

Inspection Report

Course provider: The Frontline Organisation

Course approval: Pg Dip Social Work

Inspection dates: 16th – 18th January 2024

Report date:	20.02.2024
Inspector recommendation:	Approved with conditions
Regulator decision:	Approved with conditions
Date of Regulator decision:	18.03.2024
Date conditions met and approved:	29.04.2024

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Introduction

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

What we do

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

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

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

Summary of Inspection

15. The Frontline Organisation, Pg Dip Social Work 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. As part of the reapproval, the inspection team also considered proposed changes to the course which are due to be implemented for the next cohort on the programme in September 2024.

Inspection ID	TFOR1
Course provider	The Frontline Organisation
Validating body (if different)	Lancaster University
Course inspected	Pg Dip Social Work
Mode of study	Full time
Maximum student cohort	500
Date of inspection	16 th – 18 th January 2024
Inspection team	Catherine Denny (Education Quality Assurance Officer) Joanne Benn (Lay Inspector) Anne Mackay (Registrant Inspector) Lara Timms (Observing)

Language

16. In this document we describe The Frontline Organisation as ‘the education provider’ and Lancaster University as ‘the university’ and we describe the Social Work Pg Dip as ‘the course’.

Inspection

17. An onsite inspection took place from 16th – 18th January 2024 at the Coram Campus in London where The Frontline Organisation is based. During the inspection, the inspection team also considered proposed changes to the course which are due to be implemented from September 2024. As part of this process the inspection team planned to meet with key stakeholders including students (who will be referred to as participants throughout the report), course staff, the validating body, 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.

19. The education provider currently delivers a two year course whereby year 1 (Pg Dip Social Work) enables successful participants to be eligible to apply to join the Social Work England register, and year 2 leads to the completion of a masters in social work. The proposal for the new version of the course is a 3 year programme whereby year 1 (Pg Dip Social Work) enables successful participants to be eligible to apply to join the Social Work England register, year 2 supports participants through their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) and year 3 leads to the completion of a Masters in social work. As Social Work England is the regulator for qualifying social work education and training, the inspection team only considered year 1 of both versions of the course during the inspection process.

Conflict of interest

20. No parties disclosed a conflict of interest.

Meetings with students/participants

21. The inspection team met with 11 participants on the programme across years 1 and 2 of the course. Discussions included experience of admission to the programme, practice-based learning, curriculum and assessment, experience of support services and understanding of key processes.

Meetings with course staff

22. Over the course of the inspection, the inspection team met with staff members from The Frontline Organisation and Lancaster University. This included staff involved in selection and admissions, programme and delivery, curriculum and assessment, practice tutors, partnerships and placements, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), quality and standards and student support services.

Meeting with people with lived experience of social work

23. The inspection team met with people with lived experience of social work who have been involved in assessment centres as care experienced assessors, and experts by experience who have been involved in course delivery and review. Discussions included roles within assessment centres, training and support, and involvement in course design, delivery and review.

Meetings with external stakeholders

24. The inspection team met with representatives from placement partners including Hertfordshire County Council, London Borough of Hounslow, London Borough of Havering, Southwark Council, Staffordshire County Council, Wirral Council and Newcastle City Council.

Findings

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

Standard one: Admissions

Standard 1.1

26. The course provider website provided comprehensive information about the application process which included details about registering an interest in the programme, application form, online tests, assessment centres and pre-employment checks. Documentary evidence outlined how The Frontline competencies, which all candidates were assessed against, were closely aligned to Social Work England's professional standards, and tasks and assessments within the process offered assurance in relation to candidates' academic capabilities, command of English and ICT skills.

27. The inspection team were assured that the education provider had a process in place to ensure that consistent judgements were made at assessment centres, and that the process was managed effectively by a centralised recruitment team. Representatives from recruitment and admissions teams explained that there were quality assurance processes in place whereby implementation of scoring systems were reviewed by Frontline recruitment partners. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.2

28. Documentary evidence highlighted the ways in which the wider application process assessed candidates' motivation to work within the field of children and families social

work. This included drawing upon past experiences which would demonstrate suitability for the programme through activities such as the application form, conversations with care experienced young people and formal interviews. The recruitment and admissions policy also offered clarity about how prior experiential learning could not be accepted as contributing towards any of the eligibility criteria or be accredited against the academic aspects of the course.

29. During meetings with key stakeholders who supported participants on the course, the inspection team heard that the selection process produced candidates with relevant varied experiences which supported their development on the course. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.3

30. Documentary evidence received in advance of the inspection outlined how care experienced young people had been involved in the development of assessment materials and were directly involved in interviews at assessment centres. In relation to the involvement of employer partners, the inspection team heard that there was a mixed approach to this as not all local authorities chose to accept the offer to be involved, however the offer was extended to all partners to sit on interview panels within assessment centres.

31. During meetings held as part of the inspection, the inspection team heard that young people were consistently involved in assessment centres as care experienced assessors. Representatives spoke of accessing unconscious bias training to support them in their role, however there was mixed feedback provided in relation to the support received on the day of assessment centres. Some care experienced assessors felt uncertain about expectations on the day and found it challenging to work with multiple assessors. All representatives agreed, however, that they felt that their role within assessment centres and feedback offered made a difference to the decisions that were made in relation to candidates.

32. The inspection team heard that a sample of Consultant Social Workers (CSWs) had been involved in observations of role plays or as a member of interview panels for previous cohorts. Representatives from local authority partners explained that, whilst they had been invited to be involved in assessment centres, they had not always been in a position to accept this. Whilst there was not consistent employer representation at assessment centres, the inspection team heard that the education provider had invited employer partners to contribute to offering feedback in the admissions process which was well received and subsequently addressed.

33. Following a review of the evidence received, the inspection team agreed that the standard was met with a recommendation in relation to renewing and strengthening their

approach to stakeholder engagement within admissions processes. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [recommendations](#) section of this report.

Standard 1.4

34. Documentary evidence submitted in support of this standard provided detail of a robust and effective system for assessing the suitability of applicants to a qualifying social work course. The process included health checks, disclosures of any conduct issues or previous involvement with social care as the responsible adult, previous incomplete social work training and satisfactory Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. Where disclosures were made by applicants, the education provider had mechanisms in place to engage with local authority partners around decision making in relation to offers on the course.

35. The inspection team heard about some minor changes to the suitability process for the September 2024 cohort which included the removal of a GP health form for all offer holders. Instead, this would be requested only where appropriate or where an occupational health referral may not be appropriate. The inspection team agreed that the proposed changes did not impact upon the ability of the education provider to meet the standard and, as a result, agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.5

36. The inspection team reviewed relevant policies and the education provider's recruitment diversity strategy, which evidenced how the principles of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) underpinned recruitment processes. There was evidence of appropriate training in place for all staff involved in the recruitment of participants to the course, and the necessary processes for applicants to seek reasonable adjustments where required. Participants who the inspection team met with confirmed in their experience that policies and procedures were implemented effectively.

37. In addition to the information outlined above, the inspection team heard about the ways in which the admissions process was continually adapted to widen the attraction pool for the course. The course provider also provided details of the ways in which diversity data was captured at application stage and monitored to ensure diverse representation within and across cohorts. The inspection team were satisfied that data was analysed effectively and used to inform action planning where appropriate. As a result, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.6

38. The course provider submitted links to their website which provided a wealth of information in relation to the role of a social worker, structure and content of the course, Social Work England registration requirements, funding and the research elements of the curriculum. Applicants were able to review information in relation to potential placement

locations and requirements for driving within certain local authorities prior to application, which was further enhanced within conditional offer letters for successful candidates. During a meeting with participant representatives, the inspection team also heard how Frontline staff were accessible throughout the admissions process for 1:1 conversations about specific issues where required. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard two: Learning environment

Standard 2.1

39. The inspection team reviewed copies of collaboration agreements between the course provider and local authorities, module and programme forms and a CSW handbook in support of this standard. Within the documentation provided, it was clear that participants received 200 days of practice-based learning across contrasting settings. The inspection team requested further detail of skills day planning for the current and future version of the course to review the content and structure of these sessions.

39. As part of the inspection visit, the course team provided an overview of skills day planning, which included details of where the sessions would be delivered within the programme and an overview of the skills being developed. The inspection team agreed that the content of the skills days was comprehensive and relevant to current social work practice. The course provider also outlined how the design of the course allowed participants to learn about skills and then immediately apply them to practice with the support of their CSW and Practice Tutor (PT). The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.2

40. The course provider submitted a comprehensive overview which described how the practice based elements of the course provided students with opportunities to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the professional standards. The narrative provided was underpinned by documentary evidence including programme handbooks, module forms and the programme specification. The inspection team agreed that there was appropriate coverage of relevant social work theory and research throughout the year to support students to apply theory to practice. All aspects of practice learning were supported by the CSW and PT, and inspectors noted that the mechanism of sharing what was taught on the course with CSWs allowed them to support participants to understand the models and theories they were exposed to within the practice environment. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.3

41. Documentary evidence received in support of this standard outlined clear expectations in relation to induction, which included shadowing days within local authority placements, an induction week, and the development of a Personal Development Plan (PDP) led by the CSW and PT. Within the PDP, guidance was offered regarding roles and responsibilities, supervision arrangements, workload and relevant policies and processes which participants would need to be informed of. Participant representatives confirmed that they had received thorough inductions to their placements and felt that their CSW's were well trained and informed.

42. Supervision arrangements for both versions of the course were managed on a group basis within units or hubs. Participants were expected to bring cases to weekly sessions to be discussed alongside their peers and CSW's, and academic learning from the course was also interwoven into these sessions. Participants also received 1:1 input from their CSW and PT both on a needs basis and during formal reviews throughout their placement.

43. The inspection team reviewed evidence which demonstrated that course and practice based staff had a good understanding of participant workloads, in relation to both volume and complexity, which was achieved via weekly reporting. Participants and employer partners also outlined how there was a flexible approach to caseload allocation which kept the child and family as a central consideration. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.4

44. The expectations in relation to participants' learning experiences and responsibilities whilst on placement were outlined within the local authority collaboration agreement and CSW handbook. Throughout the inspection process, the inspection team also heard how there was flexibility within the allocation of cases based on the participant's learning needs to ensure that they were appropriate. The initial PDP meeting also ensured that there was consideration of participants' prior experience and training to support with caseload allocation for the duration of the placement. The inspection team were assured that this standard was met.

Standard 2.5

45. During the inspection process, the inspection team heard about planned changes to the Readiness for Direct Practice assessment (RfDP) which was usually held during the summer institute prior to placements commencing and included assessed role play scenarios. The course provider outlined the plan to remove the role play aspect of the assessment due to the reduced number of face to face days within the new readiness for practice stage of learning (previously called the summer institute) and the desire to use face to face sessions to build relationships and establish connections across the cohort.

46. The newly developed RfDP assessment focused on participants developing a portfolio of evidence which was measured against the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and included shadowing of practice alongside blended interactive learning. Inspectors were assured that the RfDP stage offered a good assessment of skills and preparedness for practice and the changes were welcomed by both CSW's and participants. The course provider outlined processes in place where students did not successfully pass this aspect of the course, which included resit opportunities. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.6

47. The inspection team reviewed the job pack for the CSW role and the CSW handbook which provided details about the role and relevant requirements. The job description for the role included details of the requirement to be a qualified and registered social worker, and all CSWs were required to submit an academic CV to the organisation in line with the requirements of the validating body. When appointed to their role, all CSWs undertook the CSW practice education and leadership programme which supported all to be able to perform their role to the highest standards. The course provider also offered additional sessions throughout the year and maintained communication about taught content and delivery on the course.

48. Whilst the inspection team agreed that the expectations of the CSW were clear and that currency was maintained through direct input from the course provider, there was a lack of clarity about how the Social Work England registration of CSWs was formally checked by the course provider. The inspection team recognised that CSWs were appointed from local authority backgrounds and as such likely to have registration checked by their employer, however there was not a regular mechanism for the course provider to check that registration was current and maintain oversight. Consideration was given as to whether the finding identified would mean that the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it was deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard, and we are confident that once this standard is met, a further inspection of the course would not be required. Full details of the condition, its monitoring and approval can be found in the [conditions](#) section of this report.

Standard 2.7

49. The inspection team reviewed the organisational whistleblowing policy which was readily available to participants via the course provider's website. The course provider also outlined how students were able to report concerns via CSWs and PTs, which was made clear in course handbooks. Local authority processes were reviewed during induction as standard, and participant representatives confirmed that they were clear of the expectations and processes in relation to raising concerns about unsafe behaviours or

organisational wrongdoings whilst on the course. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard three: Course governance, management and quality

Standard 3.1

50. The course provider submitted copies of their functional organisational charts and terms of reference for the Academic Governance Group (AGG) and Programme Management Group (PMG). The inspection team observed a transparent governance structure which included details of line management mechanisms and lines of accountability. Clarity was provided about the governance arrangements in place between the course provider and validating body to ensure effective quality management of the course. During meetings held as part of the inspection, the inspection team observed good lines of communication between the course provider and university validating body. All representatives demonstrated a good awareness of cross organisational roles, and the governing groups and annual reporting mechanisms ensured that the quality of the course was maintained. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.2

51. The inspection team reviewed the local authority handbook and collaboration agreement for the course, which provided details of the agreements in place to provide education and training that meets the professional standards. During meetings held as part of the inspection, course provider and local authority representatives provided details about how the specialist roles in place across the programme supported placements to be successful.

52. The inspection team observed that the course provider worked hard to develop effective working relationships with local authority partners, and that mechanisms such as the unit and hub model were embedded within practice settings to ensure effective practice opportunities. Regular engagement from PTs and Principal PTs ensured that placements were supported, and where issues occurred these were picked up quickly. Representatives from local authority partners shared that the course provider was responsive to the needs of local authorities and intervened rapidly to support students at risk of placement breakdown. The inspection team heard that there were effective processes in place to manage placement breakdowns but these were rare due to the level of monitoring and support embedded into programme structures. The inspection team were assured that this standard as met.

Standard 3.3

53. The inspection team reviewed details of a praxis assessment undertaken by the course provider when developing a new local authority partnership. Praxis assessments were used

by the course provider during assessment days with potential partnerships to identify whether the partnership would be a good fit. Conversations with local authority staff explored the support mechanisms in place and the learning opportunities available for potential participants.

54. In addition to wider organisational support, participants received support from CSWs, PTs and dedicated course staff to ensure that individual needs were met. During induction to placements, CSWs were required to provide details about the relevant policies and procedures in place within host organisations, with consistency ensured via reference to agreed checklists. Regular contact between PTs and the Placement and Partnerships Manager (PPM) offered further assurance that placement providers were equipped to offer necessary support for participants. As a result, the inspection team were assured that the standard was met.

Standard 3.4

55. The course provider offered details about the involvement of local authority representatives in the recruitment of CSWs to the course, via their role as panel members in recruitment days. Further to this, the inspection team observed how CSWs provided ongoing input into course development via their relationships with students and PTs. During meetings with the course provider and local authority representatives, the inspection team heard details about how the placement and partnerships team held regular forums and collaboration events in which key messages about the course were communicated to partners. As a result, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.5

56. The inspection team heard that local authority partners were kept informed of course related matters and developments through bi-annual strategic partnership meetings, in person regional forums and weekly strategic partnership meetings. Feedback on specific issues was obtained via surveys and invitations to focus groups where projects and developments were discussed. Whilst the inspection observed strong partnerships and lines of communication, there was not consistent evidence of local authority partners being involved in decision making about course changes, but rather informed when decisions had already been made.

57. During a meeting with Experts by Experience (EBE) representatives, the inspection team heard about the development of a steering group which had been implemented to review the approach to working with people with lived experience of social work and their involvement in the course. Members of the steering group spoke positively about the approach being adopted by the course provider and were excited about future prospects. In addition to the steering group, the inspection team heard about the young people's advisory board which was led by a member of Frontline staff. Further to this, EBE were

involved at a course level by contributing towards skills days and the assessment of direct practice at Practice Assessment Panels (PAP).

58. The views of participants were sought via quarterly meetings with participant representatives, direct feedback following recall days and through individual conversations with PTs. A biannual survey of participants also allowed the course provider to seek wider course level feedback and a 'you said, we did' report was produced following this to outline actions as a result. In addition to this, the inspection team heard about the development of groups which focused upon issues specific to different participant groups, such as the community space for racialised minority participants, which provided a space in which participants could discuss and seek to address issues of potential and actual discrimination.

59. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met with a recommendation in relation to considering the mechanisms through which the course provider could collaborate with employers in relation to course changes and decision making. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [recommendations](#) section of this report.

Standard 3.6

60. The course provider outlined how the proposed cohort numbers for the course were agreed in partnership with the Department for Education (DfE). In order to ensure the availability of placements for each cohort of the course, the dedicated Partnerships and Placements Team develop the course providers placement strategy. The team worked closely with existing delivery partners, as well as exploring partnerships with new local authorities, to ensure the availability of placements. As a national programme, the Partnerships and Placements Team adopted a regional approach with individual targets for each region being agreed. The course provider was able to provide an overview of targets to accommodate potential drop off rates and ensure contingency arrangements were in place. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.7

61. The inspection team reviewed the Curriculum Vitae (CV) and Social Work England registration details of the named lead social worker in place for the course. The inspection team agreed that they were appropriately qualified, experienced and held current registration. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.8

62. The course provider outlined the different team structures in place to ensure effective delivery of the course. Arrangements were in place between the course provider and validating body to review the experience and qualifications of all practice based and curriculum staff. The inspection team reviewed a sample of CVs for PT's involved in course delivery, which included staff from a range of experience and practice backgrounds. Where

staff were new to involvement with the programme, there was the expectation that they would complete a Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) in Higher Education within 12 months of commencing their role. The completion of all courses was monitored by centralised HR systems. Where PTs worked in a temporary capacity, there was the expectation that they would have a masters degree. All PTs were supported by a pedagogy team within the organisation to ensure effective practice. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.9

63. Through their review of documentary evidence and via discussions held as part of the inspection visit, the inspection team observed a range of mechanisms by which the course provider evaluated information about student performance, progression and outcomes. The course provider demonstrated how their annual monitoring processes linked with quality assurance mechanisms in place at their validating body, and were able to evidence how these processes informed action planning and review. Representatives from the validating body commented that they were impressed by the level of attention to detail demonstrated by the course provider within reporting.

64. The inspection team also observed the ways in which the course provider collected, analysed and evaluated participant data in relation to EDI and used this to inform targeted planning in relation to specific themes. The course provider was able to demonstrate the impact of work in this area through the diversification of cohorts and a growth in participants from underrepresented backgrounds. The inspection team were assured that this standard was met.

Standard 3.10

65. As referenced within standard 3.8, course staff had access to a range of continuing professional development opportunities both internally and via completion of recognised qualifications. The course provider was able to outline how developmental and training needs were a consideration within the supervisory arrangements for all staff on the course. Members of the senior leadership structure outlined how staff received quarterly performance review meetings where their knowledge and understanding of professional practice was discussed, and there was also an annual appraisal system. In addition to the opportunities available to staff within the organisation and via partner providers, the inspection team also heard how there were developmental opportunities via their relationship with Lancaster University which offered reciprocal benefits for social work course teams within each organisation. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard four: Curriculum assessment

Standard 4.1

66. Documentary evidence provided in advance of the inspection visit included professional standards mapping, the programme specification, module forms and the year 1 handbook. The documentation provided clearly demonstrated the links between the course content and relevant frameworks, including the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education benchmark statements and Social Work England professional standards. The content of the curriculum demonstrated an emphasis on developing critical social workers with an emphasis on children, young people and families' social work. However, the inspection team were assured that adequate consideration had been given to other areas of social work via contrasting learning experiences and course content. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.2

67. The inspection team noted that CSW's played a significant role within course processes, delivery and participant support. This was evident from the outset of the programme with some CSW's playing an active role in the assessment centres, and further demonstrated by the way in which the CSW role was interwoven into course delivery, assessment and management. Whilst wider local authority partners did not have the same range of involvement as CSWs, they did engage with processes such as Practice Quality Committees (PQCs) and consulting on aspects of course content, such as summer institute input. The inspection team heard that the course provider notified employer partners about proposed changes to the course, however this was often to communicate once changes had been made rather than seeking input from partners about proposed changes.

68. As outlined within standard 3.5, the course provider had a range of workstreams which included their EBE network. The inspection team agreed that the addition of the EBE steering group was supportive of the requirements of the standard and representatives spoke positively about impact they'd had to date. The inspection team heard that the steering group was having an input into developing course content, training for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) and reshaping the role of the EBEs involved in the course. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.3

69. Documentary evidence provided in support of this standard demonstrated that the course was clearly designed in accordance with EDI principles and human rights and legislative frameworks. There was further evidence of the inclusion of anti-racist, anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice throughout all taught modules. The participant charter implemented by the course provider also demonstrated the expectations of staff and participants in relation to their behaviours and approach whilst engaged in the programme.

70. Further to the aims which underpinned the programme, the inspection team reviewed arrangements for supporting participants with additional academic and wellbeing needs. This included the use of inclusion passports, which were available to all participants and could be used to highlight where additional considerations or support might be required, and more bespoke disability support plans where appropriate. Participant representatives confirmed that they understood how to access support whilst on the course. As a result, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.4

71. The course provider outlined the arrangements for updating the curriculum on an annual basis to ensure that it remained relevant to social work practice. The curriculum team held responsibility for overseeing the process and worked closely with specialists in the field to ensure the currency of content. Documentary evidence also outlined how the course provider had funded professional doctorates for staff, on the understanding that their research would further enhance the programme. The inspection team also acknowledged that the changes being considered as part of the reapproval inspection offered further support of the standard as they responded to current issues within social work practice. As a result, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.5

72. The inspection team acknowledged that the design of the course was based upon ensuring that participants were able to continually integrate theory into practice. The current unit model, which will be known as the practice hub model from September 2024, was based upon principles of systemic social work theory and practice and offered opportunities for participants to learn alongside their peers whilst being guided by a skilled CSW. The course provider submitted examples of research which demonstrated the effectiveness of the models, and participant representatives spoke positively about how it supported them to apply their skills and knowledge within the practice environment. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 4.6

73. The practice based nature of the programme ensured that all participants had opportunities to learn from professionals from a range of disciplines within the health, education and social care sector. Examples were provided of local authorities who maintained positive relationships with colleagues in the police force, which provided opportunities for participants to learn about the ways in which social care and the police could work together successfully. The course team also outlined how a magistrate had been invited to speak to participants about the role of social work within the courts, which had been well received. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.7

74. The inspection team recognised that the time-limited nature of the course placed greater emphasis on ensuring that the academic and theoretical aspects of the course were adequately covered. Documentary evidence, and evidence heard during the inspection visit, assured the inspection team that this was managed effectively through the hub and unit model and specialist role of the CSW.

75. As part of the proposed changes to the course, the inspection team noted that the new course model included a reduction in face to face teaching offered through the summer institute. The inspection team were eager to understand whether this reduction could result in less structured teaching time for participants. Upon discussing this with key stakeholders, the inspection team were assured that this change responded to the needs of cohorts and that there would not be a reduction in the quality of academic learning as a result. Further assurance was provided by representatives from the validating body, who confirmed that the quality of teaching and learning on the course was regularly reviewed to ensure that participants were able to develop their skills to meet the required levels of competence. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.8

76. The inspection team reviewed the course assessment strategy and module forms, which provided assurance that the assessment strategy and design ensured assessments were robust, fair, reliable and valid. All assessments were approved by the validating body and further support for the assessment strategy was observed through external examiner feedback.

77. The inspection team reviewed proposed changes to the assessment strategy for the course as part of the inspection. These changes aimed to refine the established strategy and respond to issues such as over assessment which had been raised by stakeholders. The assessments in place for the course were based within real life practice and supported with the practical application of skills. The course provider also highlighted how there had been efforts to develop additional formative assessment opportunities for participants to support their ongoing development. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.9

78. Documentary evidence outlined how the assessment strategy had been designed to reflect the increasing complexity of practice being undertaken by participants. A range of assessment tasks were utilised within the course which enabled participants to demonstrate achieving modular and programme level learning outcomes. The course provider also outlined how additional study skills sessions had been added to the course to address gaps in participants' academic skills set. As a result, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.10

79. The hub and unit based model within the course design provided ongoing opportunities for participants to receive feedback from their CSW and PT in a supportive environment. The course team also outlined how they had embedded a formative assessment or reflection opportunity into each module so that learning could be carried through into summative assessments. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.11

80. Documentary evidence submitted in advance of the inspection outlined how all assessments were carried out by PTs, CSWs or approved external markers. Where external markers were used, the course provider confirmed that their background was checked in conjunction with the validating body, and all were expected to provide an academic CV which detailed relevant academic or practice based backgrounds.

81. In reviewing this standard, the inspection team also reviewed CVs for external examiners appointed to the course. The inspection team noted that, whilst one of the external examiners had experience within social work academia, they were not a registered social worker. The course provider explained that they were in the process of appointing new external examiners to the course and, in doing so, would require that all were registered with Social Work England.

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

Standard 4.12

83. Documentary evidence submitted in support of this standard demonstrated that there were clear progression points on the course which were informed by relevant staff. Academic assessments were marked against the relevant marking matrix for level 7 study in place within the validating body, and practice based assessments considered both the relevant stage of the PCF and Social Work England professional standards. Practice portfolio assessments were further moderated through Practice Assessment Panels (PAP), and examination boards ratified academic assessments and supported decisions around progression. The inspection team agreed that the documentation provided to participants clearly articulated progression points, and this was understood by representatives with whom the inspection team met. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.13

84. Participants' ability to develop an evidence-based approach to practice was supported by the design of the participant hub and unit models. Weekly meetings, led by CSWs and supported by PTs, offered regular opportunities for participants to engage in case discussions in which they considered theoretical concepts and research. During a meeting with participant representatives, the inspection team heard that participants felt that the course allowed them to develop critical thinking skills and apply research to their practice, which built their confidence as a knowledgeable social work practitioner. The inspection team concluded that this standard was met.

Standard five: Supporting students

Standard 5.1

85. The course provider submitted a range of documentary evidence in advance of the inspection to outline where and how participants could access resources to support their health and wellbeing. The resources available were delivered directly through the organisation as well as through university student support services. The course provider outlined how regular meetings between the course provider and university disability team ensured that participants were accessing regular support and advice where needed, and any issues for individual participants could be addressed rapidly.

86. The inspection team heard that participants were able to access regular direct support from their PT and CSW who would lead on the implementation of any relevant individual plans required. Any active plans would be monitored by Heads of Delivery and reported to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to identify and themes or issues arising. As a result of the monitoring in place, the inspection team heard that the course provider had played a role in developing community groups for participants in relation to key issues.

87. In relation to the support available via university support services, the inspection team heard that participants had access to resources 24/7, 365 days a year. This included online self-help guidance, counselling and emotional wellbeing interventions, careers services and financial aid, advice and support. Participants were made aware of the support available through their online learning platform, programme handbooks, CSWs and PTs. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 5.2

88. Documentary evidence highlighted how the virtual learning environment used on the course offered academic guidance and support to participants, with relevant accessibility features built in. PTs also played an active role in offering academic support to participants and were supported by CSWs who had been assessed against the relevant competencies to support effective learning. Participants received dedicated tutorial support from the PTs to

support with assignments and assessment deadlines and, where additional intervention was required, this could be signposted by the PT.

89. As with pastoral support, participants were able to access academic support via university systems. This included subject librarians, subject specific guides, additional tutorial support and specific workshops. The inspection team also heard about the addition of a learning developer role which was part of the university learning development team. This role had been developed to specifically support Frontline participants, and was designed to support participants to reach their full potential, regardless of previous attainment. The role offered 1:1 and some group tutorials where participants received support in relation to writing skills, essay questions and new assessment techniques such as presentation skills. The inspection team were assured that this standard was met.

Standard 5.3

90. Following completion of the necessary suitability checks upon joining the programme, participants were subject to organisational Fitness to Practice (FtP) processes upon joining their local authority placement. Participants were made aware of the requirement to disclose any relevant changes in their suitability to the course provider during their period of study through the relevant signed declarations.

91. In addition to the FtP process in place, the course provider also has a Fitness to Study (FtS) and cause for concern process. Within the cause for concern process, there was a focus on offering support to participants through the use of Practice Support Plans (PSPs) which were overseen by the PT and CSW. The inspection team agreed that the processes in place were appropriate and communicated effectively to participants within handbooks and guidance. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 5.4

92. The inspection team were provided with documentation in advance of the inspection which outlined the support available to participants with additional needs or disabilities. This included information about central services available via the university, and collaboration agreements with local authorities which outlined details of the expectations in relation to ensuring any identified reasonable adjustments were made.

93. Formalised plans were in place where required for participants, which included details of needs and the adjustments. These were shared, with consent, with appropriate staff in both the placement and wider organisation. The inspection team heard that there was a staged approach to support plans, which included those available universally and more targeted plans where a formal diagnosis was present. Where changes to formal plans and support was required, this would be overseen by disability support advisors based within the university, and these staff would liaise with course and placement colleagues to ensure that adjustments were understood. Further to this, where new needs were identified for

participants during their study, there were appropriate referral processes in place to respond in a timely manner. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 5.5

94. The year 1 handbook provided to participants upon commencing the course was a comprehensive source of information in relation to the curriculum, practice placements, assessments and transition to registered social worker. This information was also available to participants via their virtual learning environment. As participants remain engaged in the Frontline programme following qualification and registration, they are well supported by the course provider to understand ongoing requirements in relation to Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.6

95. Documentary evidence provided in advance of the inspection visit detailed the expectation of participants in relation to completion of practice placement days and attendance at the summer institute and recall days. The inspection team were keen to further understand how attendance was practically monitored and what actions were in place should attendance fall below a specific level.

96. The course provider outlined the presence of systems used for participants to sign into when attending taught sessions in person or online. The same system had the capacity to send reminder emails to participants where their attendance fell below 80%, this was also flagged with PTs and there was an expectation that participants would discuss how to address any gaps to catch up on content with their PT. Principal PTs also had access to an attendance monitoring dashboard, which enabled them to intervene early should there be any signs of decline. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 5.7

97. Documentary evidence submitted in support of this standard included clear timeframes in which participants could expect to receive feedback on assessments. All participants involved in inspection meetings confirmed that they received written feedback on their assessments aside from an exam for which they received a grade. There were mechanisms in place for participants to discuss their feedback with PTs where necessary. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.8

98. Evidence of an academic appeal process was seen within the year 1 participant handbook which was reviewed as part of the inspection. The appeals process was congruent with the validating body university process. This was also understood by participants who the inspection team met with. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

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

Standard 6.1

99. As the qualifying course is a Postgraduate Diploma (Pg Dip), 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 is an agreed mechanism for checking, on an ongoing basis, that all CSWs are on the Social Work England register.	Within 3 months of the regulator decision.	Paragraph 48
2	Standard 4.11	The education provider will provide evidence that demonstrates that all external examiners for the course are on the Social Work England register.	Within 3 months of the regulator decision.	Paragraph 82

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	Standard 1.3	The inspectors are recommending that the course provider consider strengthening their approach to involving employers in admission processes by reviewing their role in assessment centres and matching processes. In addition, the inspection	Paragraph 33

		team are recommending that the course provider consider how they might support Care Experienced Assessors with additional needs to understand and navigate the assessment centre process via a system of ensuring individualised support is available to them.	
2	Standard 3.5	The inspectors are recommending that the course provider consider reviewing the ways in which they collaborate with employer partners to discuss proposed changes to the course.	Paragraph59

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	Standard 2.6	The education provider will provide evidence that demonstrates that there is an agreed mechanism for checking, on an ongoing basis, that all CSWs are on the Social Work England register.	Condition met.
2	Standard 4.11	The education provider will provide evidence that demonstrates that all external examiners for the course are on the Social Work England register.	Condition met.

Findings

100. In relation to the condition applied against standard 2.6, the course provider submitted evidence of email communication that had been sent to all active CSWs to request Social Work England registration numbers, where they weren't already recorded. The inspection team also reviewed the new application form which requested registration numbers from the outset for all new CSWs.

101. The course provider demonstrated that they had an ongoing process for checking the registration status of CSWs involved in course delivery through their process flowchart and annual checking mechanism, led by the Partnerships team. The inspection team agreed that the evidence provided outlined a clear process which offered assurance that the required information to meet the standard would be held and checked on a regular basis. The inspection team agreed that this condition was now met.

102. In relation to the condition applied against standard 4.11, the course provider submitted details of the two external examiners currently appointed to year 1 of the course.

The inspection team were able to check the registration status of both staff to ensure they were currently on the Social Work England register. In order to assure the inspection team that any newly appointed external examiners would also have up to date registration, the course team provided a link to the person specification for the role as set out in Lancaster University's manual of academic regulations and procedures. This was supported by a copy of the external examiner nomination form which required details of registration, and confirmation that this had been checked by the nominating department. The inspection team agreed that the narrative and supporting evidence demonstrated a clear process which was fit for purpose. As a result, the inspection team agreed that this condition was now met.

Regulator decision

Conditions met.