conflict of interest.

Meetings with students and graduates

18. The inspection team met with nine social work students representing different routes and years of study, including recent graduates who had just completed their final year.

Meetings with course staff

19. The inspection team met with staff involved in social work education including senior managers, staff delivering teaching, learning, supervision and assessment, and staff involved in admissions.

Staff involved included:

- Deputy Vice Chancellor
- Deputy Dean of School of Social Professions and Social Sciences
- Head of Subject, Community Development, Refugee Programmes, Social Work and Youth Studies
- Head of Social Work
- Principal Lecturers
- Senior Lecturers in Social Work
- Associate Lecturers in Social Work
- Head of Student Experience and Academic Outcomes
- Associate Professor of Learning
- Head of Admissions
- Admissions Officer
- Partnership and Placements Officer

Meeting with people with lived experience of social work

20. The inspection team met with four people with lived experience of social work who have been involved in social work education at the university. Their experiences of involvement in the course spanned from teaching and learning activity, to course design and supporting course admissions.

Concerns

21. Social Work England received three concerns in relation to qualifying social work courses at London Metropolitan University in 2019, which were subsequently investigated by the inspectors as part of our concerns process. The nature and content of the concerns are outlined briefly in this section.

22. A concern was raised by an academic staff member in relation to what they had perceived and experienced as a culture of harassment, bullying and victimisation based on protected characteristics within the university. In addition, the staff member reported further concerns touching on aspects of course admissions, resourcing, governance, management and leadership.

23. A concern was raised by the parent of a social work student. They provided evidence of an interim court judgement in relation to the Equality Act 2010 and discrimination experienced by this student while studying at the university.

24. An anonymous concern was raised by a not-for-profit organisation representing whistle-blowers in academia. This concern did not provide much detail or offer any opportunity to gather further evidence, but the concerns related to course resourcing, governance, management and leadership.

Findings

25. In this section we set out the inspectors' findings in relation to whether the university 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 two: Admissions

26. For the purposes of this inspection, the inspectors considered Standard 2.2, Standard 2.3, Standard 2.4 and Standard 2.7.

27. The education provider provided the inspection team with documentary evidence in relation to the current admissions process, including documentation in relation to entry criteria, the selection and interview process, requirements and assessment for England language proficiency, suitability and criminal convictions checks, relevant policies, minutes from course meetings where admissions had been discussed and examples of materials provided to stakeholders involved in the process.

28. It was confirmed during the inspection that the course leader acts as admissions lead for all social work courses and that they have oversight of admissions onto the social work course, supported by the university's central admissions team. The inspection was able to review evidence which demonstrated the stages of the admissions process, including an application, interview, and a written test in an essay format. The inspection team were informed that all interviews use standardised questions, are moderated, and that under normal circumstances all interview panels would include a social worker and a person with lived experience of social work. It was noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic some practitioners had dropped out at short notice and that this was being addressed for the next admissions cycle.

29. In their discussions with staff involved in admissions the inspection team explored how students with health conditions or impairments would be supported as part of the admissions process and were provided with examples of reasonable adjustments which had been made for applicants based on their individual circumstances. The inspection team were also able to review a briefing pack for stakeholders involved in the admissions process which included information about objective assessment and being conscious of differences in perception, in addition to models and tools which assessors should use as part of the selection scoring process to minimise personal bias.

30. The students the inspection team met with reflected on their experience of the

admissions process and commented that it had been a smooth process involving a written test, a group discussion, and an interview. They confirmed that the interview had included questions about their knowledge of the social work profession, their own individual life and work experience, and the values and behaviours expected of social workers. When asked to recall who had been involved in interview panels, students' recollections were unclear, but they agreed that for the academic year 2020 – 2021 it was two people interviewing per student, usually an academic and a social worker, and that some of these interviews had involved people with lived experience of social work.

31. As part of the inspection process the inspection team were able to discuss processes for assessing applicants' prior learning and experience, suitability for social work and criminal conviction checks with the course leader and head of admissions. This included consideration of how students declare their suitability for social work, which is enabled using a 'declaration of suitability for social work' form provided to all applicants. The inspectors were able to review the form and agreed that it would sufficiently capture the required information.

32. The inspection team engaged in further exploration of the process in place for making admission decisions about individual students with non-traditional qualifications, or who may have fallen short of the academic and professional entry criteria. The inspection team were assured from these discussions that effective processes are in place and are being appropriately actioned by the relevant staff involved.

33. This was evidenced by the provision of meeting minutes which documented decision making between senior managers with regards to directing unsuccessful applicants towards alternative courses, such as a foundation year in community development and youth studies if they did not meet the requirements for admissions onto a qualifying social work course. The inspectors agreed based on the evidence provided that these standards were met.

Standard three: Course governance, management and leadership

34. For the purposes of this inspection, the inspectors considered Standard 3.2, Standard 3.9, Standard 3.10, Standard 3.11, Standard 3.15 and Standard 3.16.

35. The education provider provided the inspection team with documentary evidence including an up to date and current selection of staff CVs for all course staff, an organogram for the social work team, and a staffing log indicating responsibilities and working pattern (for example full-time, part-time, substantive post, associate lecturer etc). During the inspection meetings were held with a range of senior staff and course staff, including course lecturers and associate lecturers.

36. A key focus for the inspection team was the resourcing of social work provision at the

university and an exploration of whether staff felt supported in their roles. In discussion with the course team, it was reported that three staff had left the team over the previous 10 months and that it would take time to rebuild the team. The inspection team were assured that two new members of staff had been recruited as they were able to meet with them during the inspection week, and that two further posts were being advertised at the point of inspection.

37. The inspection team felt that there was an understanding of the importance of ensuring that the social work team was sufficiently resourced, not only by staff in terms of numbers but also experience and expertise, and that sufficient steps were being undertaken to progress this. New staff members spoke positively about their inductions, their workloads and the range of support available from the university

38. The inspection team were informed that there is now a new workload model in place which was designed to ensure that staff workloads are better aligned to decision-making in relation to resourcing, and that appraisals should now involve greater opportunity for staff to discuss their workloads and their career aspirations. The workload model was described by senior managers and evidence of its impact was echoed in a separate meeting with course staff, which involved contributions from both longstanding team members and newer colleagues. The inspectors felt that there was an honest reflection from staff members that although there had been issues in the past in relation to resourcing and work loading, things were starting to improve and morale within the team was rising.

39. Alongside improvements to workload modelling, the inspection team heard that the university has also taken steps to embed activity to support staff health and wellbeing such as screen-free Fridays, protected lunch breaks, walking challenges, and away days for coaching/team building. Course staff confirmed to the inspection team that they felt that their workloads were now more manageable following the implementation of the new workload model and that they were engaging in the opportunities and activities offered by the university in relation to health and wellbeing.

40. The inspection team explored the role of associate lecturers in the delivery of social work education at the university and were informed that these lecturers are used to provide flexibility in teaching and support with the ongoing delivery of supervision and curriculum development. The inspection team were informed that associate lecturers are supported through the provision of a guidance handbook and are invited to meet twice a term with substantive staff. They also have full access to the same training and development materials. Associate lecturers spoke positively about the breadth of their involvement in the course and their engagement with social work colleagues.

41. The inspectors were informed in a meeting with senior staff that the university had undertaken a cultural review to address concerns previously raised in relation to racism and

bullying within the department. The inspection team were aware of the review prior to the inspection and had read the Cultural Review Report. However, the inspection team had not had the opportunity prior to the inspection to assess the impact of the review or whether recommended actions had been successfully implemented.

42. The outcome of the Cultural Review included several actions, such as all staff members attending inclusive behaviour training. The inspection team were informed that further actions were being taken to improve trust and working relationships within the team, such as a peer review system for colleagues which will be introduced from the next academic year and coaching sessions for senior managers to help them improve ways of working. Course staff reflected that they felt things had improved within the team since the cultural review and that, prior to the review, staff and management had been unable to meet without mediation. Staff confirmed that this was no longer the case and that working relationships, communication and trust have improved.

43. Senior managers spoke openly and honestly with the inspection team about historic financial challenges at the university which they felt had a cumulative impact on staff well-being, workloads, organisational culture and trust in institutional structures and decision making. The deputy vice chancellor highlighted that the university has publicly acknowledged that there is an issue with institutional racism within the institution and across British society, and that the university are working to address this. Examples of this work included an external review which had been commissioned by the university into institutional racism, and the university's new Race Equity Strategy.

44. Course staff informed the inspection team that they felt there are now policies and procedures which underpin all their work, and that the management of complaints from both staff and students has improved because there is a better culture of openness and an approach to diffusing conflict. Staff felt that being able to raise concerns informally had resulted from growing trust between staff and managers, which in turn had helped to grow trust between staff and students. Over the past year National Student Survey (NSS) results for the BA (Hons) Social Work at the university have improved from 26% to 95%, which staff felt was evidence of the improvements within the team and the impact of those positive changes on the student experience.

45. Students spoke positively about their engagement in staff student liaison committees and that they felt respected by staff within the course team. An example was provided of how students had provided feedback about conflicting assessment deadlines which had been listened to and acted on. Overall students reported that their lecturers were very approachable, supportive, and responsive.

46. The people with lived experience of social work that the inspectors were able to meet with described a wide range of involvement in admissions and teaching. They reported that they had good working relationships with the course team and felt that their contributions

were valued. They also commented that students and staff within the social work department were respectful and caring. The inspectors were assured by the evidence provided that these standards were met.

Standard four: Course design and delivery

47. For the purpose of this inspection, the inspectors considered Standard 4.2.

45. The inspection team were provided with documentary evidence which demonstrated detailed mapping of learning outcomes to the professional standards across all course modules for all social work courses delivered by the university.

48. The inspection team were also able to review recent reports from two external examiners, one of which commended that feedback on student assessments was constructively and clearly aligned to the learning outcomes.

49. Based on the evidence provided the inspection team agreed that there was a strong focus on professionalism across each of the qualifying social work courses, starting from the first semester when students undertake a written essay focused on professional working and professional ethics. This standard was further explored in meetings with the course team and students, who were able to provide examples of teaching and learning focused on the role of the social worker, the professional standards and fitness to practise.

50. The inspection team noted that professionalism and the professional standards were a particular focus for students as part of the assessment of their readiness for direct practice. In conversation with inspectors, students and recent graduates were able to reflect on their knowledge of the professional standards and the requirements of working as a regulated professional. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard six: Assessment

51. For the purpose of this inspection, the inspectors considered Standard 6.2.

52. The inspection team were satisfied from the evidence provided in relation to course assessment, including mapping of course modules and assessment against the professional standards and examples of recent external examiner reports, and their discussions with course staff and students during the inspection process that this standard was met.

Proposed outcome

53. The inspection team recommend that no further action is taken as, at the point of inspection, the education provider was able to evidence that Social Work England's [2019 education and training standards](#) required to be met by this review, were met.

54. When reaching their recommendation, the inspection team considered that all qualifying social work courses will be subject to re-approval under Social Work England's [2021 education and training standards](#). The inspection team also considered information regarding plans by the education provider to subject their social work provision to a periodic review process in early 2022. The timescales for these quality assurance processes, external and internal, were discussed as part of the extraordinary inspection.

55. The inspection team agreed that as the education provider was embedding new processes, team members and practices at the point of inspection, that an early reapproval of their qualifying social work provision would be beneficial to ensure that improvements are embedded successfully. This would also align with their planned internal periodic review process, which may result in further changes subject to approval by Social Work England.

56. The reapproval cycle schedule was discussed with the education provider who have agreed that their courses will be subject to reapproval by Social Work England in the first year of the cycle, in 2022.

Regulator decision

No further action.