

Inspection Report

Course provider: Royal Holloway University
London

Course approval: Step Up to Social Work (PGDip)

Inspection dates: 18th – 21st April 2023

Report date:	01.06.2023
Inspector recommendation:	Approved with conditions
Regulator decision:	Approved with conditions
Date of Regulator decision:	19.07.2023
Date conditions met and approved:	

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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. Royal Holloway University London, Step Up to Social Work (PGDip) was inspected as part of the Social Work England reapproval cycle; whereby all course providers with qualifying social work courses will be inspected against the new Education and Training Standards 2021. During the inspection, consideration was given to proposed course changes which would affect future cohorts.

Inspection ID	RHULR1
Course provider	Royal Holloway University London
Validating body (if different)	
Course inspected	Step Up to Social Work (PGDip)
Mode of study	Full time
Maximum student cohort	42
Date of inspection	18 th – 21st April 2023
Inspection team	Catherine Denny - Education Quality Assurance Officer Bradley Allan - Lay Inspector Jane Reeves - Registrant Inspector
Inspector recommendation	Approved with conditions
Approval outcome	Approved with conditions

Language

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

Inspection

17. An onsite inspection took place from 18th – 21st April in Senate House where Royal Holloway University London 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.

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 two student representatives who were approaching the end of their study on the course. Discussions included selection and admissions, placements, curriculum, assessment and experience of student support services.

Meetings with course staff

21. Over the course of the inspection, the inspection team met with university staff members from the course team, senior leadership team, those involved in placement provision, admissions staff and student support services. Discussions included curriculum, governance and leadership, placements, admissions processes and support available to students on the course.

Meeting with people with lived experience of social work

22. The inspection team met with people with lived experience of social work who were involved in the Insight group at the university as well as representatives from ATD Fourth World who also support with course delivery. Discussions included their involvement in different aspects of the course such as admissions and selection, course delivery, assessment and contributions towards course design. The inspection team also explored the support available from the university to enable members to undertake their role.

Meetings with external stakeholders

23. The inspection team met with representatives from placement partners including Bromley, Croydon, Bexley, Richmond, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Wandsworth and Surrey local authorities. Discussions included the processes in place around placement allocation, university processes, communication, practice education and support.

Findings

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

Standard one: Admissions

Standard 1.1

25. The course provider outlined how all applicants were screened in line with Department for Education (DfE) requirements, which included minimum academic qualifications combined with relevant professional or voluntary work experience with vulnerable children and their families or vulnerable adults. Details of entry requirements were outlined on the course providers website, which provided further links to DfE requirements, and through promotional documentation which had been developed in liaison with the regional partnership.

26. Where applicants were shortlisted, the university outlined how holistic assessment processes tested their potential to develop the required knowledge and skills to be a social worker alongside other relevant competencies. Through a meeting with the course lead and representative from the lead agency within the partnership, the inspection team heard how assessment centres were co-planned to include group activities, role play scenarios, written tasks and formal interviews. The inspection team were satisfied that the standard was met.

Standard 1.2

27. Applicants to the course were required to provide details of prior relevant experience of a least six months full time work within a relevant field in their application form. As prior relevant experience formed part of the basic entry requirements for the course, this was considered when determining if a candidate would be shortlisted. For those who were successful in reaching an assessment centre, there would be further exploration of their experience through planned tasks and interview questions. Student representatives were able to reflect upon their experience of demonstrating their relevant professional experience within the interview process and commented that exploration was robust. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.3

28. Due to the nature of the course being delivered in partnership, the involvement of colleagues within practice was engrained in the admissions process for the course. The lead agency representative explained how all local authorities within the partnership were contacted following shortlisting to nominate staff who could support with assessment

centres. At the same time, a request would be made for representation from the Insight group within the university. Representatives from Insight explained how they had been involved in these processes multiple times through sitting on interview panels, asking questions and contributing to scoring. All those who had participated reflected that the university and partner agencies showed recognition for the expertise that people with lived experience of social work brought to interview panels. Representatives also explained that they had the confidence to disagree with decisions made by professionals at interview and felt comfortable making their views known.

29. The inspection team were able to review details of the assessment centre briefing documentation which was used to update all those involved in interviews on expectations and behaviours. Whilst the briefing provided a comprehensive overview, the inspection team heard from Insight members that it had been some time since they had received any formal training to support their role within the admissions process. Representatives explained that this had been raised with the course team and more input was expected, but this had not been rolled out at the time of the inspection. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met with a recommendation in relation to training and oversight, for all stakeholders involved in selection and admissions. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [recommendations](#) section of this report.

Standard 1.4

30. Candidates were made aware of the required suitability processes prior to application sessions through Step Up information briefings. During the application stage, candidates were required to complete their first self-declaration form which explored criminal convictions, conduct issues and health related circumstances. The self-declaration form also outlined the requirement for enhanced DBS checks to be completed. When a declaration was made, the lead agency discussed this in liaison with the academic programme lead from the university. Following this and where appropriate, there would be a 1:1 discussion with the candidate to further explore the declaration before a joint decision was made between the university and lead agency. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.5

31. The course provider explained how the admissions process was in line with DfE requirements and wider university Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies. All candidates were asked in advance of their interview if there were any reasonable adjustments that might be required which were considered on an individual basis. One example of a reasonable adjustment provided included offering additional time on written tests.

32. To prepare staff involved in assessment centres to undertake their role, the university and lead agency had offered a recruitment and assessment centre briefing for assessors

which included information in relation to fairness, inclusivity and equality and unconscious bias. Whilst the content of the training was helpful, as outlined in standard 1.3, there were some issues raised in relation to the consistency of training offered to all assessors involved in assessment centres. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met but decided that the recommendation applied to standard 1.3 was also applicable against this standard. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [recommendations](#) section of this report.

Standard 1.6

33. All prospective candidates to the course were able to access information via the DfE website, promotional material and also the university website. The university and lead agency also provided details about the course, partnership, programme structure and curriculum content through their information question and answer sessions. During meetings with representatives from the university, the inspection team heard that all candidates had the opportunity to speak with partnership leads within local authorities on the day of the interview and following this, and ask any questions throughout the process. Onboarding sessions for successful applicants provided further detail about bursaries, DBS checks and placement logistics. During a meeting with student representatives, the inspection team heard that there were ample opportunities to ask additional questions that might not have been covered throughout the admissions process. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard two: Learning environment

Standard 2.1

34. The inspection team were able to review the practice learning handbook for the course which detailed the expectation that all students complete two placements during the programme. The first placement was completed in the first half of the programme and lasted for 70 days with the second taking place in the second half and lasting for 100 days. Both placements were based within local authority statutory children's settings, but contrast was ensured by having a placement within a different team in children's services.

35. In addition to placement days, students also engaged with a minimum of 30 skills days which explored a range of topics and social work practice issues. These were supported by a range of professionals from different areas of social work practice. The course team explained that the mandatory aspect of skills days was communicated to students, and this was supported by consistent messaging within communications. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.2

36. Agreements in place with all providers ensured that students were able to develop a wide range of skills and knowledge to meet Social Work England Professional Standards. The Placement Learning Agreement (PLA) meeting also provided a forum for any learning opportunities to be mapped against both the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and Professional Standards. Midway reviews and placement portfolios provided further evidence of the learning opportunities students were provided with which were reviewed by academic staff.

37. Practice Educator (PE) representatives confirmed that they had a strong understanding of what students required at different times within the placement journey and understood what was being taught on the course at different points. Student representatives shared their experiences of practice learning opportunities, confirming that they were appropriate to their stage of learning and development. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.3

38. The course provider outlined plans to support transition into placement which included a placement tutor who was responsible for monitoring the placement and agreements with employer partners that state a planned induction will be provided for all students. In addition to planned induction, all students spent 10 days in their host agency prior to the start of placement as part of their readiness for direct practice module which allowed opportunities for shadowing within teams and wider familiarisation. Upon placement starting, all students were expected to be provided with access to central systems and internal training. Arrangements for supervision were also discussed within the induction period and formalised through the PLA meeting at which tutor, PE and student were in attendance.

39. During conversations with student representatives, the inspection team heard that whilst students appeared to receive their induction timetables, these did not always go to plan. Some students also reported knowing details of their PE in advance of placement starting whilst others did not have this confirmed until they had started. Despite some differences in experience, student representatives confirmed that they were able to refer to the placement handbook to support their understanding of roles and responsibilities and had further opportunities for reflection via the PLA meeting and supervision sessions. The inspection team agreed, therefore, that the standard was met.

Standard 2.4

40. Academic and placement tutors held responsibility for maintaining regular contact with students whilst on placement to discuss their responsibilities and ensure they remained appropriate. More formal discussions in relation to workload and responsibilities were also explored via the PLA and midway placement meetings. Student representatives provided

examples of how expectations on placement and pace of work increased in line with their development and met their expectations. Where issues did arise, there was appropriate support offered from a university perspective to address them.

41. The programme lead for the course also outlined how they remained in regular contact with students throughout their study to discuss workload related issues. Where these were significant or persistent topics of concern, these could be taken to curriculum development meetings, steering boards or staff-student committee meetings for further discussion. Student representatives gave examples of issues that had been raised via these forums that were resolved satisfactorily. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.5

42. All students on the course were required to complete a readiness for direct practice module prior to commencing placement. During this module, students engaged with a range of activities which tested key skills such as professionalism, communication and reflection. The readiness for direct practice portfolio provided evidence of student engagement with the module and also included an updated self-declaration in relation to health and personal circumstances, which was signed off by university staff.

43. Due to the accelerated nature of the course, the inspection team were eager to understand if the readiness for practice module was long enough to prepare students for direct practice. The inspection team heard that the calibre of candidates to the course and their previous experience supported their preparedness for practice. In addition, successful candidates were required to complete pre-course work which also supported their knowledge and skills. Student representatives explained that they felt prepared for placement and did not feel that more input was required than that which was already available. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 2.6

44. The course provider explained the processes in place to check the knowledge, skills, currency and registration of PEs. Where an offsite PE was allocated to work with a student, the university completed a check of their registration with Social Work England. The university also provided Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS) training at level 1 and 2 which was available to all PEs who supported students on the course. Where a placement provider selected a PE to work with a student, the university requested that they completed necessary checks to assure the university they are appropriate. The PLA documentation also required PEs to share their Social Work England registration number.

45. The inspection team queried how the university ensured that employer partners were completing satisfactory checks. The course team explained that this information was contained within Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) documentation which was signed by all agencies upon commencing their partnership with the university. The inspection team

heard that work was taking place to review the MoC's in place with providers and make any updates as necessary. Further to this, the placement lead explained that there was work taking place to review the information held about PEs as there had been significant changes to staffing within agencies. The spreadsheet used had the capacity to capture different information in relation to training and time since a PE last supported a student, but it required amendments to do so. The spreadsheet was developed by a member of staff who had since left the university and as a result, there was not current institutional memory of some of the information held, which required updating and amending.,

46. In relation to the currency of PEs, whilst the university offered PEPS training and PE workshops as an incentive for PEs and their employers, these were not compulsory and as a result, attendance was not routinely monitored. The inspection team agreed that there were some processes in place to monitor registration and background of PEs, however there was not currently appropriate oversight of the currency and training undertaken. 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 can be found in the [conditions](#) section of this report.

Standard 2.7

47. The practice learning handbook submitted by the university outlined policies students could refer to which ensured that students were able to learn within an appropriate and safe environment. Guidance around the concerns process, including whistleblowing procedures, were also outlined within the placement learning handbook. During a meeting with student representatives, the inspection team were assured that students were clear about the policies and procedures in relation to concerns and as a result, agreed that the standard was met.

Standard three: Course governance, management and quality

Standard 3.1

48. The course provider submitted an overview of the governance arrangements for the course which included details of partnership agreements between the university, lead agency and partner local authorities. The details of arrangements were evidenced through the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) and service specification which outlined how programme delivery and governance would be managed on an ongoing basis through steering board meetings and a bimonthly curriculum development group. Representatives from all partner agencies were required to attend meetings to share and review updates on programme delivery.

49. In addition to the governance arrangements in place between the course team and employer partners, the inspection team heard about where the course sat within internal university governance, management and quality assurance processes. The senior leadership team assured the inspection team that the quality assurance systems that the course was subject to were robust. There was a clear commitment to ensuring that the course remained part of the wider social work offer within the university which was supported by all staff developing their knowledge and understanding of the course and the unique aspects of its delivery. The inspection team also heard about how clear roles were being developed within the course team to support effective delivery and oversight. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 3.2

50. The inspection team reviewed the service specification in place between the university and Surrey and South London Partnership for the most recent cohort of students. The service specification included details of the expectations of placement providers to offer placements which meet the professional and education and training standards. Detail was also included regarding PE supervision and support as well as processes to follow in the event of placement breakdown.

51. Whilst the inspection team were satisfied with the content of documentation in place and were assured by the course team that agreements for future cohorts would be based upon this, they identified that there was reference to the previous regulator within agreements. Further to this, the inspection team acknowledged that there would need to be evidence of any agreements for future cohorts shared as this would not be with the same partnership. 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 can be found in the [conditions](#) section of this report.

Standard 3.3

52. The course provider outlined the plans in place to ensure that placement providers have the necessary arrangements to support student health, wellbeing and risk. Host agencies were all provided with the practice learning handbook which details the guidance for the different stages of placement and expectations for support. All host agencies were expected to ensure they had the necessary policies and procedures in place to support students, the arrangements for which were formalised during the PLA meeting.

53. The course team explained that there was a joint responsibility for audit of placement and checks would be completed by both university staff and host agency representatives. The course team acknowledged that they were currently working on their records in

relation to the audits of placements and that whilst the Quality Assurance of Placement Learning (QAPL) process was helpful, they were developing a process which outlined the frequency at which individual placements would be audited. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.4

54. Due to the nature of arrangements for the course, lead and host agencies were seen as key partners in the delivery of the programme. The inspection team heard that employer partners played a key role in admissions through assessment centres, attended steering board and curriculum development group meetings, supported placement allocation and were directly involved the provision of practice education. Further to this, representatives from the different agencies within the partnership attended Practice Assessment Panels (PAP's), supported teaching on the course via skills days and were involved in decisions relating to suitability. Through meetings with employer partners, the inspection team were satisfied that all could speak well to the different aspects of their involvement.

55. As the arrangements for any future cohorts of the course had not been agreed at the time of the inspection, the inspection team concluded that it would be necessary to apply a condition to the reapproval to ensure that there would be the same level of employer participation for any future iterations. Full details of the condition can be found in the [conditions](#) section of this report.

Standard 3.5

55. As outlined in standard 3.4, the inspection team were assured that employers were involved in the course in a range of ways. The course team explained that the Insight group had been involved in the review of the readiness for practice module and discussions in relation to wider curriculum review. The inspection team also met with representatives from Insight who highlighted their involvement in admissions and recruitment activities, with some representatives having experience of admissions cycles on different cohorts for the course. Further to this, detail was provided about the implementation of wellbeing sessions that had been developed and delivered by Insight members in response to perceived need and members participation in assessment observations and feedback to students.

57. Student representatives explained that they had the opportunity to meet regularly with the course lead to share their cohorts' views on the course. Staff and student committee meetings also provided a forum in which students could provide input into course development and evaluate the impact of support. In addition to this, the course team confirmed that students were invited to complete an evaluation form at the end of every module which would be considered by teaching staff. The inspection team were assured that this standard was met.

Standard 3.6

58. The course provider explained that numbers admitted to the course were aligned with local capacity as agreed by all organisations within the partnership. This was considered in line with the capacity of the course team within the university which was balanced alongside the provision of other postgraduate social work education. The course capacity was considered by the academic lead and head of department, and also included within the wider school post graduate taught strategy to ensure that all planning was aligned. As the approval was based upon the potential for another cohort of the course to run in the future, the inspection team agreed that they would need to apply a condition that requires confirmation of the numbers for any further cohorts following planning meetings with key stakeholders. This would need to be aligned with teaching and support capacity within the university. Full details of the condition can be found in the [conditions](#) section of this report.

Standard 3.7

59. The university provided a copy of the CV for the course lead which confirmed that they were appropriately qualified and on the register. The inspection team were assured that this standard was met.

Standard 3.8

60. The inspection team reviewed documentary evidence which highlighted the level of qualification of course team staff and the range of research activity that they were involved in. Staff explained the ways in which their research was able to contribute towards module development and articulated their research goals for the future. The interim executive dean, a professor of social work and highly research active, also remained closely involved with the course team, further supporting the development of the curriculum. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.9

61. Documentary evidence provided to support the standard included school annual review documentation and minutes from assessment boards, where conversations occurred in relation to comparisons between student attainment data of different cohorts. The inspection team noted that annual review documentation demonstrated a review of student outcomes and the efforts of the course team to reduce the attainment gap.

62. During the inspection visit, the course provider detailed their mentoring initiative which had been formed to address attainment gaps for Black and global majority students. Further to this, the inspection team heard that there had been work in relation to the decolonisation of the curriculum which included postgraduate students. Whilst narrative was available about some of the initiatives that the course team had developed, the inspection team were not able to see evidence of the data analysis that had taken place

which led to these being identified as a priority. They were also unable to see data analysis and evaluation which evidenced the impact of such interventions.

63. Following discussion and reflection against the requirements of the standard, the inspection team agreed that whilst the standard was met, a recommendation in relation to the ways in which data was presented and evaluated was appropriate. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [recommendations](#) section of this report.

Standard 3.10

64. The inspection team heard how all academics within the course team had access to a conference allowance, which had recently been increased, to support the development of their professional knowledge. In addition to attending conferences, academic staff regularly presented at events such as the Joint Social Work Education Conference (JSWEC) and the European Association of Schools of Social Work Conference.

65. The social work course team were able to provide examples of research that they had been involved in and the impact of this on the curriculum. This included research which had been completed alongside social work students. The inspection team heard that staff were involved in research clusters and were able to engage in joint bids alongside colleagues from other disciplines. Cross teaching also supported the development of professional knowledge with examples being provided of teaching with staff delivering law courses and vice versa.

66. As a result of the university partnership with WLTP, some staff had the opportunity to spend time in practice shadowing colleagues. Staff involved in course delivery had completed PhD's in practice-based issues and the course lead maintained their links with practice by offering advice to local authorities on practice-based issues. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard four: Curriculum assessment

Standard 4.1

67. Documentary evidence included all module syllabi for the course which were mapped against the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), Social Work England Professional Standards and the Knowledge and Skills statements from both children and families and adult social work. The course provider also demonstrated how assessments on the course required students to demonstrate they had the appropriate knowledge and skills required to be a social worker.

68. The inspection team were satisfied with the mapping provided and were also able to review proposals for the new version of the course, which they agreed was appropriately planned in response to key learning of developments within the profession. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met with a recommendation that new modules be

mapped to the PCFs in the same way as the current version. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [recommendations](#) section of this report.

Standard 4.2

69. As outlined in standard 3.5, the course provider demonstrated a range of ways in which practitioners and people with lived experience of social work were involved in the course and curriculum development. During a meeting with representatives from the Insight group, the inspection team heard how group members had provided feedback on the ways in which sessions should be run and how this had been taken on by the course team. Representatives from ATD Fourth World provided a specific example on their contributions towards teaching about poverty and the impact of this on social work practice. Another representative explained how they offer a presentation to students followed by a question-and-answer session about specific topics.

70. Practitioners from local authority organisations explained how they had been involved in careers events hosted by the university and offered advice and support to students around their understanding of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE). Details of the skills workshops on the course also demonstrated how practitioners had an active role in supporting course delivery. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.3

71. Upon reviewing the curriculum, the inspection team observed that there was clear evidence of the design of the course being in accordance with EDI principles, for example through modules in relation to human rights and skills day planning. The inclusion of Insight members, who represent a diverse range of experiences within social work, also provided evidence of the course teams commitment to embedding EDI throughout the course. Further to this, the inspection team acknowledged that the proposed changes to the course recognised EDI related topics that needed greater emphasis within curriculum.

72. During a meeting with student representatives, the inspection team heard that student support services had visited the university to offer support to the cohort and suggested points in the course when it might be helpful. Representatives also outlined that the course lead and personal tutors would offer reminders about support available to them. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.4

73. As evidenced within standard 3.10, the research activity of social work academics on the course was provided during the inspection. The commitment to using research to inform teaching was also explored with staff and examples of direct links were provided. The inspection team also acknowledged how the proposed changes to the course, which were considered as part of the reapproval process, demonstrated that there was a desire for it to

remain current and informed by relevant developments within the profession. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.5

74. The inspection team were able to see evidence of explicitly planned opportunities for students to be taught about how to link theory into practice through the design and content of modules. The use of assessment activities such as case studies also tested student capabilities in this area. Student representatives were also able to identify when they had been taught about the application of theory both through the curriculum and whilst on placement and provided examples of planned opportunities such as weekly reflections with PEs around different models of practice and theory. Student representatives acknowledged that their PE was key in supporting this standard and worked to ensure that they not only supported this skill but encouraged students to have ownership of their own development.

75. PE representatives provided an insight into their commitment to supporting students to make links between their learning on the course and practice situations, as well as developing evidence-based practice. Examples provided included the use of theory reflection cards within supervision, facilitating group supervision to look at specific cases and focusing supervision from a particular theoretical stance. PEs confirmed that they felt supported by the course team via access to details of what was being taught at the university throughout the academic year. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.6

76. The course provider outlined the ways in which students were able to learn with and from other professions through taught content and via placement experiences. Taught module content included opportunities for students to experience teaching from professionals within clinical psychology roles, safeguarding, youth justice and law and criminology. Some modules and skills day sessions also incorporated assessment activities which required students to apply their understanding of working with other professions to formative and summative assessment tasks. During a meeting with the Insight group, the inspection team also heard how people with lived experience of social work contributed to a session on understanding poverty and working with service users accessing benefits.

77. Student representatives explained that through their induction to placement, there was a focus upon planning opportunities for working with other professionals and attending multi-disciplinary meetings. Students confirmed that their PEs and on-site supervisors also incorporated shadowing opportunities into their placement experience. The university maintained its oversight of multi-disciplinary learning opportunities through their oversight of placement portfolios, which required students to demonstrate their experiences of

working with other professions on placement. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.7

78. The evidence submitted by the course provider included details of academic learning and required contact hours, alongside an overview of the necessary placement days needed to complete the course. The inspection team were satisfied that the information provided demonstrated that the standard was met.

Standard 4.8

79. The course provider outlined the ways in which assessments on the course were compliant with wider institutional policies. Further detail was provided about the ways in which assessments were moderated to ensure they remained robust, fair and reliable. The inspection team reviewed details of assessment throughout the course modules and were satisfied that the range of assessments were varied and innovative, meeting the needs of a range of student abilities and strengths in their design. All assessments were mapped to the relevant frameworks to support student understanding of their acquisition of key knowledge and skills. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.9

80. All assessments on the course were mapped to the PCF domains and Social Work England Professional Standards. Detail was provided by the course team about their incremental approach to assessment which allowed students to receive appropriate feedback to support their development, whilst tasks increased in complexity. Through conversations with course team staff, the inspection team were assured that there was a shared understanding of the assessment design and calendar, which ensured that they were prepared to deal with periods where additional support for students might be needed in relation to assessment tasks. This was further supported by the library team who increased their presence and availability to support at key points within the academic year.

81. Student representatives spoke about the relevance of specific assessments, specifically the readiness for practice module which was viewed as being a positive introduction to placement. Student representatives also articulated how later modules had supported their progression on placement. Feedback was provided on how one module had felt very similar in terms of content and assessment methods; however the inspection team were reassured by the fact that this feedback had been included in the proposed changes to the course being considered as part of the inspection. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 4.10

82. Documentary evidence outlined the variety of ways in which students could expect to receive feedback on the course, this included formal feedback from assignments and presentations, informal feedback during lectures, skills days and on placement, direct tutor feedback on a termly basis and placement related feedback at the mid-point review. Student representatives explained that feedback was usually timely and received within 28 days. The course team also provided workshops and drop-in sessions which correlated with submission dates to support submissions. Whilst students felt there were some positive examples of feedback provided, there had been some issues in relation to consistency and comments which didn't support student progression, which resulted in discussions with lecturers on the course.

83. During a meeting with members of the course team, the inspection team heard that there had been an exploration of the concerns raised by some students in relation to feedback with module leads. The course team acknowledged that there were different marking styles being used at times and that work could be done to try and gain more consistency. One action that the course team took in response to these concerns was to develop marking workshops amongst the course team. The inspection team were satisfied that, on balance, the standard was met.

Standard 4.11

84. Copies of CVs provided by the university assured the inspection team that staff involved in marking assessments had a wide range of expertise. The details of the external examiner also provided assurance that they were appropriately qualified and on the register. Whilst the inspection team was satisfied with the evidence provided at the point of inspection, there was recognition that details of the external examiner for future cohorts would be required prior to the course commencing. 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 can be found in the [conditions](#) section of this report.

Standard 4.12

85. Documentary evidence outlined the different mechanisms in place to monitor student progression on the course and the range of professionals involved in supporting decisions. It was evident that student progression was monitored via personal tutorials, marks on assessments such as essays and presentations, through mid-point review on placement and via submission of the final placement portfolio. A range of people contributed towards decision making in relation to progression. These included academic staff, PEs (who completed direct observations during placement), people with lived experience of social work and other professionals who the student may have worked with. Wider contributions

were also invited via the Practice Assessment Panel (PAP), which included social work managers as chairs. Where concerns were raised in relation to progression, the inspection team were assured that there are appropriate referral mechanisms in place to address barriers or highlight practice concerns. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.13

86. The course provider detailed their approach to supporting students on the course to understand research and how to engage with this as part of their learning. All students on the course had experience of modules with research focused elements and those who completed the full MSc course worked closely with a research supervisor as part of their dissertation.

87. The inspection team observed how members of the course team supported the standard through their own research activities which had fed into course development. Staff modelled their own engagement with evidence informed approaches by developing a staff reading group in which they reviewed current research and discussed as a team. PE representatives were also able to reflect on how they used academic articles to support student understanding of key topics during placement. Staff involved in course delivery also showed recognition of the use of people with lived experience of social work as a key evidence base to support student development. The inspection team were assured that this standard was met.

Standard five: Supporting students

Standard 5.1

88. Documentary evidence provided as part of the inspection process outlined the range of ways in which students could access support from university services. Support available included wellbeing services who offered confidential pastoral and counselling support to students throughout the academic year, as well as referrals to occupational health support where necessary. The Disability and Neuro-Diversity Service (DNS) also outlined the ways in which students with additional needs could access enhanced support to allow them to progress effectively on the course. Representatives from services explained that all support was available to students both face to face and remotely. Members of services also offered support via engagement with the course team during induction activity and planned delivery of sessions throughout the course.

89. Whilst there was a range of support services outlined within evidence, the inspection team heard via student representatives that support was not always easily accessible. This was linked to the fact that the majority of the university student support teams were based at the Egham Campus whilst delivery of the course was in central London. Students highlighted that there was often a cost implication with travel to an alternative campus and,

whilst online appointments were offered, these were often challenging to access due to limited availability.

90. The inspection team explored the issues identified with representatives from student support services and the course team. There was an acknowledgement that the geographical location of services could pose a challenge, however discussions were already underway to discuss how some services might be brought to a central London campus. Student support services also explained that, where online appointments were booked up, there was still potential to offer appointments at an alternative time. They reflected, however, that this may not always be clear to students and considered ways in which this message might be more clearly articulated. The inspection team agreed that, on the balance of evidence available, the standard was met with a recommendation in relation to developing ease of access to students who might be studying on a different campus. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [recommendations](#) section of this report.

Standard 5.2

91. Student representatives reported varying experiences from their cohort in relation to support from academic and placement tutors although, where this was positive, it supported their progress on the course. Representatives from student support services also provided an overview of the services available to support the academic development of students which was predominantly provided via the library and the Centre for the Development of Academic Skills (CeDAS).

92. Library services outlined the ways in which they had adapted their provision to support students working remotely or on placement. This included 24/7 online services, daily chat support and 1:1 online support. Additional resources in relation to academic skills, language and writing styles were also developed and made available online via Moodle and 1:1 sessions were also provided by the library team and CeDAS. Support services were able to demonstrate an awareness of when their support was most likely to be required for students on the course and adapted their availability accordingly.

93. As with standard 5.1, there were some concerns about being able to access all academic support services consistently. As with the previous standard, the inspection team agreed that the standard was met but that the recommendation applied was also appropriate for this standard. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [recommendations](#) section of this report.

Standard 5.3

94. The course provider outlined how successful applicants to the course were required to complete a self-declaration form as part of the requirements for suitability for social work. Where declarations in relation to suitability were made, discussions were held between members of the course team and candidates to ensure fitness for social work study and

practice, and to offer appropriate support. Following completion of an initial declaration, students were required to update their self-declaration prior to commencing their second placement. As with initial declarations, the course provider outlined the processes to ensure appropriate support was offered, particularly in relation to additional health needs. The inspection team also heard about the processes in place to consider issues in relation to fitness to practice and the range of professionals who were involved in contributing to such decisions. The inspection team were satisfied that the standard was met.

Standard 5.4

95. The inspection team heard that students are encouraged to make any declarations about health conditions or additional needs during the application stage of the course so that appropriate support can be explored from the earliest point. This was revisited during the induction period due to the time elapsed between offer and when the course commenced.

96. Where students declared a specific learning need or disability, contact was initiated by student support services to highlight the provision available to them to support their study. Student support services explained that, whilst engagement with services was encouraged it was not mandatory. As a result, they had built in further check points throughout the course to try and ensure high levels of engagement. This included further contact at induction and via routine systems checks where needs were declared but students had not come forward.

97. Where students did engage with support services, they were offered the provision of a support plan which could be shared with relevant members of the course team. Representatives from student support services also highlighted that they could support placement planning on the course by attending 3-way meetings with placement providers and academics. In situations where needs were identified during study, the same level of support could be accessed, including referrals for assessments where required. Where this had happened, the inspection team heard that students were offered assessments within a timely manner, usually approximately four weeks from referral. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 5.5

98. During induction to the course, students received focused sessions which highlighted key aspects of the course handbooks including timetable, assessments, placement provision and details about their transition to registered social worker. The course team added that, at the start of each module, students are provided with an overview of content and assessments. Student representatives confirmed that they felt equipped to understand key elements of the course and agreed that online materials and course handbooks were routinely used to source information.

99. In addition to course literature, the course team explained that students receive input from the academic team on post-qualifying CPD and also receive a presentation from the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) during the later part of the course. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 5.6

100. Information in relation to attendance expectations were included within the course handbook as well as being written into students' bursary agreements. The course lead also highlighted that attendance expectations were a key feature of the partnership agreement in place with host agencies. To monitor attendance and participation, details of student attendance and engagement was shared between members of the partnership and actions taken to address any missed sessions, either for taught content or placement. Student representatives confirmed they understood attendance requirements for the course. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.7

101. As outlined within standard 4.10, the course team heard that feedback to students was timely overall and complied with the university expectations of 28 days. Whilst there had been some concerns about the consistency of feedback provided and the effect this had on supporting progression, the inspection team were satisfied that actions had been taken to address this by the course team and that it did not reflect the overall experience of students on the course. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.8

102. Documentary evidence submitted by the course provider demonstrated that there was an appropriate academic appeals process in place which was robust. During conversations with the course team, there was assurance that the process had not highlighted any specific trends in relation to appeals, providing assurance about the quality of assessments and marking.

103. Whilst the inspection team were assured that the academic appeals process existed, during conversations with a selection of student representatives, there was a lack of clarity about the process and its purpose. Whilst the inspection team agreed that the standard was met, they decided that a recommendation in relation to refreshing student understanding of academic appeals was appropriate. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [recommendations](#) section of this report.

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

Standard 6.1

104. As the qualifying course is a postgraduate diploma (Step Up to Social Work), 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	Standard 2.6	The education provider will provide evidence that demonstrates that there are processes in place to ensure that all practice educators who work with students on the course have been subject to appropriate checks in relation to registration and currency.	19 th July 2024	Paragraph 46
2	Standard 3.2	The education provider will provide evidence that a new service specification has been developed for future cohorts of the course, including details of all agencies involved in the partnership. During the development of a new service specification, the education provider will ensure that all references to the previous regulator have been amended to accurately reflect Social Work England as the regulatory body.	19 th July 2024	Paragraph 51
3	Standard 3.4	The education provider will provide evidence that there is the same level of employer engagement and participation with all aspects of the course.	19 th July 2024	Paragraph 55
4	Standard 3.6	The education provider will provide evidence of confirmed numbers for any	19 th July 2024	Paragraph 58

		future cohort of the course and demonstrate how they have been determined with agencies in the partnership, and how they fit with university course team capacity.		
5	Standard 4.11	The education provider will provide evidence of the confirmed arrangements for the external examiner for any future cohort for the course.	19 th July 2024	Paragraph 84

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	Standards 1.3 and 1.5	The inspection team are recommending that the university consider developing a consistent approach to training, and monitoring training undertaken, for all people involved in interview processes.	Paragraph 29 Paragraph 32
2	Standard 3.9	The inspection team are recommending that the university consider documenting clearer data sets and evaluation in relation to their analysis of EDI data with action planning to support.	Paragraph 63
3.	Standard 4.1	The inspection team are recommending that the university consider mapping the new version of the course against the PCF's.	Paragraph 68
4.	Standards 5.1 and 5.2	The inspection team are recommending that the university consider formalising and sharing their plans for student support services to meet the needs of students across campuses.	Paragraph 90 Paragraph 93
5.	Standard 5.8	The inspectors are recommending that the university consider providing a session for students which outlines the academic appeals process.	Paragraph 103

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			
3			

Findings

Regulator decision