

Inspection Report

Course provider: Think Ahead and Middlesex University

Course approval: Social Work Practice (PgDip)

Inspection dates: 13th, 15th and 16th February 2023

Report date:	09/03/2023
Inspector recommendation:	Approved
Regulator decision:	Approved
Date of Regulator decision:	17.04.2023

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	9
Standard three: Course governance, management and quality.....	11
Standard four: Curriculum assessment.....	15
Standard five: Supporting students	19
Standard six: Level of qualification to apply for entry onto the register.....	21
Proposed outcome.....	22
Recommendations	22
Annex 1: Education and training standards summary	23
Regulator decision	29

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. As a result of the COVID 19 pandemic, inspections are currently being carried out via remote virtual arrangements, and typically last three to four days.
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. Think Ahead and Middlesex University, Social Work Practice (PgDip) 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.

Inspection ID	THIR1
Course provider	Think Ahead and Middlesex University
Validating body (if different)	Middlesex University
Course inspected	Social Work Practice (PgDip)
Mode of study	Postgraduate
Maximum student cohort	160
Date of inspection	13 th , 15 th and 16 th February 2023
Inspection team	Catherine Denny Education Quality Assurance Officer Joanne Benn Lay Inspector Aidan Phillips Registrant Inspector
Inspector recommendation	Approved
Approval outcome	Approved

Language

16. In this document we describe Think Ahead and Middlesex University as ‘the education provider’ or and we describe the Social Work Practice (PgDip) as ‘the course’.

Inspection

17. A remote inspection took place on the 13th, 15th and 16th of February 2023. The inspection days were staggered due to the university being impacted by industrial action and the intention to have as much representation from academic staff as possible. 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 6 students from the course, one of whom was a student representative. Discussions included experience of application and admission to the course, placement allocation and experience, curriculum, assessment 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, students support services, senior leadership team and admissions. The inspection team also met with staff from Think Ahead, including the chief executive, programme director and managers, practice specialists, recruitment, external relations, finance and operations and trustees. Discussions included, selection and admissions, course content, practice placements, provision of practice education, students support, assessment and course governance.

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 admissions process, curriculum delivery, assessment and review of provision. Discussions included the training they receive to undertake their role, support from course staff and their ability to influence content and give feedback on course content.

Meetings with external stakeholders

23. The inspection team met with representatives from placement partners from local authorities and NHS trusts who work with the course team. A meeting was also held with staff involved in practice education on the course.

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 course provider outlined the management of the admissions process which was led and operationalised by Think Ahead with support from Middlesex University. The evidence provided demonstrated a multi-dimensional assessment process which included self-assessment activities, a situational judgement test and a written application form prior to shortlisting. Successful shortlisted candidates were required to take part in an online assessment centre in which they completed a group task, interview and role play. Inspectors were assured that the tasks used within the assessment process test the necessary skills and competencies. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.2

26. Consideration of prior relevant experience was evidenced through the application form which encouraged candidates to reflect upon past experiences to support their application to the programme. Staff involved in assessment centres used interview questions to further expand upon and clarify examples used and student representatives from the course were able to reflect upon how their previous experience was measured during their admission to the course. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.3

27. During the review of documentary evidence, the inspection team were able to identify clear examples of the ways in which people with lived experience had been involved in the development and delivery of the admissions process. The inspection team also heard that the assessor role can include practicing experts, Consultant Social Workers (CSW's) who support the provision of practice education on the course or recently retired social workers. The course team explained that all assessors undertake regular refresher training on their role to ensure that they can recognise the key factors and attributes that are being assessed.

28. During a meeting with employer partners, the inspection team heard that host organisations contribute towards the review and evaluation of admissions processes but are not operationally involved in admissions and selection. Some representatives shared that this would be helpful in providing input into understanding the unique nature of the teams

prospective students may be placed in, and some of the geographical issues relating to allocation. The course provider had responded to some of the requests from host organisations with some representatives explaining that they will be involved more closely in the next round of recruitment, however this has not been actioned across all organisations involved in the delivery of the course. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met with a recommendation in relation to enhancing the involvement of host organisations in admission and selection. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [recommendations](#) section of this report.

Standard 1.4

29. During their application to the course, all applicants are required to complete a declaration of suitability, full DBS check and complete an occupational health assessment to identify if any reasonable adjustments are required to enable them to access the course. The course team explained that there are varying levels of occupational health assessment available based upon whether any additional needs have been declared. A suitability panel, which is comprised of representatives from both Middlesex University and Think Ahead, review all aspects of the suitability process prior to making an offer on the course. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.5

30. The course provider shared copies of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies from their organisations alongside a copy of the admissions policy which demonstrated how these policies were implemented within the admissions process. The inspection team also explored the mechanisms in place to ensure that those involved in admissions are adequately trained to support these principles throughout the assessment process. The course team explained that all assessors undertake 3 hours of training prior to any assessment centre, which is an annual requirement. The training provided includes unconscious bias training and opportunities for assessors to review their approach to scoring and interview techniques. Assessors who the inspection team met with confirmed that the training sessions are detailed and allow them to reflect upon their own approach alongside colleagues from a range of backgrounds.

31. During a meeting with the course team, an overview of the approach and commitment to EDI issues was provided. The course team were focused on widening participation of underrepresented groups on the course and were using targeted information days to support this. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.6

32. The course provider submitted a series of web links to demonstrate where prospective applicants could access pertinent information about the course and a career within the profession. The inspection team were able to review information about the application

process, mental health social work and the outline of the programme, including information in relation to placement and associated costs. During a meeting with student representatives, it was confirmed that the information provided was accessible and supported decision making. Participants reflected that when they had additional questions that were specific to their circumstances, there was always a representative from the course provider who could answer queries throughout the application process. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard two: Learning environment

Standard 2.1

33. Documentary evidence submitted by the course provider demonstrated that the identified placement days for the course exceed the minimum requirement of 200 days. In addition to planned placement days, the course provider also outlined their plan for 20 additional skills days, delivered through the summer institute and taught sessions. The inspection team were keen to understand how independent tasks associated with skills days were monitored to ensure that students had the necessary skills and knowledge. The course team explained that tutors monitored engagement with discussions in forums and were able to review metrics which measure engagement. In addition, the use of a viva tested the skills sets of participants.

34. During conversations with representatives from the course team and employer organisations, the inspection team were assured that there was an appropriate emphasis on statutory social work tasks through placements and that these were pitched appropriately. Students experience contrasting placements as they all spend time within children and families social work settings alongside their main mental health placement. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.2

35. The course provider outlined how all practice learning on the programme is aligned to the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and Social Work England Professional Standards. This was made available to student and placement partners through the programme and placement handbooks. The inspection team were able to see how the practice learning had been sequenced to support student progression. Further to this, the Placement Learning Agreement (PLA) meeting allowed for a review of previous experience and learning needs ahead of a placement commencing. The evidence was further supported by the explanation of Case Consultation Meetings (CCM's) which take place throughout the course where student learning within the placement environment is consolidated. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.3

36. The inspection team heard further details about the role of the CSW in relation to student induction, support and supervision. The course team explained that the role of the CSW was critical in ensuring effective practice education for students and being a key link between the academic tutor and practice specialist. The expectations of the CSW were outlined within delivery agreements held between the course provider and host organisations.

37. The CSW's that the inspection team met with explained that they agree induction plans prior to placement start dates and invite colleagues from different roles within the organisation to support where necessary. CSW's highlighted that induction is seen as an ongoing process throughout placement and is based upon individual student need. All students received weekly supervision from their CSW and details of arrangements were detailed in supervision agreements. CSW's explained that the dedicated nature of their role within organisations meant that there was time to offer comprehensive support and supervision to all students for the duration of their practice placements. Student representatives explained that their experience of induction and support had been a positive one, this was further supported by the fact that allocated CSW's remained with them for the duration of the course. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.4

38. As outlined in standard 2.3, the role of the CSW ensured that student experience and learning on placement could be tailored to the appropriate stage of their development. The dedicated nature of the role provided opportunities for students to co-work and shadow practice within the placement environment. In addition, CSW's were able to allow responsibilities on placement to build over time due to them being allocated to students for the duration of the course. Students confirmed that they had been able to develop their independence within the placement environment but acknowledged that they were able to return for support and guidance whenever necessary. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.5

39. All students on the course are required to undertake a readiness for direct social work practice module ahead of starting their first placement. The inspection team reviewed the content of the module which included a role play and reflective account which was assessed by a panel comprised of a social work academic, person with lived experience of social work and a front-line social worker. It was also acknowledged that the summer institute had a focus on preparation for direct practice and was influenced by a range of practitioners. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.6

40. Many of the CSW's involved in course delivery were employed by host organisations and so had their registration checked as a condition of their employment. Where CSW's came from outside of host organisations, there were appropriate checks in place regarding their knowledge, experience and registration. The course team explained that all CSW's are required to complete Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS) 1 or 2 via Middlesex University or be working towards this. Ongoing developmental opportunities were also offered by the course provider throughout the academic year and practice specialists offered support to CSW's both before and during placement. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.7

41. Information in relation to raising concerns to the course provider was outlined within the placement handbook. There was also evidence of reference to organisational policies in relation to whistleblowing and challenging poor practice highlighted within the PLA meeting documentation. Students were able to confirm that they understood the process and knew where to access further information or guidance. They also highlighted that their CSW and tutor could support with any concerns and when this was necessary, things would be dealt with effectively. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard three: Course governance, management and quality

Standard 3.1

42. As the course is delivered jointly by Middlesex and Think Ahead, the course team worked to develop clear management and governance pathways to ensure effective oversight at both strategic and operational levels. Programme management was outlined clearly within documentary evidence and the relationships within different levels of management were demonstrated through visual overviews. Information in relation to the frequency of meetings which address management and course delivery issues further supported the standard. Representatives from the university and Think Ahead were able to articulate their understanding of course governance and management structures effectively and recognised how their role contributed to the quality management of the course. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.2

43. The Think Ahead delivery agreement which was provided as evidence included details regarding how placements ensure quality learning opportunities that meet the professional standards. Representatives from employer organisations confirmed that the detail of the contracts are supportive in helping them to understand their responsibilities when students are on placement and are regularly used as a reference. Placements are also regularly

reviewed by the programme team to ensure they provide the required educational opportunities.

44. The inspection team were eager to further understand the placement breakdown procedures that were outlined within the placement handbook. Representatives from the course team and host organisations explained that, where there are placement difficulties, every effort is made to keep a student in placement. This is usually achieved through partnership working between CSW's, practice specialists and academic tutors and the support planning process. The practice specialist role is one that is dedicated to ensuring high quality practice placements, which provide the appropriate support and learning opportunities for students. The course team explained that, as this support is ongoing, it is hoped that early intervention can be provided where issues occur to avoid full placement breakdown. Where there aren't opportunities to resolve placement issues, alternative arrangements are sought quickly for students through partnership working between members of the course team and colleagues in host organisations. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.3

45. The delivery agreement referenced in relation to the previous standard included details of the necessary policies and procedures students should be introduced to upon commencing placement. Representatives from host organisations explained that partners from the university and Think Ahead have strong communication streams to ensure that they are kept up to date on any changes to expectations, one being the website that holds a range of information for both students and employers. Placement partners shared that, where students had experienced additional challenges as a result of a health or learning need, the policies to guide the implementation of support plans ensured support was implemented in a timely manner. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.4

46. The course provider outlined that employer engagement in the programme is prioritised, as all organisations commit to offer successful students a position within their organisation to complete their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) after the qualifying aspect of the programme ends. In order to ensure consistent engagement, a network of operational leads are invited to contribute to consultations on the design and delivery of the programme on a quarterly basis. Employers also have the opportunity to shape practice education for students on the course as CSW's are employed within the organisation. Further employer representation is seen through teaching on the course where colleagues from practice setting have been invited to contribute towards teaching and assessment, particularly in relation to readiness for direct practice. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.5

47. As outlined in standard 3.4, the involvement of employers within the course is a key feature of the programme. During meetings with employer representatives, the inspection team heard that employers have close relationships with practice specialists on the programme which ensures there is a route for sharing feedback on practice issues. Employers were able to provide an example of specific feedback they had given in relation to the timing of placement allocation and the impact this had on organisational planning. As a result of the feedback, the programme team took the decision to change the date when this would happen.

48. The involvement of people with lived experience in the review of the course was evidenced through the opportunities members of the programme team provided for individuals to feedback after leading student sessions on modules. Representatives from the programme team also meet with the chairs of the two groups that the course works with, Involve Middlesex and Think Ahead Service User Carer Reference Group (SUCRG) to look at feedback on a regular basis. This is in addition to the involvement of both groups in annual curriculum reviews.

49. Students on the course are invited to engage in evaluations of modules and placements upon completion. There is also a larger annual evaluation that looks at the course as a whole. Student representatives highlighted that the relationships they have with CSW's and academic tutors allow them the opportunity to feed back on their experiences on a regular basis. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.6

50. Documentary evidence submitted by the course team provided details of the agreement in place with the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), to provide training for 160 students per year. The course provider outlined arrangements for regional capacity and agreements which include interested organisations making an application to be associated with the course. The Head of Partnerships within Think Ahead works closely with interested organisations to plan placements before students are allocated. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.7

51. The inspection team were satisfied that the professional with responsibility for the course was appropriately qualified, experienced and on the register. The details of the lead social worker were accurately reported within key course documentation. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.8

52. The inspection team reviewed the CV's of staff involved in the delivery of the course which evidenced a range of experience and expertise. Alongside academic staff, there was further support outlined through the provision of CSW's and practice specialists as well as the operational roles within Think Ahead. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 3.9

53. Through review of documentary evidence, the inspection team were able to see the different mechanisms the course provider had in place to evaluate student performance, progression and outcomes. The course was in line with other university-based courses in relation to reporting, with module leaders reporting to the programme lead to support with identification of any issues relating to progression at both a module and course level. Think Ahead also conduct analysis of retention data to support planning in relation to assessment on the course.

54. The course team also showed evidence of the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process to look at progression alongside the different demographics of students. The course team gave an overview of the partnership working in place to ensure that issues affecting progression relating to EDI are addressed quickly. The course team also spoke of their commitment to widening participation and EDI focused targets in their delivery and improvement planning. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.10

55. The course provider submitted information relating to continuous professional development activities in place for staff involved in the delivery of the course, including the 'Clear Review' process in which staff are encouraged to consider professional development alongside their line manager or delegated senior colleague. The inspection team also heard about the links that the course team had with mental health practice settings and their engagement with front line practice through their role supporting students in placement.

56. During the inspection event, representatives from the university outlined the organisation's commitment to research and staff development. The inspection team heard how all staff who join the university are expected to be research active and that, for the course, opportunities to join research projects are provided through clusters within the Think Ahead model. Further to this, all staff who join the university are expected to complete the Post Graduate Certificate in Higher Education (Pg Cert HE), supported by the university, and are encouraged to consider further higher education qualifications as part of the Clear Review process. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard four: Curriculum assessment

Standard 4.1

57. The course provider submitted evidence of how the course was mapped to both Social Work England Professional standards and the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF). This was seen through mapping documents, handbooks and module learning outcomes. The course team explained their approach to sequencing taught content to support students in their placement journey. Students were able to articulate how the course develops their practice skills and critical thinking abilities. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.2

58. The inspection team were able to see evidence of stakeholder engagement in the review of the course through the curriculum review record for the previous academic year. Copies of stakeholder handbooks provided by the course team also detailed the processes in place to support ongoing contributions and review to the programme at both a modular and whole course level.

59. During meetings with different stakeholder groups, participants were able to provide examples of changes that had been made to the course in light of their feedback. Representatives from the people with lived experience networks, explained that they felt empowered by the opportunities provided to them to influence social work education and provision. The planned approach to seeking feedback through quarterly meetings was supported by regular opportunities and mechanisms for stakeholders to offer contributions on an ongoing basis. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.3

60. The course provider submitted evidence of EDI policies from both the university and Think Ahead to demonstrate how the course is designed in accordance with EDI principles. Course leads explained how they ensure that these principles are applied through engagement with the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process referenced in relation to other standard areas. The evidence provided also detailed the development of the 'Difference and Diversity Repository' which provided a range of resources to encourage learners on the programme to examine and reflect on diversity and difference to develop knowledge and strengthen anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice.

61. During meetings with staff involved in admissions and student support, the inspection team saw how the design of processes around the course also demonstrated a commitment to EDI principles. The occupational health screening offered to all candidates ensured that challenges to success were addressed prior to starting the course and the offer of assessments where needs are identified ensured that appropriate support was offered

quickly. Both students and staff were able to provide examples of how the course had supported a rapid response to student need to ensure that barriers to progression were quickly resolved. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.4

62. The programme team and key stakeholders engage in an annual review of the curriculum, to ensure that the course remains up to date and fit for purpose. There are also ongoing opportunities for the course team to review content on the course by engaging in a critical review of taught content prior to its delivery to ensure it remains current. Alongside planned review processes, the inspection team heard about how staff undertaking research are encouraged to feed this into programme design, as are staff with specialist backgrounds. The course leadership team explained that staff teach across all modules on the course to ensure that their knowledge of practice issues remain current. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.5

63. The indicative teaching plan for the course demonstrated how the structure of the programme promotes the integration of theory and practice. This was further supported by the evidence provided within module and course specifications and handbooks. The inspection team noted how the planned delivery of the readiness for practice module ensured that students had the required skills ahead of placement start dates.

64. During meetings with staff involved in course delivery, the inspection team heard about the Case Consultation Meeting (CCM) process in place to support students during placement activity. During fortnightly CCM's, students receive support from CSW's to reflect upon specific cases and consider their approach, applying relevant social work theory. CSW's explained that CCM's could be attended by tutors and practice specialists to add further insight and professionals from other disciplines also offer input for students to develop their practice. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.6

65. Due to the nature of the programme, much of the learning on the course occurs within a multi-agency setting where students have the opportunity to work alongside other professions. Many students are placed within NHS settings or foundation trusts and pick up a strong understanding of other roles pertinent to mental health social work during placement. The contrasting placement within a children and families social work setting also increases student knowledge of other disciplines. CSW's highlighted how they supported the standard by planning mini placements within other teams to support student knowledge and development in working with colleagues from other areas. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.7

66. The course provider shared details of their indicative teaching plan and academic tutor role guidance as evidence of the number of hours students spent in structured academic learning. Students explained that they feel prepared for practice learning following taught input and acknowledged that, whilst they might welcome more taught input on specific mental health difficulties ahead of placement, this could be picked up through practice. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.8

67. The programme handbooks and course specification submitted by the provider gave an overview of the assessment plan for the course including basic requirements and expectations. Following review of evidence and through triangulation meetings with students and course team staff, the inspection team were assured that the information provided in relation to assessment was transparent and readily understood. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.9

68. Evidence to support the standard demonstrated how assessments were mapped to the learning outcomes and curriculum, and carefully sequenced to match taught content and student development. The inspection team agreed that the range of formative and summative assessments on offer provided opportunities for students to demonstrate their skills in a range of ways. The inspection team also heard about the range of people who contributed towards the marking of assessments, including representatives from the people with lived experience networks associated with the course. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.10

69. The course provider summarised the ways in which students on the course could receive feedback, this included formal written feedback, tutor support and guidance from their CSW. Through course handbooks, students were made aware of expectations in relation to feedback and how this is designed to support progress on the course. The mechanisms in place to quality review feedback offered included the external examiner and course level moderation.

70. During a meeting with students, the inspection team heard that they generally agreed that the timeliness of feedback was in line with expectations however there were some differences in the style of feedback and how this supported them to progress. Students recognised that this could be the result of different styles of marking but felt it affected their ability to move on appropriately. The inspection team considered this alongside the

evidence presented and acknowledged some of the challenges this could create, but agreed that, on balance, the standard was met.

Standard 4.11

71. The inspection team reviewed the experience and qualifications of staff involved in assessment on the course and agreed that this was in line with expectations. The CV for the external examiner also demonstrated that they were appropriately qualified and on the register. Alongside the knowledge and experience of the team, the inspection team felt that the moderation processes in place around assessment further supported the standard and agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 4.12

72. Documentary evidence demonstrated that student progression is effectively planned through module assessments and observation of direct practice, with minimum expectations for observations articulated via course literature. The inspection team heard that tutors, CSW's and practice specialists all attend and contribute towards placement reviews where discussions about student progression take place. Where students experience challenges or barriers to progression, there is appropriate support offered or the university care and concern process is initiated. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.13

73. The inspection team reviewed the course teaching plan and module handbook to understand the ways in which the course design enabled students to develop an evidence informed approach to practice. A module focused upon knowledge and application targeted the skills described within this standard, however the inspection team were able to see examples of evidence-based approaches in other areas of course design. Members of the course team described the use of case studies within teaching to support the application of academic learning to practice scenarios. They also highlighted that relevant reading and literature is an ongoing agenda item in tutorials and supervision sessions for students. This is supported by the provision of the subject librarian who offers open access to a range of materials that might be otherwise difficult to source.

74. Students were able to reflect upon their ability to think reflectively and critically to improve their practice as a result of course input. A significant support in this area was highlighted through the provision of CCM's where there is a strong focus on using evidence to inform approaches to working with service users. The inspection team also recognised the value of dedicated CSW's in supporting this standard through regular supervision and encouragement to apply theory to practice. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard five: Supporting students

Standard 5.1

75. Students accessing the course were able to seek support in relation to their health and wellbeing via both the university and through Think Ahead. The inspection team heard that students could access counselling services through Middlesex University in blocks of up to 6 weeks. One student representative was able to provide an example of support being initiated within 2 days of them raising a concern. The course team and support services also gave examples of other adjustments that had been implemented such as pausing study and restarting once relevant assessments and support had been accessed. Think Ahead also described the development of their hardship fund which was created in response to student need and additional counselling services via 'Qwell'.

76. The inspection team queried whether the regional nature of the course had any impact on students taking up the offers of support, however representatives from both organisations confirmed that access to support had always been strong. This was further supported by the proactive nature of the course team in responding to student need and offering all participants occupational health assessments prior to starting the course. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.2

77. All students on the course receive support from an academic tutor who provides one to one tutorial support on a fortnightly basis as well as monthly group tutorials with other students in the unit. The role of the academic tutor is to work with students, CSW's and practice specialists to integrate academic learning into the practice environment. Academic tutors were also described as being available to support students with any difficulties that may arise during their course of study.

78. Alongside the academic tutor role, students access academic support services through the subject librarian and learning enhancement team. The course provider explained that this includes writing advice and support, workshops, IT support and additional tutor input. The different support mechanisms offered by the university and Think Ahead adopt a 'whole team' approach to student support to enable students to continue their studies successfully. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.3

79. The inspection team reviewed the course provider's care and concerns protocol which also included fitness to study and fitness to practice processes within this. There was sufficient documentary evidence, alongside that gained through conversations with the course team and key stakeholders, that appropriate preventative interventions were available to support student difficulties, alongside a more formal process should concerns

impact ability to practice safely. Students confirmed their understanding of how to raise concerns through the structures available and confirmed that there were appropriate avenues to refer into regarding health needs. Through examples provided, the inspection team were assured that the response is appropriate and tailored to individual circumstances. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.4

80. As referenced within other standard areas, the inspection team were provided with a range of evidence relating to the support available to students with additional health, learning and wellbeing needs. Students reported feeling valued on the course and gave examples of accessing assessments and interventions which supported their progress. The course team spoke of a student-centred approach which was echoed by other stakeholders involved in a student's education. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.5

81. All students have access to an online portal where they can access information about the curriculum, practice placements, assessment and transition to qualified social worker. The portal is supplemented by the course handbooks which provide further information. Student representatives from the course confirmed that the information provided to them was detailed and relevant, this was further supported by the availability of different professionals within the course structure who were available to offer advice. Further to this, the design of the course ensures that students are guided through ASYE by the course team where the offer of support continues to be substantial. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.6

82. The programme handbook for the course clearly set out expectations in relation to student attendance. This is supported by the training agreement that students are required to sign with Think Ahead upon joining the course. During the inspection event, students were clear about attendance expectations and the inspection team heard that there were sound mechanisms in place to follow up on absences such as catch-up tasks monitored by the course team. Absence from mandatory elements of the course, such as skills days, remained unauthorised and tasks to compensate for any missed elements of practice learning were agreed in liaison with CSW's. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.7

83. As outlined within standard area 4.10, the inspection team agreed that the course provider had ensured that there was appropriate information provided about assessment on the course. The inspection team reviewed a range of formative and summative assessment tasks which were deemed appropriate for students' progression on the course. The role of CSW's in providing feedback to students was deemed as being helpful for student development during practice placements. Whilst there was some variation in the style of feedback reported, the inspection team agreed that, on balance, the standard was met.

Standard 5.8

84. The programme handbook for the course provided evidence of the appeals process for students in a clear and transparent way. Conversations with students confirmed that they understood this process and the knowledge of academic tutors and other members of the course team ensured that appropriate advice could be provided about university processes when required. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

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

Standard 6.1

85. As the qualifying course is a Post Graduate Diploma, Social Work Practice, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Proposed outcome

The inspection team recommend that the course be approved.

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	Standard 1.3	The inspectors are recommending that the university consider engaging with all employer partners to review their input into selection and admissions processes.	Paragraph 28

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.