

Inspection Report

Education provider: Staffordshire University

Course approval: Reapproval of BA (Hons) Social Work Practice (Apprenticeship)

Inspection dates: 23 January – 25 January 2024

Report date:	04 March 2024
Inspector recommendation:	Approved with conditions
Regulator decision:	Approved with conditions
Date of Regulator decision:	16 April 2024
Date conditions met and approved:	12 July 2024

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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, approval and annual monitoring processes on our website.

What we do

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

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

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

Summary of Inspection

15. Staffordshire University BA (Hons) Social Work Practice Apprenticeship was inspected as part of the Social Work England reapproval cycle; whereby all education providers with qualifying social work courses will be inspected against the new Education and Training Standards 2021.

16. During the same week the MA Social Work and PG Dip Social Work (exit route) courses were also inspected by a separate inspection team. Some meetings across the week were held jointly. Details of this inspection are covered in a separate report.

Inspection ID	SUR2CP137
Education provider	Staffordshire University
Validating body (if different)	
Course inspected	BA (Hons) Social Work Practice (Apprenticeship)
Mode of study	Full time
Maximum student cohort	48
Date of inspection	23 – 25 January 2024
Inspection team	Zoe Burke Education Quality Assurance Operations Manager (covering officer role due to sickness absence) Sally Gosling (Lay Inspector) Aidan Philips (Registrant Inspector) Kate Springett Education Quality Assurance Officer - Observing

Language

17. In this document we describe Staffordshire University as ‘the education provider’ or ‘the Education provider’ and we describe the BA (Hons) Social Work Practice (Apprenticeship) as ‘the course’.

Inspection

18. An onsite inspection took place from 23 January 2024 – 25 January 2024 at The Catalyst Building where the education provider is based. As part of this process the inspection team planned to meet with key stakeholders including students, course staff, employers and people with lived experience of social work.

19. 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

20. No parties disclosed a conflict of interest.

Meetings with students

21. The inspection team met with a mix of level 5 and 6 students, as well as recent course completers. The students were from differing employer partners including Cheshire East County Council, Stoke on Trent Children's and Adult Services, North Staffordshire Combined Health Care Trust and Staffordshire Children's services. Discussions included: how prepared the students felt prior to beginning the Apprenticeship, their placements, how student feedback is gathered and dealt with by the Education provider, support services, and what feedback given to students on assignments from the Education provider.

Meetings with course staff

22. Over the course of the inspection, the inspection team met with education provider staff members from the teaching team, senior management, support services, practice learning and staff involved in working with people with lived experience of social work.

Meeting with people with lived experience of social work

23. The inspection team met with people with lived experience of social work who have been involved in the design and development of the course, the admissions process, assessment, and course delivery. Discussions included their involvement in admissions and interviews, assessment of students, their involvement on the course, meetings and feedback.

Meetings with external stakeholders

24. The inspection team met with representatives from placement partners including Cheshire East County Council, Stoke on Trent Children's and Adult Services, North Staffordshire Combined Health Care Trust and Staffordshire Children's services. They also met with a representative of the West Midlands Teaching Partnership.

Findings

25. 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

26. Documentary evidence reviewed in support of this standard included, but is not limited to Interview questions, Teaching partnership best practice in admissions guide, Written task, Program specification, and Admissions policy.

27. Following a review of documentary evidence by the inspection team it is clear that an admissions process and mechanisms are in place to test requirements such as written English capability, to meet the academic standards and to show ICT skills. Applicants must evidence as a minimum level 2 literacy and numeracy to be accepted on the course. There is a selection day where students are required to attend an interview and undertake a written task.

28. The inspection team were keen to better understand more about the assessment day and the breadth of ways the education provider assesses students. Through discussions with the course team, the inspection team were able to discuss what tasks are done on the selection day in terms of group discussions and/or role play as this did not appear to form part of the assessment. The inspection team were able to identify that group work has been done for the last 2 years, however the course team advised this did not play to everyone's strengths, and was difficult to assess. As a result, in the last cycle, the education provider reverted back to a written assessment.

29. The inspection team also heard about the involvement of people with lived experience of social work and employers in the admissions process.

30. The inspection team considers the Education provider's approach to be multidimensional as per the standard and the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.2

31. Documentary evidence submitted in support of this standard included the Social Work Apprenticeship Handbook and 2024 Cohort Staffordshire University Social Work Apprenticeship Interview questions, which the inspection team consider are supportive of the standard as there is evidence prior relevant experience is considered.

32. Through discussion with the employer partners and course team at the inspection, the inspection team heard that applicants were required to hold a relevant substantive role within the local authority prior to being shortlisted to undertake the Apprenticeship. The admissions team explained that the selection process starts whereby students are selected by their employer following an expression of interest to them. The employer then shortlists candidates who then will attend the Education provider's assessment day. The inspection team also heard that some employers operate direct recruitment processes; they seek to recruit prospective apprentices, with appointment subject to being accepted by the University onto the course. They heard that more employers plan to move to this model, given their pipeline of internal candidates is decreasing.

33. The admissions team explained that the Education provider is open to relaxing entry requirements in terms of applicants requiring 112 UCAS points to enrol on the course and they would discuss applicant's additional experience with their employer. However, the Education provider's decision, backed by employers and the Teaching partnership is that applicants must have appropriate level maths and English qualifications. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.3

34. Documentary evidence submitted in support of this standard was the 2024 Cohort Staffordshire University SW Apprenticeship Interview questions. The questions show that employers, service users and academics are involved in asking the interview questions.

35. The inspection team were able to triangulate perspectives on how the recruitment process works in practice and how consistency of approach is achieved. It was clear to the inspection team that employers and people with lived experience of social work are involved in the admissions process.

36. The inspectors were satisfied that people with lived experience of social work feel valued and part of the admissions process, level of input was high and evidence of a high level of coproduction could be seen for the process, particularly with respect to the setting and updating of questions and involvement in decision making.

37. The inspection team agreed this standard was met.

Standard 1.4

38. Documentary evidence submitted in support of this standard included a self-declaration form, and evidence that applicants were aware of the expectations around health and character which was suitable to meet this part of the standard.

39. The inspectors were unsure when a DBS check is completed by the education provider, however gained clarity with secondary information during the inspection from the course team. They informed the inspection team that a DBS check is made as a condition of

employment by the local authority, and the education provider undertakes a further DBS check prior to a student starting their first placement. (Links to standard 5.3).

40. The course team also explained their process with respect to assessment of suitability and panel arrangements for this process. The inspection team agreed this standard was met.

Standard 1.5

41. Documentary evidence submitted in support of this standard was supportive and helpful. The evidence included Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Access and Participation plan 2020-21 to 2025 as well as information contained on the Education provider's website. There was also focus on involvement of people with lived experience of social work.

42. In advance of the inspection it was unclear to the inspection team how reasonable adjustments are identified and what support was put in place. The inspection team were satisfied following discussion with the admissions team that reasonable adjustments are identified and appropriately made as examples were provided by the course team as well as students.

43. There was limited evidence documented to show that there is diversity among student cohorts. The course team advised that they are proactively working with employer partners to seek to ensure that diversity is improved, this is linked to strategic priorities within the Education provider and is part of a five year business plan for the school.

44. The inspection team were also satisfied that adequate and appropriate training opportunities are provided for those involved within the admissions process. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.6

45. The inspection team saw a range of documentary evidence in support of this standard including information about recruitment webinars for employers, briefing event PowerPoint presentations, Apprenticeship information on the Education provider website and Q&A follow up emails.

46. On the whole, students said that they were provided with lots of information about the course and what to expect.

47. The course team and employers outlined how they actively provide information to candidates and explained about the offer day.

48. The inspection team reviewed the Education provider website for the Apprenticeship, and while it was acknowledged that this isn't the primary source of information for potential applicants it may need updating.

49. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is making a [recommendation](#) in relation to standard 1.6. We recommend that if it is being used as a source of information for prospective students, the website is updated to provide accurate information with respect to year two and three modules, outlines that on successful completion of the course students are eligible to apply to register with Social Work England and includes additional information with respect to opportunity for research.

Standard two: Learning environment

Standard 2.1

50. Documents submitted such as programme and module descriptors provided the inspection team with evidence that students receive two placements with contrasting experience, and that at least one of those placements to provide statutory tasks within a statutory setting.

51. Students confirmed to the inspection team that this was the case, the majority said that their first placement gave them contrasting experience from their job role setting, with their final placement being based in their substantive team.

52. 30 skills days are built into the course with an emphasis on statutory tasks, this was highlighted in the Year Plan submitted in evidence.

53. During a meeting with staff involved in practice based learning, which included Education provider staff and external stakeholders, the inspection team heard how the Education provider and employers work together to find the most appropriate placements to meet the needs of the students, and how any individual learning needs can be met.

54. The inspection team agreed this standard was met.

Standard 2.2

55. Documentary evidence included information about placement audits and the Quality of practice learning (QAPL) process. There was also evidence of midpoint meetings and learning agreements, outlined in the placement handbook and module descriptors.

56. During the inspection the inspection team were able to see a demonstration of the PARE e-portfolio platform and were guided through how it works and how it links to the APtem (apprenticeship) system.

57. The inspection team heard from staff involved in practice based learning and employers where they were told about the role of the Senior Work Based Education Officer and the Work Based Education Officer. They outlined their role in coordinating with employers and students to ensure that appropriate learning opportunities are available and to act quickly to resolve any issues with respect to placement activity, providing an example of how a

specific issue for one student had been resolved and additional learning opportunities had been built into their placement.

58. The inspection team were assured during meetings that 12 monthly audits are undertaken on placements, and it was evident that these audits were valued and that the purpose of them was understood. The inspection team agreed this standard was met.

Standard 2.3

59. Supporting documentary evidence for this standard included the Placement Learning Agreement, and Placement Portfolio along with the demonstration of PARE during the inspection. The Placement Handbook submitted in evidence provided the inspection team with detail about the ongoing review processes.

60. The inspection team heard from students that they were allocated Practice Educators and provided an example of when relationships with a practice educator had broken down, they said that the matter had been dealt with quickly and appropriately by the education provider.

61. During meetings with students it was confirmed that tripartite meetings took place and that these were usually arranged by the Senior Work Based Education Officer and the Work Based Education Officer.

62. Some students outlined that there wasn't always sufficient awareness amongst those providing induction and supervision of their role as an Apprentice and a student on placement, particularly when placed within their own substantive team, and there have been some difficulties with respect to workload as a result.

63. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is making a [recommendation](#) in relation to standard 2.3. We recommend that the education provider considers working with employers to ensure staff have a good understanding of the differences in apprentices' respective role, remit and responsibilities when in their job roles and when they are students on placement. This includes to ensure that students' workload while on placement is supportive of their learning.

Standard 2.4

64. Through a review of documentary evidence the inspection team could see where progression points were across the course and how the placement and course is aligned to the PCF and learning agreements. An explanation was provided of how the nature of placements, in terms of the complexity and responsibilities they provide to students, is appraised and kept under review using the QAPL process. The Placement Handbook clarifies how arrangements are made for placements that are appropriate to individual students' stage of education and training.

65. Students and Practice Educators confirmed the arrangements for review meetings and their understanding of how any issues could be raised during these meetings. The inspection team agreed this standard was met.

Standard 2.5

66. Documentary review of evidence outlined to the inspection team that students must pass all their year 1/level 4 modules to be able to progress to those in year 2/at level 5. The latter includes their 70-day placement. It is also indicated that the process of preparation for going on placement is a holistic one, across students' first year of study, and that students, as apprentices, will undertake regular reviews of their progress.

67. The module descriptor for the preparation for practice module provides summative assessment information. The course team provided information about role play used with students during their preparation and the involvement of people with lived experience of social work in assessments.

68. The inspection team agreed this standard was met.

Standard 2.6

69. During meetings and in review of the documentary evidence the inspection team acknowledged that Practice Educators involved in the course are either onsite or independent. Staff involved in practice placements and employers, told the inspection team about monitoring and quality assurance processes that are undertaken, with the education provider having oversight of independent Practice Educators, and employers having oversight of on-site practice educators.

70. While the inspection team felt confident that checks are made with respect to Practice Educators being on Social Work England's register and that they have the relevant and current knowledge, skills and experience to support students, there appeared to be some reliance on employer oversight of onsite Practice Educators. While evidence heard during meetings with both employers and staff involved in practice education suggests that relationships are strong, the inspection team considers that the education provider should ensure that all practice educators are on the register and that they have the relevant and current knowledge, skills and experience to support safe and effective learning.

71. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is recommending that a condition is set against standard 2.6 in relation to the approval of this course. Consideration was given as to whether the finding identified would mean that the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it is deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard, and we are confident that once this standard is met, a further inspection of the course would not be required. Full details of the condition, its monitoring and approval can be found in the [proposed outcome](#) section.

Standard 2.7

72. Documentary evidence including the Placement Handbook and the Placement Learning Agreement paperwork provided the inspection team with assurance that there are appropriate policies and procedures in place for whistleblowing, raising complaints and challenging poor practice, including while students are on placement.

73. External stakeholders and students reiterated in meetings that they were aware of the policies and procedures and students expressed a willingness to challenge poor practice. The inspection team agreed this standard was met.

Standard three: Course governance, management and quality

Standard 3.1

74. Documentary evidence provided to the inspection team included course governance structures, Board minutes from the West Midland Teaching Partnership, the Apprenticeship Quality Improvement Plan and Course Committee Terms of Reference and minutes.

75. During the meeting with the Senior Management Team the inspection team heard directly about the governance of the course, providing additional assurance. The structure is clear, and it helped to understand the structure and involvement of the West Midland's Teaching Partnership.

76. Through documentary evidence and in the course team meeting, the inspectors heard that the course lead is a registered social worker with direct experience of Children and Adult services. The course team also shared the commitment from the Senior Management Team to signal resourcing requirements as they continue to develop and expand the course.

77. The inspection team heard from employers about their role in the Course Committee, which is a recent development, and the Apprenticeship Group. The inspection team agreed this standard was met.

Standard 3.2

78. The inspection team were provided with documentary evidence including the Practice Learning Agreement and Placement Handbook, which outlined policies and procedures in place in relation to education and training and the management of placement breakdowns.

79. During meetings with staff involved in practice placements, Practice Educators, employers and students, the inspection team were given examples of how breakdowns and issues had been managed including recognition of a dyslexia diagnosis during placement for one student, and another who had to change their placement. The meetings highlighted the joined up approach of all parties. The inspection team agreed this standard was met.

Standard 3.3

80. Documentary evidence provided an explanation of arrangements for ensuring placement providers have the necessary policies and procedures in place for students' health, wellbeing and support.

81. The narrative and the placement paperwork, and the placement handbook provided the inspection team with evidence of how arrangements are formalised, including for checking public liability insurance is in place. It also indicated that education provider support for students, including for those students requiring reasonable adjustments and out-of-hours tutorial support, extends to them while they are on placement.

82. During meetings with students the inspection team heard specific examples of how adjustments were made for students and that they gained useful support from the education provider, others said they knew what the process was should they need support. Support services staff shared their processes in terms of students' health, wellbeing and support and how coordination works between teams. (Links to standard 5.4). They heard how student wellbeing is actively managed on placement, during tri-partite meetings and in a pre-emptive, organic way, not just relying on processes. The inspection team heard how this was supported by the Senior Work Based Education Officer and the Work Based Education Officer. The inspection team agreed this standard was met.

Standard 3.4

83. During meetings with employers the inspection team heard about their involvement with the admissions process, the development of the course and contribution to teaching and assessment; including final assessments for the 'Working with Complexity' module where panels consist of academic staff and practitioners.

84. Documentary evidence for this standard included information about a programme led by the West Midlands Teaching Partnership to embed practitioners in academia, whereby six practitioners have been recruited to the role of '*Teaching Consultant*'. They will have 6 days each, per year ring fenced to spend at the university and will be involved in a range of activities including module content development, teaching and assessment based on their expertise.

85. The documentary evidence also included information about the Apprenticeship working group, meetings are the key forum whereby employer partners are involved in course management and monitoring. This forum is used to discuss any key challenges or changes that are required to ensure the course remains reflective of contemporary social work practice. The inspection team also saw Terms of Reference for the Course Committee which explicitly outlined that employers weren't involved in the Committee. This appears to have changed as during the meeting with employers, they expressed their involvement and benefits of being involved in the meetings.

86. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is making a [recommendation](#) in relation to standard 3.4. We recommend that the education provider ensures documentation reflects up to date processes and Terms of Reference for the Course Committee for sharing with employers.

Standard 3.5

87. The inspection team's review of documentary evidence for this standard outlined the involvement of key stakeholders in decision making processes and the monitoring of the course. These include people with lived experience of social work, students, and employer partners. They saw evidence of student feedback for individual modules and the quality improvement plan for 2023/2024.

88. People with lived experience of social work and students are also involved in the 'Course Committee Meetings'. During meetings with people with lived experience of social work it was evident that they valued their role in these meetings and felt heard.

89. The inspection team heard from the course team and students about how they had acted upon feedback about the 'Contemporary issues' module. Students fed back that the word count for the assignment was too low, and they felt that they did not have the scope to show the depth and breadth of analysis in their work that they would like. The course team have amended this by increasing both the credit value, and word count for the module. (this also links with standard 4.1).

90. The inspection team agreed this standard was met.

Standard 3.6

91. The inspection learned from the course team and in documentary evidence that they want to make a significant expansion to the cohort size (from 45 to 60 over the next three years), for the apprenticeship to respond to employer interest to increase this approach to addressing recruitment and retention issues. They talked about the gradual nature of doing so to ensure that it is done safely and responsibly to maintain the quality of the course and its outcomes.

92. During the meeting with employers, the inspection team heard about a desire to be able to increase placement capacity in order to support increased numbers.

93. Documentary evidence outlined strong links with the West Midlands Teaching Partnership in relation to placement capacity. The inspection team also saw evidence about Regional strategy and workforce meetings, they agreed this standard was met.

Standard 3.7

94. The inspection team were provided with CVs for the course lead and the course director, both who are registered social workers and have appropriate levels of experience. As evidenced in other standards, the inspection team were also told about how the staff team including the course lead have the opportunity to keep their knowledge current. The inspectors agreed this standard was met.

Standard 3.8

95. The inspection team were provided with CVs for the course team which outlined specialist subject knowledge and research interests supporting the course. All staff have completed or are working towards the Post Graduate Certificate in Higher and Professional education, and therefore fellowship of the Advance HE.

96. During a number of the meetings over the course of the inspection the inspection team heard about the pivotal role of the Senior Work Based Education Officer and the Work Based Education Officer, this appears to work well alongside the teaching team.

97. The inspectors agreed this standard was met.

Standard 3.9

98. During a review of documentary evidence, the inspection team saw narrative explanation that set out the arrangements for evaluating information on student performance and outcomes. It indicated that structured processes are used to track individual students. This includes to identify whether interventions are needed to address issues of individual student engagement and performance. The wider processes for course monitoring and annual action-planning are also outlined and documentation on them supplied.

99. During the meeting with the senior management team, the inspection team explored how information on students' performance, progression and outcomes was captured and used, and how positive trends from students' performance, progression and outcomes on the programmes is being distilled. They heard that the education provider monitors student performance on a monthly basis, looking at how able students can be stretched, helping students near to point of completion of course in discussion with partners. They were also advised that the course team is looking to share good practice from the degree apprenticeship and mirror in other programmes.

100. During meetings with the support services and the course team the inspection team were told about the allocated academic mentor, who can offer this individualised support at key points throughout the academic year, or as and when required. This is further supplemented by the support of the work based education officer. This information confirmed what had already been seen in documentary evidence. (also links to 5.2)

101. The inspectors agreed this standard was met.

Standard 3.10

102. During meetings with the senior management team the inspection team heard about how staff are supported in their ongoing development. As outlined in standard 3.8, they were told about the key performance indicator relating to staff having completed or be working towards the Post Graduate Certificate in Higher and Professional education, and therefore fellowship of the HEA. They also outlined the time staff spend back in practice and the two way work that is being agreed between the education provider and employers. These discussions were confirmed with the course team during their meeting.

103. The inspection team also saw a range of documentary evidence in support of this standard, including Academic strategy 2020-2030, Performance and development Review flowchart, PDR Academic and Research form, Values and Behaviours Framework and PDR Example Objectives.

104. The inspectors agreed this standard was met.

Standard four: Curriculum assessment

Standard 4.1

105. At the beginning of the inspection the course team delivered a presentation about the course which included detail about the structure of the course and learning progression throughout.

106. The inspection team saw a range of documentary evidence relating to this standards and mapping across to the relevant frameworks.

107. The inspection team agreed that this standard is met.

Standard 4.2

108. Documentary evidence for this standard included stakeholder engagement slides from June 2023, which included the team's plan to increase their approach to consultation and co-production with people with lived experience of social work. The inspection team also saw the Service User and Carer (SUC) strategy 2022 - 2025, founded on the principles of collaboration and partnership working. All teaching staff arrange for collaboration in teaching and assessment.

109. During meetings with all stakeholders the inspection team were told about the ways that they are consulted with and the opportunities there are for coproduction and collaboration in the design and development of the curriculum resources and teaching sessions. This was particularly prevalent in the meeting with people with lived experience of social work. The group were keen to tell the inspection team about activity they had been involved in and also voiced other things they thought it would be valuable to be part of.

110. As outlined in standard 3.1 the inspection team heard from employers about their role in the Course Committee, which is a recent development, and the Apprenticeship Group.

111. The inspection team agreed that this standard is met.

Standard 4.3

112. Prior to the inspection, the inspection team reviewed documentary evidence to support this standard including module descriptors, which outline topic areas covered by students at different levels of the course. A presentation relating to work being undertaken to reframe the way attachment theory is taught, linked to decolonising the curriculum, was also provided.

113. The inspection team heard about the internationalisation strategy for improving student experience during the meeting with the senior management team.

114. When the inspection team spoke to support services staff, online resources were demonstrated which outlined how students could access support services and what was available to them both in respect of academic support relating to accessibility and reasonable adjustments.

115. During the meeting with students and the course team the inspection team heard examples of how specific adjustments had been made.

116. The inspection team agreed that this standard is met.

Standard 4.4

117. The inspection team reviewed documentary evidence which included module descriptors, a stakeholder engagement presentation, and a timetable relating to their Research of Contemporary Themes module which highlighted topics to be covered and the inclusion of research findings in these sessions. They also learned that the module plan has recently been revisited and updated to embed a 'peer led' teaching approach, ensuring that the module content is reflective of contemporary and best practice. This change to the teaching on the module was discussed at the Apprenticeship Working Group and praised by employer stakeholders.

118. This was discussed further during a meeting with the course team and as part of the initial presentation about the course.

119. The inspection team agreed that this standard is met.

Standard 4.5

120. The narrative explanation from the education provider prior to inspection indicated the course team's focus on a fully integrated approach to developing students' learning across

theory and practice. Clarity was also provided on the modules in which there is a particular emphasis on supporting students to develop their understanding and application of theory to practice. This includes through the use of fictitious case studies.

121. During discussion with Practice Educators the inspection team were told about a standard agenda item for supervision to discuss the links between theory and practice and how it had been applied in practice.

122. Students also told the inspection team how they were able to gradually make sense of applying their theory to practice.

123. The inspection team agreed that this standard is met.

Standard 4.6

124. Prior to inspection the inspection team were provided with evidence of visiting speakers, the programme specification and course handbook all of which outlined opportunity to work with and learn from other professionals. It also outlined further opportunities for inter-professional learning that are provided via the 'skills days' embedded into learning at level 4, and again through the placements at level 5 and 6.

125. Narrative information provided explained the siting of the course in a school that enables inter-professional learning opportunities with a range of healthcare students. It also indicates that strengthening inter-professional education has been a focus of the school over the last few years, with approaches actively supporting learning opportunities.

126. During discussions with students they highlighted multi-disciplinary working and where they had some involvement in that, but reflected on how useful more opportunity for this would be.

127. The senior management team also expressed a wish to extend this practice across other relevant schools giving law and criminology as an example.

128. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is making a [recommendation](#) in relation to standard 4.6. We recommend that the course team, with support from the senior management team, continue to develop this area of practice in consultation with students.

Standard 4.7

129. Documentary and narrative evidence was provided to the inspection team, the narrative indicated that the course adheres to the standard tariff within the higher education sector of 10 hours of learning being required for each credit. It was further explained that the balance of taught, independent and practice-based learning hours varies between modules, reflecting their different focuses. In addition to this, the evidence showed that apprentices are given clear guidance on where and how to direct their

independent learning via the use of the 'Basic, Better, Best' model for each week of teaching.

130. Discussions with students and the course team confirmed that the time spent in the academic environment is well used and they valued the 'Basic, Better, Best' model.

131. The inspection team agreed that this standard is met.

Standard 4.8

132. During meetings with the course team and students the inspection team learned about changes made to the assessment of the Contemporary Themes module as a result of student feedback. This was a positive example of how feedback had been acknowledged and acted upon to strengthen the overall assessment strategy of the course.

133. The inspection team had an opportunity to see Blackboard and what the students see with respect to the assessment strategies. They were also walked through the model of 'Basic, Better, Best', which has been developed to help students consider what they might need to do to meet the requirements of assessment. Students reacted positively to this during discussion.

134. On review of the documentary evidence and as a result of discussions with the course team and students the inspection team could see a strong assessment strategy that is being continually reviewed.

135. As part of the documentary evidence and during meetings, the course team provided information in relation to changes made to incorporate the updated requirements for end point assessment and outlined the interim process that was rolled out in advance of the full scale changes.

136. The inspection team reviewed the programme specification, module descriptors and course handbook. While in practice the changes appear to have been implemented, not all the changes appeared to have been consistently or fully incorporated into the documentation itself.

137. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is recommending that a condition is set against standard 4.8 in relation to the approval of this course. Consideration was given as to whether the finding identified would mean that the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it is deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard, and we are confident that once this standard is met, a further inspection of the course would not be required. Full details of the condition, its monitoring and approval can be found in the [proposed outcome](#) section.

Standard 4.9

138. Evidence shared in advance of the inspection showed that learning outcomes are clearly linked to the taxonomy of learning with a scaled approach to demonstrating the skills in reflection, analysis and application required at each level of the course. The curriculum has a spiral approach, with apprentices revisiting core learning at each level but with increasing levels of depth, analysis and application. QAA Level Benchmarks also mapped.

139. An emphasis is placed on the spiral design of the curriculum, with a particular focus on enabling students to consolidate and build on their learning on an incremental basis.

140. During the inspection the inspection team were shown Blackboard, which demonstrated the above. The inspection team were also provided with additional marking rubrics during the inspection that linked with what was demonstrated on Blackboard.

141. During meetings with students they appeared to be happy about when assessments took place and also referred back to the 'Basic, Better, Best' model in supporting their preparation.

142. The inspection team agreed that this standard is met.

Standard 4.10

143. The inspection team heard from people with lived experience of social work and their involvement in the feedback process for students, particularly during activity relating to preparation to practice days.

144. During the meeting with students, the majority expressed satisfaction with assessment feedback and said that it did support their progression to the next stage of the course. However, some did say in order to get an increased level of feedback to support this they had to directly ask for it.

145. A Blackboard demonstration showed the structured approach to feedback aligned to the module.

146. Documentary evidence for this standard included module descriptors, course handbook, marking and feedback guidance, the external examiner policy and report and the assessment policy and procedure. Additional documents provided during inspection suggested that some issues with consistent feedback and marking had been identified, but it also outlined how this was going to be addressed. (Links to Standard 5.7)

147. The inspection team agreed that this standard is met.

Standard 4.11

148. Documentary and narrative information assured the inspection team that assessments are carried out by people with appropriate expertise. They were supplied with CVs for the

course team and the external examiner report and policy. The evidence also confirmed that the external examiner is an experienced, registered social worker and academic.

149. The inspection team agreed that this standard is met.

Standard 4.12

150. Documentary evidence provided for this standard was the Academic Regulations and University Award Board for Exceptions guidance. Narrative explained that the course sits outside of the usual academic regulations around progression due to the requirement for apprentices to pass 120 credits to progress to the next level of the course. It also outlined that at every level, students are required to complete observed practice. In the Preparation for Social Work module this takes the form of a formatively assessed role play where in Practice based learning 1 and 2 students must undertake three successful direct observations of practice. As outlined in standard 4.10 above, the inspection team heard from people with lived experience of Social Work who are involved in the assessment of the role play.

151. During meetings with the course team, the inspection team were able to understand more about observed practice and what was recorded on to PARE e-portfolio.

152. The inspection team agreed that this standard is met.

Standard 4.13

153. Module descriptors and the course handbook were provided to the inspection team along with narrative that indicated that the spiral design of the curriculum and the work-based nature of an apprenticeship supports students to develop their awareness and understanding of taking an evidence-informed approach to practice. The learning outcomes of the course also focus on the requirement that students are able to work with a range of evidence and take part in critical analysis.

154. During the meeting with support services the inspection team heard about academic support for students, and in particular for those who have been away from academia for some time, we were shown the resources available to students which included a confidence checker.

155. The course team explained how they supported students to engage critically with the evidence base by considering the relevance and application of specific elements of published research to local practice and service delivery.

156. The inspection team agreed that this standard is met.

Standard five: Supporting students

Standard 5.1

157. Documentary evidence provided to the inspection team outlined provision available to students which includes confidential counselling services, careers advice, support and occupational health services.

158. During the meeting with support services the inspection team were told more about the services provided and how students access it. They explained how services had a joined up approach to service delivery and signposting, and demonstrated where students could find information for both academic and pastoral support on their site online. (links to standard 5.2)

159. Students during their meeting gave examples to the inspection team of being able to access support.

160. The inspection team agreed that this standard is met.

Standard 5.2

161. The inspection team were provided with documentary evidence including the academic mentoring policy. The narrative indicated students' access to an academic mentor (personal tutor), with a structured approach defined for how students receive support.

162. During meetings with support services and the course team the inspection teams heard about the strong link between the academic team and support services.

163. The inspection team agreed that this standard is met.

Standard 5.3

164. The inspection team were provided with a range of documentary evidence which included HEOPs Social Work Standards of Medical Fitness to Train, Fitness to Practise Procedure, Placement Handbook and module descriptors.

165. The documentation outlined the education providers arrangements for checking students' suitability as they progress through the course. It indicates that students are required to make an annual declaration and the education providers arrangements for investigating any issues. (Links to standard 1.4)

166. The inspection team agreed that this standard is met.

Standard 5.4

167. As outlined in standard 3.3, during meetings with students the inspection team heard specific examples of how adjustments were made for students and that they gained useful support from the education provider, others said they knew what the process was should they need support. Support services staff shared their processes in terms of students' health, wellbeing and support and how coordination works between teams.

168. The narrative and documentary evidence provided, which included the academic mentoring policy, practice learning agreement and links to student support and disability support services, indicate the processes in place for making reasonable adjustments in support of students who disclose a disability, with a structured approach to producing individual learning support statements.

169. The inspection team heard from the people involved in placement learning that in mid-point reviews, if any support needs are identified there is joined up work with employers if issues arise.

170. The inspection team agreed that this standard is met.

Standard 5.5

171. Documentary evidence in support of this standard included the Course Handbook, the Impact of Theoretical Perspectives Timetable 2023, Written Assignment Marking Criteria and Assignment Guidance Slides 15 09 2023. Narrative provided an overview of support for final year students, transition into ASYE, and CPD, these are discussed at professional development days as part of the final placement at level six.

172. The course team told the inspection team about the Working with Complexity module which also covers post course preparation.

173. The inspection team agreed that this standard is met.

Standard 5.6

174. Students are advised that any missed mandatory placement days must be 'made up' at the end of placements. They are advised of the requirement to complete the mandatory placement days via the module descriptors, placement handbook (pg.10) and in the information shared at the Learning Agreement Meeting (LAM).

175. Placement attendance is currently monitored via the Aptem system, but the course team advised the inspection team that they are in the process of moving to the PARE e-portfolio and students will complete a timesheet in PARE that is signed by the Practice Educator and Work Based Supervisor to confirm the required number of placement days have been completed. The inspection team also heard that attendance is logged on Beacon and an academic register.

176. The inspection team agreed that this standard is met.

Standard 5.7

177. Documentary evidence included the External Examiner policy, the marking and feedback guidance and the Assessment Policy and Procedure. Narrative showed that the standard and consistency of feedback is monitored through the internal moderation and external examining process, and that the course lead reviews all grades to track upward or

downward trends in terms of student performance which helps to strategically allocate time and resources to students who may be struggling academically.

178. This was confirmed during meetings with students and the course team. The majority of students expressed satisfaction with assessment feedback and said that it did support their progression to the next stage of the course. However, some did say in order to get an increased level of feedback to support this they had to directly ask for it. (Links to Standard 4.10)

179. The inspection team agreed that this standard is met.

Standard 5.8

180. The Complaints and Appeals Process provided to the inspection team explained the process for students to make an appeal, with a link to the education provider's academic appeal process included in the course handbook.

181. It is clarified that, should students not be satisfied with how their appeal is managed by the education provider, they can escalate the issue to the Office for the Independent Adjudicator.

182. The inspection team agreed that this standard is met.

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

Standard 6.1

183. As the qualifying course is BA (Hons) in Social Work Practice, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Proposed outcome

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

Conditions

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

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

	Standard not currently met	Condition	Date for submission of evidence	Link
1	2.6	The education provider will demonstrate that they can ensure that all practice educators are on the register and that they have the relevant and current knowledge, skills and experience to support safe and effective learning.	16 May 2024	Paragraph 69
2	4.8	The education provider will review and update their programme specification, programme handbook and module descriptors to ensure they fully and consistently reflect the changes made to the course structure and assessment, and provide evidence of the updated resources.	16 May 2024	Paragraph 132

Recommendations

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

	Standard	Detail	Link
1	1.6	The inspectors are recommending that if it is being used as a source of information for prospective students, the website is updated to provide accurate	Paragraph 45

		information with respect to year two and three modules, outlines that on successful completion of the course students are eligible to apply to register with Social Work England and includes additional information with respect to opportunity for research.	
2	2.3	The inspectors are recommending that the education provider considers working with employers to ensure staff have a good understanding of the differences in apprentices' respective role, remit and responsibilities when in their job roles and when they are students on placement. This includes to ensure that students' workload while on placement is supportive of their learning.	Paragraph 59
3.	3.4	The inspectors are recommending that education provider ensures documentation reflects up to date processes and Terms of Reference for the Course Committee for sharing with employers.	Paragraph 83
5.	4.6	The inspectors are recommending that that the course team, with support from the senior management team, continue to develop their practice in relation to multi-professional learning in consultation with students.	Paragraph 124

Annex 1: Education and training standards summary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Regulator decision

Approved with conditions.

Annex 2: Meeting of conditions

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

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

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

	Standard not met	Condition	Recommendation
1	2.6	The education provider will demonstrate that they can ensure that all practice educators are on the register and that they have the relevant and current knowledge, skills and experience to support safe and effective learning.	Condition met
2	4.8	The education provider will review and update their programme specification, programme handbook and module descriptors to ensure they fully and consistently reflect the changes made to the course structure and assessment, and provide evidence of the updated resources.	Condition met

Findings

This conditions review was undertaken as a result of conditions set during course approval as outlined in the original inspection report above.

With respect to the condition set against standard 2.6 the education provider submitted narrative and documentary evidence outlining the process that demonstrates that they can ensure that all practice educators are on the register and that they have the relevant and current knowledge, skills and experience to support safe and effective learning. This provided details of learning agreement meetings that will take place and a learning agreement form completed in advance of a placement holding details of a practice educators registration and experience. The learning agreement meeting is attended by a member of the education providers academic team and they have oversight of the process. The evidence provided also gave clarity on how the education provider monitors practice

educators' ongoing learning needs. This includes via its Apprenticeships Working Group, seeking feedback on practice educators' support needs using an updated placement audit form, and its engagement in the regional teaching partnership.

With respect to the condition set against standard 4.8 the education provider was asked to review and update a range of documentation to ensure that it fully and consistently reflected the changes made to the course structure and assessment, and to provide evidence of the updated resources. They provided updated copies of their programme specification, module descriptors for practice based learning 1 and 2, research into contemporary practice and working with complexity in professional practice and the apprenticeship handbook.

The inspectors' recommendation is that these conditions are now met.

Regulator decision

Conditions met and approved.