



Inspection Report

Course provider: University of Plymouth

Course approval: BA (Hons) Social Work Degree
Apprenticeship

Inspection dates: 28th – 31st January 2025

Report date:	14 th April 2025
Inspector recommendation:	Not approved
Regulator decision:	Not approved
Date of Regulator decision:	3 rd July 2025

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Introduction

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

What we do

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

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

9. During this time a draft plan for the inspection is developed and shared with the education provider, to make sure it is achievable at the point of inspection.

10. Once the inspectors and officer are satisfied that an inspection can take place, this is usually undertaken over a three- or four-day visit to the education provider. We then draft a report setting out what we found during the inspection and if and how our findings demonstrate that the course meets our standards.

11. The inspectors may recommend in this report that the course is approved with conditions, without conditions or that it does not meet the criteria for approval.

12. A draft of this report is shared with the education provider, and once we have considered any comments or observations they may wish to provide, we make a final decision about the approval of the course.

13. The decisions that we can make are as follows, that the course is approved without conditions, the course is approved with conditions or that the course does not meet the criteria for approval. The decision, and the report, are then published.

14. If the course is approved with conditions, we will write to the education provider setting out how they can demonstrate they have met the conditions, the action we will take once we decide that the conditions are met, and the action we will take if we decide the conditions are not met.

Summary of Inspection

15. Course details: the University of Plymouth wish to run a three-year BA (Hons) Social Work Degree Apprenticeship.

Inspection ID	UP_CPP476
Course provider	University of Plymouth
Validating body (if different)	
Course inspected	BA (Hons) Social Work Degree Apprenticeship
Mode of Study	Full time
Maximum student cohort	15
Proposed first intake	September 2025
Date of inspection	28 th – 31 st January 2025
Inspection team	Joseph Hubbard (Education Quality Assurance Officer) Glenn Mathieson (Lay Inspector) Louise Robson (Registrant Inspector)

Language

16. In this document we describe the University of Plymouth as ‘the education provider’ or ‘the university’ and we describe the BA (Hons) Social Work Degree Apprenticeship as ‘the course’, ‘the programme’, and ‘the apprenticeship’.

Inspection

17. A remote inspection took place from 28th – 31st January 2025. 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 4 students on current programmes, including a number of student representatives. Discussions included admissions, placement experiences, readiness for practice, reasonable adjustments, interprofessional learning, pastoral and academic support, and assessment feedback.

Meetings with course staff

21. Over the course of the inspection, the inspection team met with university staff members from the course team, admissions team, senior management, practice-based learning team, and support services.

Meeting with people with lived experience of social work

22. The inspection team met with people with lived experience of social work who have been involved in the course through the university's Social Work Consultative Group. Discussions included admissions, readiness for practice, module content, and assessment.

Meetings with external stakeholders

23. The inspection team met with representatives from employers including Plymouth City Council and Cornwall Council. The inspection team also met with both LA-based and independent practice educators.

Findings

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

Standard one: Admissions

Standard 1.1

25. The university provided an approval document for this standard which outlined aspects of the proposed admissions process. An initial needs analysis would be undertaken to identify applicants' existing knowledge and qualifications, and determine whether students' English and IT skills are at the required level. In addition, applicants must have BBB or equivalent at A-level, some formal study in the past 5 years, and a minimum overall IELTS score of 7 where relevant. A panel interview would be conducted with an academic, employer, and person with lived experience of social work.

26. At inspection, inspectors sought further details of how the admissions process would assess applicants' capacity to meet the professional standards and academic requirements of the programme. Admissions staff were asked what the application form for the programme would look like and confirmed that this is still in development, though a draft copy was requested and provided. Content of the draft application form related primarily to the requirements of apprenticeships in general, rather than a social work apprenticeship specifically. In the employer partner meeting, representatives stated that though they are aware the intention is for shared recruitment between the university and employers, they do not know any details of what this process will look like yet.

27. The inspectors were concerned that while there is an overarching plan in place for admissions, the recruitment process had not yet been discussed and agreed with employer partners, and could therefore change substantially by the time they would be carried out. Having reviewed the evidence available at the time of inspection, the inspectors determined that there was not sufficient clarity regarding the details of the admissions process to find this standard met.

Standard 1.2

28. The documentary evidence for this standard noted the use of an 'Initial Needs Analysis' during the admissions process, which would identify applicants' existing knowledge, skills, and qualifications to assess whether these are appropriate for the programme. There is no experience requirement as part of the entry requirements for the programme, and no evidence

was provided regarding how amount or relevance of experience is considered during admissions.

29. At inspection, it was confirmed that the purpose of the Initial Needs Assessment is to ensure that the applicant could evidence new learning to meet apprenticeship funding requirements, and that there is no specific experience requirement outside of this.

30. The inspectors determined that they had not been provided evidence that applicants' prior relevant experience will be considered as part of the admissions process and therefore this standard was not met.

Standard 1.3

31. The programme specification document states that the admissions process will include a panel interview with an academic, person with lived experience of social work (PWLE), and employer representative. It also states that the arrangements for interviews will be made in collaboration with employers.

32. At inspection, the inspectors sought details of how these stakeholder groups have been involved in the development of the admissions process for the programme. Employers reported that they are keen to start recruitment for the apprenticeship, but have yet not had any communication from the university regarding development of the admissions process. They noted that a programme launch event had been held for stakeholders which was informative. Members of the university's PWLE group confirmed that they have been involved in development of the programme through the social work apprenticeship consultative meeting.

33. The inspectors determined that while there was an intention to have employer and PWLE representation on interview panels, this standard was not met due to the lack of engagement with employers regarding the development of the admissions process.

Standard 1.4

34. The course specification confirms that applicants must complete an Occupational Health declaration, and the enhanced DBS checks required are organised by the apprentice's employer and shared with the university. A self-declaration is also completed at enrollment, and if an applicant has any convictions their suitability for the programme is assessed by the Faculty Professional Issues Committee. The inspection team were provided with details of this process and a copy of the declaration form, along with details of how the suitability panels work if anything is declared.

35. At inspection, admissions staff confirmed that DBS will be provided by the employer for the apprenticeship. However, the university were not able to confirm how recent of an employer DBS would be acceptable; when queried, they stated approximately 5 years. The

inspection team were therefore not assured that a robust and documented process was in place around DBS checks, and determined for this reason that the standard was not met.

Standard 1.5

36. The course specification confirms a university-wide commitment to equal opportunities for applicants, and provision of reasonable adjustments. There is also a separate reasonable adjustments policy that encourages applicants to disclose any relevant disability on application or as early as possible.

37. During the inspection, the inspection team heard more about how reasonable adjustments are put in place for existing programmes. However, it was not clear how the university collect and analyse equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) data at the admissions stage, nor how they implement and monitor EDI-related admissions policies at a course level.

38. The people with lived experience that met with the inspection team confirmed that there is no regular EDI training for involvement in admissions, nor regular training more broadly. The inspectors determined that the standard was not met.

Standard 1.6

39. Prior to the inspection, documentary evidence was provided in the social work BA subject guide (it was noted that the apprenticeship-specific version is still in development) and the programme handbook. The handbook confirms that graduates of the programme gain eligibility to apply to register and states that the programme is regulated by Social Work England. The subject guide provides information on the role of a social worker and the generic nature of the qualification.

40. However, the subject guide states “once you graduate you can become a qualified social worker and register with Social Work England”; this does not make clear to applicants that registration is not guaranteed, nor that registration is a prerequisite of using the protected title social worker.

41. There was no content relating to costs or finance in either document, however it was confirmed at inspection that there is clear information on the applicant portal for apprentices clarifying that the employer should cover all costs associated with the programme. Information relating to the department’s research interests did not appear to be provided in materials for applicants.

42. The inspection team determined that this standard was not met, due to the incorrect wording in the subject guide regarding registration.

Standard two: Learning environment

Standard 2.1

43. The programme handbook and module records confirm that students will complete 30 skills days in year 1, a 70-day placement in year 2, and a 100-day placement in year 3. The programme handbook states that “where possible” apprentices will gain experience working with a range of people and with legislation. A template placement agreement form was provided for the existing programmes, but it was confirmed this will look different for the apprenticeship.

44. During the inspection, the university outlined how placement days are recorded and verified. The inspection team requested clarity on the details of skills days, such as how many there are and when in the programmes these happen, as there was inconsistency in these details across the documentation. The inspection team remained unsure what skills days would look like for the apprenticeship programme, and the course provider was still in negotiation with placement providers around details such as the number of shadowing days. The course team confirmed that the monitoring of each student’s skills days attendance is carried out piecemeal by members of staff across the team; the inspectors felt this left the process particularly vulnerable to human error.

45. The placement team outlined the process for ensuring a contrast and that statutory tasks were completed, confirming that there are processes in place for this. However, the employer partners who met with the inspection team raised concerns around how the university determines that a placement is statutory. The university and placement providers also gave conflicting information regarding placement capacity, with the former stating they have a surplus of placements and the latter stating capacity is very stretched. There were no service level agreements or memoranda of understanding with placement providers to reassure the inspectors regarding placement capacity.

46. The inspection team agreed that there was evidence of processes in place to ensure students receive the number and type of placement days required, but were not assured that these processes are fully robust. The inspectors were also not clear how these processes would work for the apprenticeship programme as aspects were still in development. The inspection team therefore agreed that this standard was not met.

Standard 2.2

47. Documentary evidence confirmed that there are processes for assessing and auditing placements, as well as initial and mid-point meetings which serve to check placements are meeting individual students’ needs. The university provided copies of the template placement learning agreement and placement activation form.

48. The inspection team met with practice educators who confirmed that students were well-prepared for placement. The students that met with the inspection team confirmed that they were broadly satisfied with their placements. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 2.3

49. The university provided a copy of the BA programme's placement module handbook which included a template practice learning agreement for existing programmes. This agreement states that agencies must provide induction, and students must flag up if induction is not provided or not comprehensive. The agreement template includes a brief list of policies to be included in induction, but is not clear which of these are required or not as there is no checklist and the list ends with "etc.". The agreement does not make reference to placement responsibilities or expectations regarding workload, which inspectors noted would be particularly important to include in the version to be created for the apprenticeship.

50. At inspection, students on existing programmes reported being content with the induction and support they received on placement. The inspectors determined that this standard was met, as the guidance for the standard is not prescriptive about how the course provider ensures appropriate induction, support, and workload.

Standard 2.4

51. The BA placement module handbook was provided as evidence of how this standard is met. The template practice learning agreement requires the student to complete an overview of learning opportunities, and notes that these must be in line with the professional standards at their level of practice. The placement handbook also states that the practice supervisor must ensure the student has sufficient and appropriate learning opportunities.

52. At inspection, students on existing programmes reported no concerns around the appropriateness of their placement responsibilities for their stage of education. The handbook and practice learning agreement have not yet been adapted for the apprenticeship, and inspectors agreed this was particularly important given the unique position of apprentices when undertaking placement with their employer. The inspectors determined that this standard was not met because the evidence provided did not demonstrate sufficiently developed and tailored documentation in respect of the apprenticeship programme.

Standard 2.5

53. The documentation provided for this standard was a section of the Teaching and Placement Timeline for the apprenticeship, specifically a table showing the 30 skills days. The listed days included 12 "start and end of semester" days over the duration of the programme (indicating some skills days do not take place in year 1), and 3 days' "preparation for practice placement training". There was no further detail provided in the document regarding how readiness for practice content would be delivered or assessed.

54. The apprenticeship module guide, though not mapped for this standard, makes reference to the "skills for social workers" module. The guide states that apprentices will complete 30

days' readiness for direct practice to prepare them for practice learning stages 2 and 3, and lists the assignments for this module as an essay, workbook, and skills days.

55. Additional evidence was requested for this standard, and the university provided a module brief for the BA's readiness for practice module, as well as a Definitive Module Records document. The module brief states that students will undertake 30 days of skills development to prepare for practice, a lecture series, and study groups, and undergo assessment of their readiness for direct practice. This was inconsistent with the original document provided, which stated the 30 days would be spread across the entire programme as opposed to all taking place prior to placement.

56. The BA module brief states that assessment for the module will be via a portfolio which must cover 5 elements, as well as seven pieces of supporting evidence. The brief states that "failure of any one [...] of these elements could result in the requirement for referral work" – inspectors considered this unclear on whether all elements needed to be passed or not. Later in the document, it is stated that "Where a marker discovers that documents are missing in whole or in part, this will lead to an automatic fail of the module." – this was not consistent with the above information found earlier in the document.

57. The Definitive Module Records document for the apprenticeship again states that the Skills for Social Work module will include 30 days' readiness for direct practice to prepare for stages 2 and 3, stating that all 30 days must be completed to be deemed ready for practice. This is in conflict with the Teaching and Placement Timeline which states that the 30 days take place across all 3 years. It was also noted within the Definitive Module Records document that there were no pre-requisites listed for the Practice Learning 1 module, where this should have listed the readiness for practice module as required to prevent students starting placement without having passed.

58. At inspection, clarification was requested regarding what the readiness for practice assessment would look like for the apprenticeship, and the course team confirmed that this would look similar to the BA module but was still under development. The inspectors agreed that this standard was not met, as the evidence provided was unclear and inconsistent, and the assessment of readiness for practice for the apprenticeship had not yet been developed.

Standard 2.6

59. The programme handbook stated that practice educators (PEs) receive regular training and learning opportunities, but did not reference requirements around registration or qualifications. The operation specification stated that PEs must be registered with Social Work England, and listed stakeholder meetings and practice learning business group as avenues for identifying PE training and support needs.

60. At inspection, it was confirmed that there is a robust process in place for gathering the required information when onboarding independent PEs (those not employed by a placement

provider). However, there is no policy or process in place for ensuring that PEs remain registered and maintain currency after onboarding. For PEs employed by placement providers, it was confirmed that the university relies on the employer to ensure these PEs are registered and qualified. The university confirmed that they do not ask employers to provide confirmation that they check PEs' registration status or how often.

61. The inspectors agreed that due to the lack of robust process in place for ensuring all PEs' qualifications, currency, and ongoing registration with Social Work England, this standard was not met.

Standard 2.7

62. The programme handbook provided contains a section which outlines how students can raise concerns around placement, and the university also provided a link to the university-wide Speak Up whistleblowing policy.

63. At inspection, students confirmed they are aware of these processes, and the course team provided an example of the concerns process in use. The inspectors agreed that the standard was met.

Standard three: Course governance, management and quality

Standard 3.1

64. The operational specification provided for the programme outlined the management roles and governance arrangements. These included detail of the annual review process and planning arrangements. The inspectors agreed that the information provided in the documentation was sufficient to determine that this standard was met.

Standard 3.2

65. The operational specification for the apprenticeship provided information on processes for placement monitoring and working in partnership with placement providers. The template practice learning agreement, mid-point review, and final report outline that the student must achieve learning outcomes in line with the Professional Capability Framework (PCF).

66. There is a specific staff team in place who have responsibility for oversight and arrangement of placement, and while there are no overarching agreements in place at this stage, a template was provided of the apprenticeship agreement document the university uses.

67. Regarding contingencies for the management of placement breakdown, a placement incidents and concerns policy was linked to through the university's central placements information website. However, this document appeared to be tailored particularly to health professions placements, and was also overdue for review in 2021. Though not mapped for this standard, the programme handbook section 'when there are difficulties' does include a

brief section on issues arising while on placement. The inspectors agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.3

68. The operational specification for the programme notes that there is a placement team who holds responsibility for carrying out quality assurance of placements before a student is allocated to them. The university also has a central apprenticeship hub which shares some of these responsibilities for degree apprenticeship programmes.

69. The template placement learning agreement provided includes an 'agency induction' section which lists some policies that must be in place and provided to the student during induction, but is not clear which of these are required or not as there is no checklist and the list ends with "etc.". As discussed at standard 2.3, at inspection students on existing programmes reported being content with the induction and support they received on placement.

70. The inspectors determined that this standard was met, as the guidance for the standard does not specify particular policies that placement providers must have in place.

Standard 3.4

71. The operational specification makes reference to employer involvement in the programme, stating that employers will attend programme meetings, including a specific meeting to discuss placements and the allocation of practice education. The document also states that the academic lead for social work attends a local employer network for discussion of practice learning and social work education more broadly.

72. At inspection, employers acknowledged that routes for employer involvement are in place, though they stated that they have not yet had involvement in the apprenticeship specifically. The inspection team also met with PEs, who stated that they had some involvement in planning for the apprenticeship programme. The inspection team determined that as the structures are in place and in use for existing programmes this standard was met.

Standard 3.5

73. The arrangements for regular evaluation and improvement systems, including an Annual Quality Review and a number of relevant committees, are laid out in the operational specification provided. These appear to demonstrate a comprehensive approach to programme monitoring.

74. At inspection, it was confirmed which mechanisms have representation from each stakeholder group. The annual programme review has representation from employers and people with lived experience of social work, the Social Work Consultative Group gathers feedback from people with lived experience, and the student-staff liaison committee provides

a route for student involvement in evaluation and improvement of programmes. The inspectors agreed that this standard was therefore met.

Standard 3.6

75. The evidence provided for this standard was narrative on the mapping form which stated that student numbers across the university's social work programmes is decided by the Head of School and Academic Lead. The mapping stated that the decided numbers then inform the faculty's admissions strategy. No detail was provided of how decisions are reached, or what information is taken into account when making these decisions.

76. At inspection, it was confirmed that there is no written strategy available, and conflicting information was provided by the university and employers regarding placement capacity. The university stated that they had a surplus of placements, whereas employers reported placement capacity is stretched very thin and they struggle to meet the university's requirements. As the evidence did not demonstrate a clear strategy including consideration of local placement capacity, the inspectors determined that this standard was not met.

Standard 3.7

77. The operational specification and academic lead's CV provided evidence in support of this standard, with the mapping confirming that the academic lead holds overall professional responsibility for all of the university's social work courses. The academic lead's CV provided evidence that they are appropriately qualified and experienced, and the register was checked to confirm they are also registered with Social Work England.

78. At inspection, it was confirmed that Social Work England registration is a requirement of this role. The inspectors agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.8

79. Staff CVs were provided as evidence for this standard, with the mapping document noting that the university also utilise practice educators and other professionals in course delivery. The inspectors agreed from this evidence that staff members appeared to have appropriate qualifications, experience, and expertise.

80. Additional evidence was requested to confirm the total number of full-time equivalent staff, and clarification as to whether staff taught across all programmes; this information was provided.

81. At inspection, it was confirmed that the university's workload allocation tool is currently being amended, in recognition that this requires redevelopment. The guidance for this standard states that the course provider must be able to justify the number of staff employed and the amount of time they spend on the course, as well as the number of students.

82. Verbal evidence at inspection indicated that the university intend to maintain current staffing levels on the basis that staffing for the existing programmes is sufficient and workload is not expected to change significantly through the addition of this programme due to falling recruitment on other courses.

83. However, no workload allocation or other documentary evidence was provided to evidence that current staffing levels are sufficient, or that the workload will not increase overall with the addition of an apprenticeship. The inspectors therefore agreed that this standard was not met.

Standard 3.9

84. Evidence for this standard included details of the university's annual quality review process, and stated that the programme lead collates progression data to inform the programme action plan. The minutes of the annual programme review for the BA programme confirmed that the analysis of progression data in this process includes review and discussion of EDI data. The inspectors agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.10

85. The narrative evidence for this standard stated that staff engage in regular practice-related research activity, such as research meetings, conference presentations, and research projects related to practice. Staff also engage with practice by delivering teaching sessions within employer partner agencies. A research summary was provided which outlined the team's collective research activities.

86. At inspection, it was confirmed that staff have 200 hours per year of protected time for scholarly activity, and a budget for continuing professional development (CPD). Staff participate in annual development reviews, and maintain their proximity to practice through research, CPD activities, and supporting students on placement. Practice educators confirmed that they are provided with regular workshops and sessions to support them in maintaining their knowledge of practice. The inspectors agreed that this standard was met.

Standard four: Curriculum assessment

Standard 4.1

87. The programme specification was provided which contained mapping of the course to Programme Learning Outcomes, which were stated to align with the Social Work England professional standards and the British Association for Social Workers (BASW)'s PCF. An appendix was also provided which mapped the Occupational Duties (KSBs), PCF, and Social Work England Professional Standards against each other. The university also provided a completed Professional Standards mapping form for the programme. The inspectors determined that this standard was met on the basis of the documentation provided.

Standard 4.2

88. Evidence was provided to demonstrate that overarching governance and quality assurance structures are in place within the university to involve employers, practitioners, and people with lived experience of social work in programme design and development. However, as the curriculum for the proposed programme has not yet been developed, and employer partners stated at inspection that they have not yet been involved in development of the apprenticeship, the inspectors determined that this standard was not met.

Standard 4.3

89. The university provided a university-wide EDI policy to evidence this standard, and directed to a number of relevant sections of the operational specification. For example, there are sections laying out approaches to reasonable adjustments, and to alternative and inclusive assessment principles. The definitive module records document and professional standards mapping form also demonstrated areas of the programme content which are related to and aligned with the principles of EDI. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 4.4

90. The mapping narrative for this standard directed to the social work team research summary document as evidence of how the team maintains up to date knowledge of social work research and best practice. It also stated that the team hold regular research meetings and team days to share knowledge and consider how developments can be incorporated into the programmes. The programme operational specification outlines the regular review processes that programmes are subject to annually to ensure they are up to date.

91. At inspection, examples of the above were provided to support the documentary evidence, confirming that the team are research active and bring their knowledge into the programmes they deliver. The inspectors agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.5

92. Aspects of the proposed programme laid out in the module guides, definitive module records, and programme specification provided evidence that the programme aims to centre the integration of theory and practice. The placement documentation also requires students to complete two practice analyses, and the template for these includes a section for the student to reflect on how they have applied theory to practice.

93. At inspection, students and PEs confirmed that integration of theory and practice is a key feature of the learning that takes place while on placement. The inspectors determined that this standard was met.

Standard 4.6

94. The evidence provided for this standard was the module information included for the two placement modules and Skills for Social Work module in the definitive module guide document. The content summaries and learning outcomes for both placement modules include reference to multi-disciplinary working.

95. At inspection, specific examples were provided of the sort of interprofessional learning opportunities that the university provides for students to engage in, such as Schwartz Rounds. Events are put on by Plymouth Integrated Health and Social Care Education Centre which involve students across a number of professions coming together to work on a case study. The course team confirmed that at least one of these events is timetabled to ensure all students access interprofessional learning opportunities. The inspectors agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 4.7

96. The number of hours and corresponding credits for each module and for the programme as a whole is outlined in the definitive module records document. This document also outlines the requirements around attendance. These details were triangulated at inspection with the course team, though it was not fully clear how existing attendance monitoring systems will translate to the proposed apprenticeship, which is intended to be delivered predominantly through distance learning. The inspectors agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.8

97. The programme specification provided broad information regarding assessment strategy and design, and inspectors requested information regarding how the assessment strategy for the programme was developed. The university responded that programme developments are discussed during regular team meeting and biannual team development days. They also stated that one planning day has been held so far to develop online resources for the apprenticeship, with further sessions planned.

98. As discussed within standard 2.5, inspectors were not assured that a coherent and robust assessment of readiness for practice had yet been developed for the programme at the time of inspection. The inspectors determined that as this standard requires assessments to be robust, fair, reliable, and valid, the standard was not met due to the concerns around the assessment of readiness to practice.

Standard 4.9

99. The narrative for this standard directed inspectors to the module frameworks within the definitive module records document, which provided outlines of the proposed assessments for each module and the assessed learning outcomes. However, on review of the assessment schedule provided in the apprenticeship approval document, the inspectors had some concerns that the sequencing of assessments may result in assessment bunching.

100. The proposed assessment schedule included two 2000-word essays due within a few weeks of each other in the first year of the programme, and two 2500-word essays due within a few weeks of each other in the second year. Inspectors noted that this bunching may not support students' progression across the programme, as they would not have time to use feedback from the first to inform their work on the second.

101. Review of student-staff liaison committee minutes confirmed that students on current programmes have requested essay deadlines to be more spread out. The inspectors agreed that the proposed assessment schedule was not appropriately sequenced to support students' progression, and therefore that the standard was not met.

Standard 4.10

102. The operational specification for the programme indicated that feedback is provided from various sources during placement, and through academic assessments outside of placement learning. The approval document outlined where in the programme formative and summative assessments would take place, as well as the process for marking assignments, and the programme handbook outlined the assessment policy. The tripartite reviews required for degree apprenticeships provide an additional opportunity for students to receive feedback.

103. At inspection, as well as in SSLC minutes, students reported finding that feedback does not consistently assist them in how to improve their work, and requested more concrete and developmental feedback. Taken alongside the scheduling issue outlined at standard 4.9, the inspectors considered this to indicate that feedback may not reliably support students' development. The inspectors therefore agreed that this standard was not met.

Standard 4.11

104. The approval document provided as evidence included CVs for course staff, which indicated appropriate expertise and experience. The operational standards outlined the requirements for external examiners, and the appointed external examiner's CV was provided to confirm that they met these requirements. The Social Work England register was checked to confirm that the appointed external examiner is registered. However, it was confirmed at inspection that the external examiner was appointed for the BA and MA programmes, and had not yet been appointed for the apprenticeship. The inspectors determined that this standard was therefore not met.

Standard 4.12

105. As discussed within standard 4.10, the operational specification for the programme indicated that feedback is gathered from various sources during placement, and through academic assessments outside of placement learning, to inform decisions about students' progression. The operational specification also notes that award assessment boards consider students' individual marks, progression, and awards.

106. The approval document outlined where in the programme formative and summative assessments would take place, as well as the process for marking assignments, and the programme handbook outlined the assessment policy. The tripartite reviews required for degree apprenticeships provide an additional opportunity to review students' progress on the programme.

107. As discussed within standard 2.5, inspectors were not assured that a coherent and robust assessment of readiness for practice had yet been developed for the programme at the time of inspection. The inspectors determined that as the readiness to practice assessment is a key progression point within the programme, the standard was not met due to the concerns around the assessment of readiness to practice.

Standard 4.13

108. The module information provided indicated that there are opportunities to develop an evidence-informed approach to practice included in a number of modules throughout the programme. The workbook students complete on placement also requires students to embed an evidence-based approach to practice. The PCFs also support students' development of research and evaluation skills to support decision-making and critical thinking.

109. At inspection, further information was requested regarding how apprentices would be supported to develop an evidence-informed approach to practice at level 4 of the programme in particular. Evidence was provided for this including examples of assessments within the first year which support development of research skills. The inspectors therefore determined that this standard was met.

Standard five: Supporting students

Standard 5.1

110. The programme operational specification confirmed that the university provides confidential counselling services and careers services, and included a link to the student wellbeing service. All offers for the programme are also subject to an occupational health assessment.

111. At inspection, it was confirmed that because the proposed apprenticeship would be a distance learning programme, apprenticeship students would not have ongoing access to the university counselling service. The inspectors considered whether this would render this standard unmet, however the standard requires the course provider to ensure that students have access to counselling; it does not stipulate that the university must provide this itself. As the university does provide apprentices with an initial one-off session to assess their needs and signpost to appropriate services in their local area, the inspectors determined that this standard was met.

Standard 5.2

112. The evidence provided for this standard was the operational specification, which outlines the support available to assist students in their academic development. These supports included a personal tutoring system, study groups, and relevant support for students with any additional needs.

113. At inspection, it was confirmed that students also have access to a suite of academic skills support, and further support through the university's central library services. Students reported being satisfied with their access to and experience of personal tutors and other academic support. The inspectors agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.3

114. The programme specification provided for the apprenticeship provided information regarding the initial occupational health screening and DBS checks, and the annual self-declaration students are required to complete at enrollment. Inspectors had some concerns that this information was limited to mostly health and DBS, and did not address wider potential suitability issues.

115. At inspection, a copy of the initial suitability declaration was provided, however it was confirmed that this was not the same as the ongoing suitability declaration, and a copy of the latter was requested but not provided. The inspectors could therefore not assess whether the declaration covered an appropriate breadth of potential suitability issues. The inspectors also noted that the lack of clear DBS policy or procedure raised at standard 1.4 posed a parallel concern for this standard. The inspectors therefore agreed that this standard was not met.

Standard 5.4

116. The operational specification included information outlining the reasonable adjustment and occupational health procedures for the programme. The placement documentation provided within the evidence demonstrated that students' individual needs are recognised and their progress is assessed and documented through the mid-point review and final report, as well as tripartite reviews. It was confirmed that the university also has an institution-wide EDI policy as well as a specific reasonable adjustments policy.

117. At inspection, students confirmed that the support provided was appropriate and that their needs had been met. Support services staff confirmed the arrangements and structures in place for supporting apprentices in particular, and demonstrated an awareness of the differences in how this is managed. For example, it was noted that while apprentices do require a diagnosis in order to access reasonable adjustments due to funding rules, the university provides support for students to access diagnosis, including funding where necessary. It was confirmed that there is a suite of accessibility software installed on all university IT systems. The inspectors agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.5

118. The programme handbook provides some information for students regarding the curriculum, placements, assessments, and transition to registered social worker. However, there are gaps in this information due to details of the programme not having been planned yet. There is also no information provided related to requirements for continuing professional development, which is required per the wording of this standard. The inspectors therefore determined that this standard was not met.

Standard 5.6

119. Information regarding attendance requirements for the programme were clearly laid out in the programme handbook. At inspection, students confirmed that communication from the university regarding attendance requirements has been clear. The inspectors considered whether the concerns outlined at standard 4.7, around how the attendance monitoring system would translate to a distance learning programme, had any implications for this standard. However, they noted that this standard concerns communication with students around attendance, which is evidenced in the programme handbook, rather than attendance monitoring itself. The inspectors determined that this standard was met.

Standard 5.7

120. As discussed under standard 4.10, the operational specification for the programme indicated that feedback is provided from various sources during placement, and through academic assessments outside of placement learning. The approval document outlined where in the programme formative and summative assessments would take place, as well as the process for marking assignments, and the programme handbook outlined the assessment policy. The tripartite reviews required for degree apprenticeships provide an additional opportunity for students to receive feedback. The mapping document stated that the university requires feedback to be provided within 20 working days wherever possible, and must include annotated feedback.

121. At inspection, as well as in SSLC minutes, students reported finding that feedback does not consistently assist them in how to improve their work, and requested more concrete and developmental feedback. Taken alongside the assessment scheduling issue outlined at standard 4.9, the inspectors considered this to indicate that feedback may not reliably support students in their progression. The inspectors therefore agreed that this standard was not met.

Standard 5.8

122. The approvals document provided includes a link to the university's appeals policy, and the programme handbook also provides information on and links to academic regulations. At inspection, students confirmed that they are aware of where to find the appeals policy should they need to. The inspectors determined that this standard was met.

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

Standard 6.1

123. As the proposed course is BA (Hons) Social Work Degree Apprenticeship, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Proposed outcome

The inspection team recommend that the course not be approved. During the inspection, there were a high proportion of standards that could not be evidenced and the course team highlighted that the apprenticeship programme was under development, and therefore documentation requested during inspection was not available.

Although the course team could verbalise their aspirations for the structure and delivery of the programme, it was apparent that collaboration with stakeholders had not yet been finalised. The culmination of the infancy of the programme, the lack of documentary evidence to support a significant number of standards, and the need for further collaboration with stakeholders influenced the decision that the programme is not suitable for approval.

Annex 1: Education and training standards summary

Standard	Met	Not Met
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 information about the professional standards, research interests and placement opportunities.	☐	☒
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.	☒	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met
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.	☐	☒
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.	☒	☐
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 employers, people with lived experience of social work, and students.	☒	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met
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.	☒	☐
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, 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.	☒	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met
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.	☐	☒
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.	☒	☐
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.	☒	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met
5.3 Ensure that there is a thorough and effective process for ensuring the ongoing suitability of students' conduct, character and health.	☐	☒
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.	☒	☐
6.1 The threshold entry route to the register will normally be a bachelor's degree with honours in social work.	☒	☐

Regulator decision

Not approved.