

Inspection Report

Inspection ID	UBIR1_ACP160/CP161/014
Course provider	University of Birmingham
Validating body (if different)	
Course inspected	PG Cert Higher Specialist Work in Mental Health Services PG Dip Higher Specialist Work in Mental Health Services PGCert Approved Mental Health Professional
Mode of study	Work based learning
Maximum student cohort	27
Date of inspection	03 and 04 March 2026
Inspection team	Joseph Hubbard (Education Quality Assurance Officer) Becky Madey (Education Quality Assurance Officer) Jane Jones (Lay Inspector) Carolyn Deacon (AMHP registrant Inspector)
Inspector recommendation	Approved with conditions
Regulator decision:	Approved with conditions
Date of Regulator decision:	22 May 2026

Conditions	Standard 1.7 Standard 6.1
Date conditions met and approved:	TBC

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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 approval standards for Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) courses. We approve courses against these standards to ensure that students who successfully complete an AMHP course can meet the requirements set out in the Mental Health (Approved Mental Health Professionals) (Approval) (England) Regulations 2008.
2. During the approval process, we appoint partner inspectors. This will include a registered inspector who will be a qualified AMHP, and a lay inspector who is not AMHP qualified.
3. These inspectors, along with an officer from the Education Quality Assurance team, undertake activity to review documentary information and evidence, and carry out an inspection. This activity could include observing and asking questions about teaching, placements, facilities and learning resources; asking questions based on the evidence submitted; and meeting with staff, people with lived experience and students. The inspectors then make recommendations to us about whether a course should be approved.
4. The process we undertake is described in our legislation: The Children and Social Work Act 2017, [The Social Workers Regulations 2018 - Social Work England](#) , and our [Education and Training Rules 2019](#).
5. In this document we describe the University of Birmingham as ‘the course provider’. The inspection was for reapproval of the existing courses and approval of an updated version of the course, PG Cert Approved Mental Health Professional. Within this report, we refer to the “current course” and “new course” where there were differences in how the courses met the education and training approval standards.

Summary of Inspection

6. The University of Birmingham’s PG Cert Higher Specialists Work in Mental Health Services and PG Dip Higher Specialists Work in Mental Health Services was inspected as part of Social Work England’s reapproval cycle, whereby all course providers with AMHP courses will be inspected against the new education and training approval standards for AMHP courses.
7. An on-site inspection took place from 03 March to 04 March 2026.
8. As part of this process the inspection team gathered feedback from key stakeholders through meetings on inspection. This included course staff, students, employer partners and people with lived experience.

Inspection Findings

9. In this section we set out the inspectors' findings in relation to whether the course meets the education and training approval standards for AMHP courses. We describe the inspection team in this section as 'we'.

Standard 1. Admissions	Met or not met.
<p>1.1 Confirm on entry to the course that applicants have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. the potential to acquire and demonstrate the competences set out in the relevant legislation governing AMHP practice; ii. the capability to meet the academic requirements of the course; and iii. the capability to use information and communication technology (ICT) methods and techniques to achieve course outcomes 	<u>Met</u>
<p>1.2 Confirm that applicants are and remain fully registered with a relevant regulatory body in line with the relevant regulations</p>	<u>Met</u>
<p>1.3 Ensure that the admissions processes assess the suitability of applicants, including in relation to their conduct, health and character. This includes appropriate criminal conviction checks</p>	<u>Met</u>
<p>1.4 Ensure that applicants have suitable prior experience of the practical application of appropriate legislation and policy, specifically including but not limited to mental health, mental capacity and human rights legislation</p>	<u>Met</u>
<p>1.5 Ensure that applicants have a robust level of legal literacy in appropriate legislative and policy areas</p>	<u>Met</u>
<p>1.6 Ensure that employers, placement providers, people with lived experience of social work, and carers are involved in student admissions</p>	<u>Met</u>
<p>1.7 Ensure that there are equality, diversity and inclusion policies in relation to applicants and that they are implemented and monitored</p>	<p><u>Not met</u></p> <p><i>see key observations for standard 1 for further information</i></p>
<p>1.8 Ensure that the admissions process gives applicants the information they require to make an informed choice about whether to take up an offer of a place on a course. This will include information about the award level and professional</p>	<u>Met</u>

qualification, course content, teaching modes, location of study, assessment methods, duration, and observation requirements including the expectations around arranging or securing placements	
1.9 Ensure that the admissions process allows candidates from any eligible profession to demonstrate their suitability to join the course	Met

Key observations for standard 1

10. Review of documentary evidence confirmed that the admissions requirements for the new course were set out clearly on the course webpage and within an applicant information brochure. Suitable prior experience for the current course was ensured through successful completion of the pre-qualifying ‘Stage 1’ learning, which included shadowing opportunities. For the new course, a minimum expectation of prior experience had been agreed with employer partners (1.1, 1.4). Legal literacy specifically was assessed through the personal statement for the current course and would be further scrutinised at interview for the new course (1.5).

11. We confirmed at inspection that admissions staff checked each students’ registration on the relevant professional register as part of admissions (1.2). For the current course, applicants’ DBS status was confirmed within the Practice Placement Agreement, and students must have agreed to key policies on enrolment which included fitness to practice requirements. The new admissions cycle would require applicants to provide a current enhanced DBS number and sign a declaration of suitability statement (1.3).

12. For both versions of the course, employer involvement in admissions was guaranteed by their own pre-selection processes and through dialogue with the university around entry requirements. We heard that people with lived experience of social work were involved through reviewing applicants’ personal statements. For the new course, interview panels would include people with lived experience and employers (1.6).

13. University-wide equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) policies were in place, and EDI data was gathered and analysed for all post-graduate certificate students at the university. However, we confirmed on inspection that EDI data was not being gathered or analysed at admissions itself, as this happened from enrolment onwards.

14. Regarding reasonable adjustments, for the current course the university relied on employer partners to notify them if a candidate required any adjustments to the admissions process. For the new programme, the invitation to interview specifically asked candidates about reasonable adjustments, however there was no opportunity to request adjustments for elements prior to this, such as the application form itself (1.7).

15. We determined that as standard 1.7 required course providers to identify and respond to any EDI concerns specifically at the admissions stage, a condition was required against this standard. We agreed that a condition was also required on this standard regarding the opportunity to request reasonable adjustments to the admissions process itself (1.7). Full details of conditions can be found in the [proposed outcome section](#).

16. Review of the programme website confirmed that the required information was made available to applicants and was applicable to all eligible professions. For the new course, an information flyer had also been produced, and open days were planned (1.8, 1.9).

Standard 2. Course governance, management and quality.	Met or not met
2.1 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	Met
2.2 Ensure that regular and effective monitoring, evaluation and improvement systems are in place, and that these involve employers, people with lived experience including carers, and students	Met
2.3 Ensure that the number of students admitted is aligned to a clear strategy, which includes consideration of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. local and regional placement capacity; and 1. the availability of part-time or other flexible course arrangements to widen access wherever possible. 	Met
2.4 Ensure that the person with overall professional responsibility for the course is a relevant qualified professional with appropriate experience	Met
2.5 Ensure that there is adequate provision of appropriately qualified and experienced staff, with relevant specialist subject knowledge and expertise	Met

2.6 Ensure that educators are supported to maintain their knowledge and understanding in relation to professional practice	Met
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Key observations for standard 2.

17. The course provider outlined a management and governance structure that included lines of accountability at programme, college and university level. We understood that processes were in place to ensure the resourcing and quality management of the course. (2.1)

18. We heard from people with lived experience and employers, who gave examples of how they provided feedback on both the current and new course. We were assured by the course team that people with lived experience and employers would have continued involvement in the monitoring and evaluation of the courses. Students confirmed that they received regular opportunities to provide feedback and were able to provide examples of changes that were made as a result. (2.2)

19. Documentation outlined how the course provider managed their student numbers with sponsoring employers. During the inspection, we were assured that the course team maintained very strong relationships with employer partners and also accommodated part-time arrangements wherever possible. (2.3)

20. The Programme Director was a registered social worker and a qualified AMHP. As the person with overall responsibility for the course, we understood that the Programme Director was not a practising AMHP at the time of inspection. However, we heard examples which assured the inspection team that their knowledge remains current. The course team included a practising AMHP and they also maintained links with the AMHP leads network. We heard examples of how the wider course team were supported by the university to maintain their currency. (2.4, 2.5, 2.6)

Standard 3. Curriculum	Met or not met
3.1 The views of employers, practitioners and people with lived experience of mental health services are incorporated into the design, ongoing development and review of the curriculum	Met
3.2 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, including around	Met

cross-national border issues in relation to practice in Wales, where this is appropriate	
3.3 The course is designed in accordance with equality, diversity and inclusion principles, human rights and legislative frameworks	Met
3.4 Course content is routinely updated as a result of developments in legislation, research, government policy, and best practice	Met
3.5 The integration of theory and practice is central to the course	Met
3.6 Students understand how the standards of the student's own professional regulator(s), apply to their specialist practice	Met
3.7 The course is designed to enable students to demonstrate an evidence-informed approach to AMHP practice, underpinned by skills, knowledge and understanding in relation to research and evaluation	Met

Key observations for standard 3.

21. For the current programme, employers contributed to curriculum review through participation in the East and West Midlands AMHP Training Partnership Management Group. People with lived experience contributed through design and feedback on course elements they delivered. We reviewed evidence of a few task and finish groups involving both employers and people with lived experience for the design of the new course curriculum. Regarding ongoing involvement, we heard at inspection that an annual evaluation day would be reinstated for the programme, which would include representation from people with lived experience, employers, and students (3.1).

22. Documentary evidence confirmed that the curriculum was mapped against Schedule 2 of the AMHP regulations, and we had confirmation during the inspection that the programme would not admit candidates employed in Wales (3.2).

23. Programme documentation and policies demonstrated that the programme was designed in accordance with equality, diversity and inclusion principles and legislative frameworks (3.3).

24. The primary mechanism for regular update of the curriculum was a biannual AMHP Management Meeting, and a review of teaching materials confirmed these to reflect current research and best practice. Currency of the legal content on the course was also maintained through consultation with the new barrister who also delivered teaching on this (3.4). Teaching resources and activities promoted the use of research and other evidence sources in students' approach to AMHP practice (3.7).

25. Integration of theory and practice was fostered through course content, and the assessment design for the new programme provided additional opportunity to demonstrate this (3.5). Teaching material on the programme provided opportunities for students to understand the relationship between their own professional background and the AMHP role (3.6).

Standard 4. Practice Placements	Met or not met
4.1 Ensure practice placements are integral to the course	Met
4.2 Ensure that the number, duration and range of practice placements is appropriate to support the delivery of the course and the achievement of the learning outcomes	Met
4.3 Ensure that students, practice placement providers and educators are prepared for each placement, which will include information about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. the learning outcomes to be met ii. the timing and duration of any placement experience iii. the records to be maintained iv. expectations of professional conduct v. assessment procedures including the implications of, and any action to be taken in the case of failure to progress vi. communication and lines of responsibility 	Met
4.4 Maintain clear collaborative arrangements for planning and communication with placement providers including a thorough and effective system for approving and monitoring all placements, in order jointly to ensure:	Met

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. that practice placement settings provide a safe and supportive environment ii. that placement providers have equality, diversity and inclusion policies in place which will apply to students, and which they will implement and monitor iii. that there is an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff, with relevant specialist subject knowledge and expertise, at the practice placement setting iv. that practice placement providers support their placement staff to maintain their knowledge and understanding in relation to professional practice, including appropriate practice placement educator training v. that a range of learning and teaching methods that respect the rights and needs of people with lived experience of social work and colleagues must be in place throughout all practice placements 	
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Key observations for standard 4.

26. The course team outlined the relevant modifications to the new course regarding practice placement. The inspection team were assured that practice placement arrangements were consistent in meeting Social Work England’s standards across the current and new course. The course team outlined that students spent 42 days in placement, which was a mandatory requirement of the course. We saw documentation such as the practice placement agreement and handbook, which set out practical information, learning opportunities and expectations for students and practice educators, known as practice mentor assessors, (PMAs) regarding practice placements. Where required, the placement period would be extended to ensure the student could demonstrate that the learning outcomes and competencies were met. (4.1, 4.2, 4.3)

27. A monitoring form was completed prior to each placement to ensure that settings met the requirements listed within standard 4.4. We heard that employers had a longstanding partnership with the course provider and would resolve issues collaboratively through midpoint meetings, attended by the student, PMA, training lead and course tutor. Placements were evaluated at end of the course. (4.4)

28. The course team evidenced how placement records would be kept by students and PMAs. We understood that PMAs attended briefing days to support them in their role and ensure consistency of practice. We heard from students and PMAs that expectations regarding placement and lines of responsibility were clear. (4.3)

Standard 5. Supporting students.	Met or not met
<p>5.1 Ensure that students have access to resources to support their health and wellbeing including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. confidential counselling services ii. occupational health services, where appropriate 	Met
<p>5.2 Ensure that students have access to a system of academic and pastoral student support for their progression, development, wellbeing and welfare</p>	Met
<p>5.3 Ensure that there is a thorough and effective process for ensuring the ongoing suitability of students' conduct, character and health</p>	Met
<p>5.4 Make reasonable adjustments for students with health conditions or impairments to enable them to progress through their course and meet the relevant standards, in accordance with relevant legislation</p>	Met
<p>5.5 Provide timely information to students about parts of the course where attendance is mandatory and have associated monitoring mechanisms in place</p>	Met
<p>5.6 Provide timely and meaningful feedback to students on their progression and performance in assessments</p>	Met
<p>5.7 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</p>	Met

Key observations for standard 5.

29. Students had access to university support services, including confidential counselling and occupational health services. We noted that these services were signposted through the course handbook and on the course welcome day. At inspection, students confirmed that personal tutors also signposted to these services when appropriate. There were a range of study skills resources available through the library, which provided additional academic support where needed (5.1, 5.2).

30. Students made a declaration of suitability at the admissions stage. They were required to notify the university of any changes to this throughout the duration of the course. An initial suitability declaration was made at the point of admission, and students must have then signed a key policies contract confirming they would notify the university of any changes to their suitability (5.3). Students were given the opportunity to disclose any disabilities at enrolment, and referred to the student disability service for a Reasonable Adjustment Plan (RAP) where appropriate (5.4).

31. Attendance requirements for the course, and processes for dealing with absences, were outlined clearly in the course handbook. We confirmed at inspection that a clear process was in place for ensuring missed content was caught up with (5.5).

32. Formative feedback was given to students to support their development, including during the placement period. We heard from students at inspection that feedback was timely, detailed and meaningful (5.6).

33. Policies were in place to support students to report concerns openly, including a whistleblowing process which was outlined in the student handbook (5.7).

Standard 6. Assessments	Met or not met
6.1 Ensure that the assessment strategy and design demonstrate that the assessments are robust, fair and consistent, and that those who successfully complete the course have developed the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the competencies set out in the relevant legislation and rules as set out in the guidance that accompanies these standards	Not met <i>see key observations for standard 6 for further information</i>
6.2 Ensure that professional aspects of practice are integral to assessments	Met

6.3 Use objective measures of student performance which ensure safe and effective practice as an AMHP	Met
6.4 Regularly monitor and evaluate assessment standards	Met
6.5 Clearly specify requirements for student progression and achievement within the course	Met
6.6 Clearly specify that any aegrotat award which may be made will not lead to eligibility to be approved as an AMHP	Met
6.7 Clearly specify the procedure for the right of appeal for students	Met
6.8 Clearly specify a process for the appointment of at least 1 external examiner who must be appropriately experienced and qualified and from the relevant part of an appropriate professional register	Met

Key observations for standard 6.

34. The course team outlined that within the current course, the summative assessment was the completion of a portfolio. This was submitted at the end of the course and required students to link evidence to professional aspects of practice. (6.2). Formative assessment included the submission of a case study for feedback, as well as ongoing feedback from the student's PMA within supervision. We understood that the assessment design was relevant to practice and demonstrated the student's ability to meet the AMHP competencies. Therefore, the inspection team was assured that the assessments were robust. (6.1)

35. The course team outlined their marking and moderation processes, which assured the inspection team that the assessment final outcomes were consistent for students. However, we heard, and the course team acknowledged, that the first marking process, undertaken by the PMAs, led to variation in marking and inconsistent outcomes, which were then reviewed by the course provider. Therefore, the inspection team were not assured that the assessment strategy of the current course was consistent. The course team acknowledged this during the inspection and had taken measures to change the marking process for the new proposed course. (6.1)

36. We heard from students that on the current course, the summative assessment load was too demanding, and the formative assessment felt insufficient in improving their academic writing. Students confirmed that feedback was timely, detailed and meaningful, but that the formative feedback was related to a partial portfolio draft. The course team clarified that students are offered the opportunity to receive formative feedback on a full case analysis, which is over a third of the total portfolio. However, it was confirmed that a significant number of students failed their summative assessment on first sit, although most students passed the course through resubmission. This feedback was considered by the course provider in the design of their new course. To provide further support to students completing the current course, the inspection team determined that a condition was required against standard 6.1. (6.1) Full details of the condition can be found in the [proposed outcome section](#).

37. Following previous feedback from students and employers, the course provider modified their assessment within the new course. The summative assessment would comprise of varying assignment types across the programme to balance the assessment burden. Professional aspects of practice would be integral to the presentation and portfolio assessments within the new design. (6.2) We heard that people with lived experience would be involved in an assessment. Based upon the mapping narrative and discussions at inspection, we were assured that the new course would be fair, robust and reliable. However, the inspection team recommended that the course team collate this information into an assessment strategy to ensure students have access to clear information and rationale. (6.1)

38. The inspection team were assured that annual module review structures, an assessment panel and moderation processes were used to regularly monitor and evaluate assessment standards. We heard that students provided feedback regarding assessment, which was considered in the assessment structure of the new course. (6.4) We saw an evidence log which identifies when and how the candidates met the competencies within the AMHP Regulations (England). We heard from some students that assessment marking felt subjective to them. However, the inspection team was assured by the course team that there were multiple objective measures of student performance which ensured safe and effective practice as an AMHP. (6.3)

39. We saw the student handbook which outlined requirements for student progression and achievement for the course, including assessment, the use of alternative assessment methods and extenuating circumstances. We heard that an assessment panel was used for oversight of student achievement. (6.5)

40. The course team outlined the process for appointing an external examiner who was appropriately experienced and qualified. We saw the CV of the external examiner at the time of inspection. It was confirmed that the course provider checked that external examiners were registered with a relevant regulator. (6.8)

41. The student handbook specified the procedure for the right of appeal for students. The course provider confirmed that there were no aegrotat awards. (6.6, 6.7)

Outcome

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

The regulator decision maker agreed with [this recommendation](#).

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 course 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	1.7	For both the current and new courses, the course provider should collaborate with employer partners to ensure there are processes in place to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• consider trends within EDI data in relation to admissions• provide the opportunity to request reasonable adjustments at application stage	22 May 2026	Link
2	6.1	Within the current course, the course provider should ensure that assessment is fair by optimising marker and student preparation.	22 May 2026	Link

As conditions have been attached to the approval, the University of Birmingham must provide evidence of meeting these conditions as outlined in the report and in the timescales agreed. Failure to do so may result in approval being withdrawn.

Recommendations

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

	Standard	Detail	Link
1	6.1	The inspectors are recommending that the course provider consider collating assessment information into an assessment strategy to ensure students have access to clear information including rationale for the assessment strategy.	Link

Meeting of Conditions

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

Inspectors will undertake the conditions review and make recommendations 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	Inspector recommendation
1			
2			

Findings