

Inspection Report

Course provider: University of Bolton

Course approval:

BA (Hons) social work

MA social work

Inspection dates: 30th April to 3rd May 2024

Report date:	12 th June 2024
Inspector recommendation:	Approved with conditions
Regulator decision:	Approved with conditions
Date of Regulator decision:	4 th September 2024
Date conditions met and approved:	27 th January 2025

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Introduction

1. Social Work England completes inspections as part of our statutory requirement to approve and monitor courses. Inspections form part of our process to make sure that courses meet our [education and training standards](#) and ensure that students successfully completing these courses can meet our [professional standards](#).
2. During the approval process, we appoint partner inspectors. One inspector is a social worker registered with us and the other is not a registered social worker (a 'lay' inspector). These inspectors, along with an officer from the education quality assurance team, undertake activity to review information and carry out an inspection. This activity could include observing and asking questions about teaching, placement provision, facilities and learning resources; asking questions based on the evidence submitted; and meeting with staff, training placement providers, people with lived experience and students. The inspectors then make recommendations to us about whether a course should be approved.
3. The process we undertake is described in our legislation; the Social Worker Regulations 2018¹, and the Social Work England [\(Education and Training\) Rules 2019](#).
4. You can find further guidance on our course change, 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 University of Bolton was inspected as part of the Social Work England reapproval cycle; whereby all course providers with qualifying social work courses will be inspected against the new Education and Training Standards 2021.

Inspection ID	UBOR1
Course provider	University of Bolton
Validating body (if different)	
Course inspected	BA (Hons) social work MA social work
Mode of study	Full time
Maximum student cohort	40 students per cohort for each course
Date of inspection	30 th April to 3 rd May 2024
Inspection team	Laura Gordon - Education Quality Assurance Officer David Amos (Lay Inspector) Stephen Stericker (Registrant Inspector)

Language

16. In this document we describe the University of Bolton as 'the education provider' or 'the university' and we describe the BA (Hons) social work and MA social work courses as 'the courses'. Where there is any distinction between the evidence for each course these will be identified, and the relevant course referenced as either the BA course or the MA course.

Inspection

17. An onsite inspection took place from 30 April 2024 to 3 May 2024 at the Queens Building in Farnworth where the University of Bolton 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.

19. During the same week, a separate inspection team also inspected the BA (Hons) social work degree apprenticeship course. Some meetings across the week were held jointly. Details of this inspection are covered in a separate report.

Conflict of interest

20. No parties disclosed a conflict of interest.

Meetings with students

21. The inspection team met with five first year MA social work students and four students from the BA social work course from various stages in their study and included student representatives. Discussions included student support, learning experiences on their placements, feedback they received on their progress and their curriculum.

Meetings with course staff

22. Over the course of the inspection, the inspection team met with university staff members from the course team, admissions staff, senior leaders, support services, and members of the practice learning team.

Meeting with people with lived experience of social work

23. The inspection team met with one person with lived experience of social work who had been involved in the courses. Discussions included their and the wider group's involvement with interviewing at admissions, designing questions for interviews, teaching and assessment.

Meetings with external stakeholders

24. The inspection team met with representatives from placement partners including Bolton local authority and the private, voluntary and independent sector. The inspection team also met with a small group of practice educators.

Findings

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

Standard one: Admissions

Standard 1.1

26. Documentary evidence received prior to the inspection detailed the interview questions, scoring and admissions policy for the courses. The application process includes a statement with the application, group exercises and an interview. For the MA course there is also currently a written assessment.

27. During the inspection, the inspection team met with members of the admissions team and course team who advised that interview questions had been reviewed and that now they had a bank of questions available to draw on for each cohort.

28. It was noted that prior to the inspection, that Social Work England had received a request to approve the removal of the written assessment from both the BA and MA course admissions process. During the inspection, the inspection team asked for more information about how the university will assess that applicants have a good command of English. The course team confirmed that they would consider sentence structure and grammar when reviewing the personal statement and will also consider applicants' qualifications.

29. The admissions team confirmed that they receive high numbers of international applications and that they require a minimum score of 7 in the international English language testing system (IELTS).

30. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for both courses.

31. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team noted that whilst the course team confirmed that they will consider applicants command of English in the personal statement, they did not have any formal grading or process for assessing this.

32. The inspection team is therefore making a recommendation in relation to standard 1.1, that the university review their approach to the assessment of all applicants' command of English to ensure that this is comprehensively assessed as part of the application process. [Full details of the recommendation can be found in the proposed outcomes section of this report.](#)

Standard 1.2

33. Prior to the inspection, the university confirmed that applicants' prior relevant experiences are considered as part of the interview process.

34. During the inspection, the admission team advised that for both courses they look at applicants' personal statements when considering previous experience. They confirmed that there is no minimum amount of experience required, but that they will look at whether it is wide and varied and consider different types of experiences.

35. The admissions team advised that applicants are also asked questions about their previous experience at interview and from the group work activity they will assess the leadership and group work skills of applicants.

36. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 1.3

37. The documentary evidence indicated that both people with lived experience and employers are involved in the interview of applicants.

38. During the inspection, the admissions team and course team confirmed that a person with lived experience is always involved in the interview panel and that where available an employer will also be on the panel.

39. The inspection team sought further information from the course team around the level of involvement of employers in the admissions process. The course team confirmed that approximately 10% of interviews involve employer partners due to difficulties with the availability of practitioners.

40. The course team also advised that both employer partners and people with lived experience had been involved in their review of the interview questions to create a bank of questions to be used in future interviews. However, the course team confirmed that there was no plan for any ongoing review of the questions.

41. The inspection team agreed that this appeared to be an isolated event and that they had not seen any evidence of a robust process for ensuring the continued involvement of employer partners in the admissions process.

42. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is recommending that a condition is set against standard 1.3, 3.4 and 3.5 in relation to the approval of both courses. Consideration was given as to whether the finding identified would mean that the courses would not be suitable for approval. However, it is deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the courses would be able to meet the relevant standard, and we are confident that once this standard is met, a further inspection of the courses would not be required.

[Full details of the condition, its monitoring and approval can be found in the proposed outcomes section of this report.](#)

43. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is making a recommendation in relation to standards 1.3, 3.5 and 4.2. The inspection team noted that the social work specific service user group relied upon three individuals and that there are plans for recruitment to the group. The inspection team recommend that the university look to strengthen and develop the social work focused service user group. [Full details of the recommendation can be found in the proposed outcomes section of this report.](#)

Standard 1.4

44. The university provided documentary evidence of their occupational health process and guidance, the disclosure and barring service (DBS) policy and their admissions policy which detailed guidance of applicants with criminal convictions. Applicants are required to complete a self-declaration and undergo occupational health screening.

45. During the inspection, the admissions team confirmed that DBS checks are completed prior to enrolment and the process for any issues that are raised through DBS or the self-declaration. An example was provided of an applicant with a health condition and the support provided.

46. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 1.5

47. Documentary evidence prior to the inspection included the university equality, inclusion and diversity (EDI) policy.

48. During the inspection, the admissions team confirmed that there is EDI training for staff involved in admissions and the person with lived experience that met with the inspection team confirmed that they had also received this training.

49. The admissions team confirmed that they can access EDI data in relation to admissions but that this is not currently reviewed nor used in consideration of widening participation. They confirmed that they treat all applications equally and that there is no consideration of contextual information.

50. The course team and admissions team provided examples of reasonable adjustments that can be put in place for applicants.

51. The inspection team agreed that there were EDI policies in place and that they could see some examples of implementation in relation to the course, but that they had not seen any evidence of any monitoring of the implementation of EDI principles within the admissions process.

52. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is recommending that a condition is set against standard 1.5 in relation to the approval of both courses. Consideration was given as to whether the finding identified would mean that the courses would not be suitable for approval. However, it is deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the courses would be able to meet the relevant standard, and we are confident that once this standard is met, a further inspection of the courses would not be required.

[Full details of the condition, its monitoring and approval can be found in the proposed outcomes section of this report.](#)

Standard 1.6

53. The university website provides information to applicants about the course, modules, admissions requirements, costs, staff research, the role of social worker and Social Work England, assessments and placements. Applicants can also access the course specification from the website.

54. It was noted by the inspection team that there is reference within the course specification available via a link on the university website to Social Work England but also to the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). The inspection team agreed that this issue would be considered further under standard 5.5.

55. During the inspection, the students that met with the inspection team confirmed that they felt that they were given enough information about the course at the application stage.

56. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard two: Learning environment

Standard 2.1

57. The placement handbook confirms that students are expected to undertake a 70 day and 100-day placement and complete 30 skills days that are related to the course content and linked to placements. It also provides clear information about making up missed days.

58. During the inspection, the inspection team confirmed that there is a review of the first placement form when matching students to their second placement to ensure a contrasting experience. They also confirmed how they ensure that students undertake statutory tasks.

59. The inspection team met with placement providers from both statutory and private independent voluntary (PVI) agencies and were shown around the university's social work centre which also offers placements for students.

60. The inspection team concluded that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 2.2

61. Documentary evidence in the form of the practice learning agreement indicated where and how learning opportunities are discussed and agreed with students. These are also reviewed at the midpoint review and the practice educators that met with the inspectors confirmed that they are discussed during supervision.

62. During the inspection, the inspection team met with students who confirmed that they were getting appropriate learning opportunities on placement and that it is made very clear to them how their learning relates to the Professional Capabilities framework (PCF) and Social Work England's professional standards.

63. The inspection team therefore agreed that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 2.3

64. The practice learning handbook and practice learning agreement (PLA), provided as documentary evidence, defined the processes and requirements in relation to induction, supervision, support and workload.

65. During the inspection, the students and practice educators that met with the inspection team confirmed that they had positive experiences of the above. The practice educators gave examples of adjustments put in place to support students, and students confirmed that they had clear support from the university with placement issues.

66. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 2.4

67. The Practice Learning Handbook outlines which placement duties are not to be undertaken by students and a list of the student's responsibilities and those of other parties during placement.

68. The students and practice educators that met with the inspection team confirmed that students receive an appropriate level of responsibility for their stage of education and training.

69. The inspection team concluded that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 2.5

70. The university provided a module specification for the readiness for direct practice module that requires students to pass the necessary assessments before they can proceed on to a placement.

71. During the inspection, the inspection team heard more about the role play assessment and the involvement of service users in the assessment and feedback. There are skills days that relate specifically to readiness for placement and employer partners contribute towards these.

72. The students that met with the inspection team confirmed that the readiness for practice role plays were beneficial and that the reflective journal completed as part of their portfolio assisted their preparation for practice.

73. The inspection team therefore agreed that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 2.6

74. Prior to the inspection, the university advised that the registration of the practice educators is specifically dealt with in the PLA where practice educators have to provide their registration number and details of their practice educator qualification.

75. The course team confirmed that there is a pool of practice educators within local authorities and that they also used offsite practice educators. The course team confirmed that the currency of practice educators is not checked.

76. The inspection team heard conflicting evidence about whether the Social Work England registration of practice educators is checked. The inspection team were initially advised that this was not checked, however at the end of the inspection were told that it is checked each year in December. Unfortunately, this information was provided to the inspection team second hand, and they were unable to speak to the person to enquire further about this prior to the end of the inspection.

77. The offsite practice educators that spoke to the inspection team advised that they were not aware of being asked to confirm their Social Work England registration number or provide evidence of any training that they had completed.

78. The inspection team agreed that they had not been provided with sufficient evidence to confirm that the university ensured that all practice educators were on the register and that they have relevant and current knowledge, skills and experience.

79. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is recommending that a condition is set against standard 2.6 in relation to the approval of both courses. Consideration was given as to whether the finding identified would mean that the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it is deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard, and we are confident

that once this standard is met, a further inspection of the course would not be required. [Full details of the condition, its monitoring and approval can be found in the proposed outcomes section of this report.](#)

Standard 2.7

80. The documentary evidence indicated that guidance was provided within the practice learning handbook and the student's guide to raising concerns, and the PLA provides a process of checking policies that the placement provider has in place.

81. The inspection team met with students who provided examples of being supported with raising concerns and that practice educators also confirmed examples of supporting students with concerns.

82. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard three: Course governance, management and quality

Standard 3.1

83. Documentary evidence received provided an overview of the university senate and course team structures. During the inspection, a further structure chart was provided with lines of accountability.

84. The inspection team spoke to members of the senior leadership team who provided information about resourcing, and different responsibilities were explained with clear lines of accountability and governance. Placement resourcing takes place through the Greater Manchester Social Work Academy (GMSWA) and private voluntary independent (PVI) agencies through individual contacts. External examiners also feed into programme plans and there are placement audit processes in place.

85. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 3.2

86. The university provided a copy of the placement audit form which is signed by both the university and employer partner and forms the agreement to provide placement opportunities.

87. During the inspection, the inspection team heard examples of placement breakdown and the lessons learnt from it. The employer partners that met with the inspection team confirmed their support for looking for alternative placements where needed.

88. The inspection team concluded that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 3.3

89. The PLA provided in the documentary evidence indicated how it is ensured that relevant policies are in place.

90. The students that met with the inspection team confirmed being asked to review these at the start of their placement.

91. The placement team confirmed that when looking at new placement providers they will go out and check that the relevant policies are sufficient and in place.

92. The employer partners that met with the inspection team confirmed the support available to students and gave examples of how they treat students as employees, add them to relevant team hubs and send them on appropriate training. The inspection team met with offsite practice educators who also confirmed good relations with onsite supervisors.

93. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 3.4

94. Documentary evidence of the GMSWA meetings minutes received prior to the inspection indicated that this steering group consider issues around the workforce, local authority placement capacity, practice educator capacity and training and CPD.

95. During the inspection, the inspection team met with a representative from Bolton council who confirmed that they have meetings with the university to discuss placements and in particular the Social Work Centre referrals. They have also provided feedback and had input in skills days and teaching.

96. The inspection team also met with a representative from the GMSWA who confirmed that they will have discussions around placements but not specifically discuss the courses due to commercial sensitivity. They advised that they only discuss general themes.

97. The inspection team also met with representatives from PVI agencies who confirmed that they were contacted by the university in relation to providing placements but did not have any other involvement with the courses.

98. The inspection team noted that minutes had been provided prior to the inspection for the industry advisor meetings, however the evidence within the documentation related only to discussions around placements.

99. The inspection team considered this standard alongside standards 1.3 and 3.5 and agreed that there was not strong evidence of employer involvement in a number of areas of the courses. In relation to this standard there was little evidence of employer involvement in the management and monitoring element of these courses.

100. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is recommending that a condition is set against standard 1.3, 3.4 and 3.5 in relation to the approval of this course.

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

Standard 3.5

102. Documentary evidence provided evidence of monitoring and evaluation of the courses through the programme plans which review the courses and are used to create an action plan. There are also module evaluations, placement audits and quality assurance in practice learning (QAPL) forms for placements.

103. During the inspection, the inspection team met with students who confirmed their involvement in the staff student liaison committee (SSLC). They also confirmed that they complete QAPL forms following placement and module evaluations. The students expressed that they felt that there were both informal and formal opportunities to provide feedback on the courses. They indicated that they felt listened to and gave examples of changes that had been implemented.

104. The inspection team also met with a person with lived experience who confirmed that they were invited to the SSLC meetings but that it was their preference to give feedback via email. They confirmed that they have access to Moodle, support and training from the university.

105. It was noted by the inspection team that there is a wider pool of people with lived experience attached to the school but that there are only 3 specific people to the social work courses. It was noted that students had referenced wanting to meet more service users.

106. The employer partners that met with the inspection team gave some examples of providing feedback that led to a change that was implemented by the university.

107. The inspection team agreed that whilst feedback into the course from employers did occur, this appeared to be ad hoc and that there was no formal process for their involvement or seeking their feedback.

108. As noted in the standard above, the inspection team considered this standard alongside standards 1.3 and 3.4 and agreed that there was not strong evidence of employer involvement in a number of areas of the courses. In relation to this standard there was little evidence of employer involvement in the monitoring, evaluation and improvements systems in place for the courses.

109. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is recommending that a condition is set against standard 1.3, 3.4 and 3.5 in relation to the approval of this course. Consideration was given as to whether the finding identified would mean that the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it is deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard, and we are confident that once this standard is met, a further inspection of the course would not be required. [Full details of the condition, its monitoring and approval can be found in the proposed outcomes section of this report.](#)

110. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is making a recommendation in relation to standards 1.3, 3.5 and 4.2. The inspection team noted that the social work specific service user group relied upon three individuals and that there are plans for recruitment to the group. The inspection team recommend that the university look to strengthen and develop the social work focused service user group. [Full details of the recommendation can be found in the proposed outcomes section of this report.](#)

Standard 3.6

111. The inspection team noted that whilst not in written form, there is a strategy in relation to the consideration of placements that is aligned to the GMSWA allocation and placement capacity and practice educator resources.

112. The courses are each capped at 40 students per cohort, although it was noted that the current course numbers are well below this.

113. The placement team confirmed that the university allocation of placements from the GMSWA is not currently fully used, and that the university's social work centre can provide further placement opportunities. The PVI agencies that met with the inspection team also indicated that they would be willing to take more students on placement.

114. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 3.7

115. Documentary evidence provided prior to the inspection confirmed the current social work lead who holds overall responsibility for the courses. The inspection team were satisfied that this individual is a registered social worker and appropriately qualified and experienced.

116. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 3.8

117. Documentary evidence provided prior to the inspection included CVs for members of the course team. It was noted that most of the team are registered social workers.

118. During the inspection, the inspection team met with members of the course team who confirmed that they have a number of members of staff who have recently joined from practice and that if staff are new to teaching, they have the opportunity to complete their postgraduate certificate in education.

119. There are specific roles for admissions, support, library services and placement leads and wider support from various leads across the school. There is also a ratio of one to twenty for personal tutors.

120. The inspection team agreed that this standard is met for both courses.

Standard 3.9

121. The university provided copies of their access and participation plan and programme plans. The documentary evidence indicated how progression is monitored, and data is captured, and examples were provided of using the data to implement changes to the course.

122. During the inspection, the course team confirmed that they were aware of EDI data in relation to cohorts but confirmed that they did not use this data as part of their evaluation of students.

123. The course team confirmed that they recognise that international students can struggle academically and provided examples of how teaching methods and materials would be adapted to meet the needs of individual cohorts.

124. The inspection team agreed that where issues were noted, actions were implemented but agreed that it was unclear how, at a course wide level, student EDI data is analysed and evaluated in relation to student performance, progression and outcomes.

125. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is recommending that a condition is set against standard 3.9 in relation to the approval of this course. Consideration was given as to whether the finding identified would mean that the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it is deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard, and we are confident that once this standard is met, a further inspection of the course would not be required. [Full details of the condition, its monitoring and approval can be found in the proposed outcomes section of this report.](#)

Standard 3.10

126. Documentary evidence confirmed there is a system for appraisal, time is built into staff workload, and opportunities for staff development and continuous professional development (CPD).

127. During the inspection, the course team confirmed they are supported and provided examples of conferences, CPD, and research opportunities that have been undertaken and confirmed that some staff continue to practice or have a link to direct practice through their supervision of the Social Work Centre.

128. The practice educators that met with the inspection team confirmed that they have training and CPD opportunities through the GMSWA.

129. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard four: Curriculum assessment

Standard 4.1

130. The university provided clear evidence of the courses being mapped to both the PCF and to Social Work England's professional standards.

131. The inspection team met with some of the students for both courses who confirmed that the professional standards are clearly identifiable in every element of their course and that they have learnt to relate everything they do to the professional standards.

132. The practice educators that met with the inspection team also confirmed that placement learning is closely linked to the professional standards.

133. As part of the inspection, the university advised of changes to three modules, and it was agreed that these changes would be considered as part of the inspection approval process.

134. The course team confirmed that, at the time of the inspection, internal validation processes were ongoing and after the inspection confirmation was received that final internal validation had been concluded. The periodic review and re-approval summary report was provided after the inspection which confirmed that the proposed changes had been agreed.

135. The inspection team received during the inspection the updated module outlines and further details about the changes which aim to streamline the assessments and learning outcomes and reduce duplication in response to feedback.

136. The inspection team concluded that the proposed changes would not impact on the standard being met.

137. The inspection team concluded that this standard was met for both courses with approval of the proposed changes.

Standard 4.2

138. The university documentary evidence confirmed that people with lived experience are involved in the readiness for practice module role play assessments and feedback.

139. During the inspection, the inspection team met with one of the people with lived experience involved in the course. They provided examples of involvement in skills days, teaching, developing teaching resources, and informal and formal feedback on elements of the curriculum.

140. The employer partners that met with the inspection team gave examples of changes to the curriculum as a result of their feedback and confirmed that practitioners come in and run sessions and are involved in skills days on the courses.

141. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

142. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is making a recommendation in relation to standards 1.3, 3.5 and 4.2. The inspection team noted that the specific social work service user group relied upon three individuals and that there are plans for recruitment to the group. The inspection team recommend that the university look to strengthen and develop the social work focused service user group. [Full details of the recommendation can be found in the proposed outcomes section of this report.](#)

Standard 4.3

143. The programme guides provide students with information into a range of policies and support services such as policies for supporting students with physical and mental health conditions and disability. The university also confirmed that EDI training was mandatory for all staff and the curriculum for both courses include content on legislative frameworks.

144. During the inspection, the course team provided examples of additional support provided for international students who may start the course later or require additional sessions.

145. The course team also provided examples of how they have implemented reasonable adjustments by considering individual cohorts and making adaptations such as using different colour of paper, font styles, and consider questioning styles.

146. The inspection team also heard how disability support plans are used to highlight individuals within cohorts, and how personal tutors will develop a plan for the student that would then feed into how the module is structured and delivered.

147. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 4.4

148. The documentary evidence provided details of the module guide approval process and how practitioners bring currency through teaching on the courses. Students also confirmed that they were aware of staff links to practice and research publications.

149. The course team confirmed that through feedback from GMSWA they develop a better understanding of some of the local issues and best practice.

150. The course team also confirmed that every year they check what has worked well, look at changes in legislation and check reading lists. The annual review also considers wider national issues and informs the programme plan. An example was given of the introduction of journal reflections for students to help students with practical skills such as learning how to reflect.

151. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 4.5

152. The documentary evidence provided in the practice learning handbook and module specifications indicated that all elements of the course link theory and practice.

153. The inspection team met with practice educators who confirmed that they ensure that placement learning is linked to students' academic learning. The students that met with the inspection team were also clear about how their learning of theory linked to their practice.

154. The inspection team concluded that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 4.6

155. Documentary evidence confirmed that there are integrated learning workshops with students from other disciplines and an annual skills day on interprofessional practice.

156. The inspection team met with students who confirmed that all modules include an element of multi-disciplinary working in their learning outcomes.

157. During the inspection, the inspection team heard from employer partners that during placements students are given opportunities for shadowing in other organisations. The practice educators also confirmed that through the university Social Work Centre there are opportunities for students to work with other professionals.

158. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 4.7

159. The university provided evidence of a clear breakdown within the module's specifications of scheduled and independent study hours.

160. During the inspection, the course team also confirmed that where needed they will be flexible to student needs and offer additional support to students. An example was provided of taking time after sessions to discuss learning outcomes with students.

161. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 4.8

162. The university provided the module specifications which contain the strategy regarding assessments and the programme specification which detailed a range of assessment methods across both courses.

163. The proposed changes referred to under standard 4.1, provides an example of the universities review mechanism for assessments and consideration of implementing changes based on feedback received.

164. The course team confirmed that there are second markers and that they use a marking matrix to ensure the fairness and reliability of assessments. The students that met with the inspection team also confirmed that the range of assessments allowed for different learning styles.

165. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 4.9

166. The documentary evidence received prior to the inspection confirmed that modules are sequenced and increase in complexity as students' progress through the course.

167. There are also skills days aligned to the modules and assessments and student progression.

168. The students that the inspection team met with did not raise any issues with the timing of assessments and confirmed that there is a gradual development in their assessments.

169. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 4.10

170. The university provided evidence of both formative assessment feedback and structured summative assessment feedback and the practice learning handbook references feedback from service users and carers.

171. The course team confirmed that consistency with student feedback is achieved through second markers, the marking matrix to which feedback is aligned and which is shared with students. Feedback is also provided to students throughout their placement.

172. The inspection team met with students who confirmed that their feedback assisted their development and that they were able to ask for a meeting to discuss their feedback further if they needed it.

173. The inspection team concluded that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 4.11

174. The documentary evidence indicated that the same external examiner is in place for both courses and is a registered social worker. The university provided copies of the external examiner reports as evidence.

175. During the inspection, the course team confirmed that assessments may be carried out by members of the course team, people with lived experience and practice educators. They confirmed that staff are supported to complete their postgraduate certificate in education.

176. The person with lived experience that met with the inspection team confirmed that he had received training and guidelines around the assessment of the readiness for practice assessment role plays.

177. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 4.12

178. The documentary evidence indicated that academics, practice educators, people with lived experience and external examiners contribute to the assessment of and decisions informing student progression at various stages.

179. There is input from people with lived experience in the readiness for practice role plays which must be passed for students to progress to placement and progression is also considered at exam progression boards.

180. For both courses, two direct observations of practice are required for first placement and three direct observations for second placement. During placement, feedback is provided by the practice educator and sought from service users and carers.

181. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 4.13

182. The documentary evidence confirmed that there is a dissertation module on both courses and, on the BA course a research methods module.

183. During the inspection, the course team provided examples of how research informed practice is integrated within the course.

184. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard five: Supporting students

Standard 5.1

185. Documentary evidence indicated that there is an appropriate range of university wide support services for students which cover careers, counselling, health and wellbeing, mental health, disability support, and financial support.

186. During the inspection, the inspection team met with staff from support services who provided further examples of support that has been provided to students and confirmed how they monitor and review services through data and collating feedback.

187. The support services also detailed how they ensure the accessibility of resources and how they have developed certain areas of support such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), and how they provide interim support for people on waiting lists.

188. The inspection team were therefore satisfied that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 5.2

189. The university provided evidence of academic support through the personal academic tutoring handbook and academic support through the LEAP programme.

190. During the inspection, the inspection team met with the subject librarian who provided details of various resources and support available to students throughout their academic studies. The support services staff also provided details of tailored support available to international students and mature students.

191. Students that met with the inspection team confirmed that support was available from their personal tutor.

192. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 5.3

193. Documentary evidence provided copies of the university fitness to practice policy and codes of professional conduct. There is also reference in the practice learning handbook to pre-placement requirements and professional conduct expectations for students.

194. There is DBS screening and self-disclosure as part of the admissions process.

195. During the inspection, the inspection team asked the course lead about the process for ongoing suitability checks. They confirmed that at the end of each academic year students are asked to provide a further declaration through an electronic sign-up sheet as part of the enrolment process for the next academic year.

196. The inspection team were therefore satisfied that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 5.4

197. The university confirmed, prior to the inspection, that upon admission to the course there is an occupational health screening process in place. Students can also self-refer or be referred by a tutor at any point in the course to the disability service which can provide specialist assessments and support. A copy of the health and wellbeing supported study plan was provided.

198. During the inspection, the inspection team heard examples of reasonable adjustments being put in place for students across both the academic and placement elements of the courses.

199. Both students and practice educators that met with the inspection team provided confirmation of examples of reasonable adjustments.

200. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 5.5

201. The university provided documentary evidence of the programme specifications and guides, module specifications and practice learning handbooks the information provided to students about the courses.

202. During the inspection, the inspection team met with members of the career service who confirmed the support provided to students with transition to registered social worker.

203. The inspection team noted that there were a number of documents and references within documentation to the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) standards. This was noted within the practice learning handbook, both course programme specifications and the reading resources for some of the module specifications.

204. As Social Work England have been the regulator for social workers since December 2019, the inspectors agreed that this information needed to be amended and updated to reflect the current regulatory standards for social workers in England.

205. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is recommending that a condition is set against standard 5.5 in relation to the approval of this course. Consideration was given as to whether the finding identified would mean that the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it is deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard, and we are confident that once this standard is met, a further inspection of the course would not be required. [Full details of the condition, its monitoring and approval can be found in the proposed outcomes section of this report.](#)

Standard 5.6

206. The documentary evidence provided clear information for students on the attendance requirements and how missed skills days and placement days must be made up.

207. Practice educators confirmed how attendance is monitored on placement. The course team confirmed that if there are attendance issues with the academic elements of the course, they have a system in place that flags attendance issues and an email sent for personal tutors to pick up with students individually.

208. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 5.7

209. The university provided evidence of both formative feedback and structured summative feedback and the practice learning handbook references feedback from service users and carers.

210. The course team confirmed that consistency with student feedback is achieved through second markers, the marking matrix to which feedback is aligned and which is shared with students.

211. The inspection team met with students who confirmed that their feedback was generally received within the 15 working days timeframe. They also confirmed that the formative feedback that they receive can be used to support them with their summative assessment.

212. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 5.8

213. Documentary evidence provided information about the university's academic appeals process.

214. The practice learning handbook also provides a link for students to the appeals process.

215. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

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

Standard 6.1

216. As the qualifying courses are a BA (Hons) social work course and MA social work course the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Proposed outcome

217. The inspection team recommend that both the BA (Hons) and MA courses be approved with conditions. These will be monitored for completion.

Conditions

218. 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.

219. 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 both courses at this time.

	Standard not currently met	Condition	Date for submission of evidence	Link
1	Standards 1.3, 3.4 and 3.5 (Both courses)	The education provider will provide evidence that demonstrates that they have a formal, robust and systematic process to ensure the involvement of employers and practitioners in each of the following areas, the admissions process, the management and monitoring of the courses and their evaluation and improvement systems.	4 th December 2024	Paragraph 42 and Paragraph 100 and Paragraph 109
2	Standard 1.5 (Both courses)	The education provider will provide evidence that they have a formal system in place to monitor and record progress around the implementation of EDI policies relating to admissions.	4 th December 2024	Paragraph 52
3	Standard 2.6 (Both courses)	The education provider will provide evidence of a robust system of oversight and checking that all practice educators have relevant and current knowledge, skills and experience and are registered practitioners with Social Work England	4 th December 2024	Paragraph 79
4	Standard 3.9 (Both courses)	The education provider will provide evidence of a process for using student	4 th December 2024	Paragraph 125

		EDI data to evaluate student performance and progression.		
5	Standard 5.5 (Both courses)	The education provider will provide evidence that all course documentation and website information, relating to the courses, has been updated to remove reference to the HCPC.	4 th December 2024	Paragraph 205

Recommendations

220. 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 1.1 (Both courses)	The inspectors are recommending that the university consider reviewing their approach to the assessment of all applicants' command of English to ensure that it is comprehensive and can be consistently and reliably applied when assessing all applicants' command of English as part of the applications process.	Paragraph 32
2	Standards 1.3, 3.5 and 4.2 (Both courses)	The inspectors are recommending that the university consider developing and strengthening the number and diversity of people with lived experience who are participating in the social work service user group.	Paragraph 43 and Paragraph 110 and Paragraph 142

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

221. Approved with conditions.

Annex 2: Meeting of conditions

222. 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](#).

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

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

	Standard not met	Condition	Recommendation
1	Standards 1.3, 3.4 and 3.5 (Both courses)	The education provider will provide evidence that demonstrates that they have a formal, robust and systematic process to ensure the involvement of employers and practitioners in each of the following areas, the admissions process, the management and monitoring of the courses and their evaluation and improvement systems.	Met for both courses
2	Standard 1.5 (Both courses)	The education provider will provide evidence that they have a formal system in place to monitor and record progress around the implementation of EDI policies relating to admissions.	Met for both courses
3	Standard 2.6 (Both courses)	The education provider will provide evidence of a robust system of oversight and checking that all practice educators have relevant and current knowledge, skills and experience and are registered practitioners with Social Work England	Met for both courses
4	Standard 3.9 (Both courses)	The education provider will provide evidence of a process for using student EDI data to evaluate student performance and progression.	Met for both courses
5	Standard 5.5 (Both courses)	The education provider will provide evidence that all course documentation and website information, relating to the courses,	Met for both courses

		has been updated to remove reference to the HCPC.	
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Findings

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

Standard 1.3

226. The university has provided evidence of a more systematic approach to the governance, monitoring and involvement of employers and practitioners in the admissions process and ongoing evaluation and development of the programmes. A schedule for Admissions interviews has been circulated to employer partners to facilitate their participation.

227. The inspectors therefore agreed that this standard is met.

Standard 1.5

228. Documentary evidence was provided of the EDI review forms which contain evidence of the EDI data collection and analysis is carried out regularly for the BA and MA course by the student data management team. At a social work team level the EDI data analysis forms are used to consider EDI data, including relating to applicants, and it is noted that a current action from this is to improve unknown data in relation to admissions. The university confirmed that the data is also discussed at the staff student liaison committee.

229. EDI data and actions are then fed into the programme plan and the subject quality enhancement plan and the programme plan for the BA course has been supplied to provide examples of action points relating to EDI issues.

230. The university also confirmed that mandatory EDI training is in place for all staff at the university and a screen shot of the online training has also been included with the evidence.

231. The inspectors were therefore agreed that the standard is met.

Standard 2.6

232. The university submitted an updated placement learning agreement which requests specific confirmation of a practice educators registration, currency and qualifications. The social work practice educator self-declaration form will be used to enable currency of practice educators to be monitored, with oversight by the practice learning leads.

233. The inspectors agreed that this standard is met.

Standard 3.4

234. As stated above under standard 1.3, the university has provided evidence of a more systematic approach to the governance, monitoring and involvement of employers and practitioners in the ongoing evaluation and development of the programmes.

235. An industry advisory board has been established and will include a minimum of 3 employer partners and meet a minimum of twice per academic year.

236. Evidence of the industry advisory board's themes for 2024/25 include work experience and placements and inclusion and diversity. The programme quality plan for 2024/25 also provides evidence of the priority given to the co—ordination and implementation of the industry advisory board meetings.

237. A copy of minutes from the GMSWA has also been provided as evidence of partners participation in practice learning.

238. The inspectors agreed that this standard is met.

Standard 3.5

239. As identified in standard 3.4 above, the industry advisory board will include employer partners in discussions relating to curriculum, content of the courses and course development.

240. The GMSWA minutes have been provided as evidence of employer engagement in practice learning monitoring with the sharing of QAPL feedback explicitly referenced in the minutes. The programme plans for both courses include the implementation of the industry advisory board and inclusion of employer feedback.

241. The inspectors were satisfied that this standard is met.

Standard 3.9

242. The EDI data analysis forms as noted under standard 1.5, have been developed in order to analyse and address information relating to the student performance and progression at a course level.

243. Evidence of how the analysis and evaluation of data is used to inform programme improvement is included in the subject quality enhancement plan provided, which is written and reviewed on an annual basis. The university confirmed that data and key issues in relation to progression are discussed at the programme boards.

244. It was noted by the inspectors that the BA programme quality plan submitted includes a local EDI plan to support student retention and progression as one of its priorities. The EDI review forms submitted also identify priority actions including understanding issues affecting the attainment of students with a disability.

245. The inspectors were satisfied that this standard is met.

Standard 5.5

246. The university submitted an updated BA & MA Placement Handbook, Concerns process for students, Concerns process for practice educators and links to their updated webpages for both courses.

247. The inspectors were satisfied that reference to the HCPC had been removed from the documentation and that this standard is therefore met.

248. Following the review of the documentary evidence submitted, the inspection team are satisfied that the conditions set against the approval of the BA (Hons) social work and MA social work courses are met.

Regulator decision

249. Conditions Met.