



Inspection Report

Course provider: The Open University

Course approval: PG Dip Social Work
(Apprenticeship)

Inspection dates: 16 to 18 July 2024

Report date:	19 August 2024
Inspector recommendation:	Approved with conditions
Regulator decision:	Approved with conditions
Date of Regulator decision:	30 September 2024
Date conditions met and approved:	20 May 2025

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Introduction

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

What we do

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

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

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

Summary of Inspection

15. Course details: The Open University wish to run a two year postgraduate diploma in social work apprenticeship.

Inspection ID	TOUCPP452
Course provider	The Open University
Validating body (if different)	
Course inspected	PG Dip social work (apprenticeship)
Mode of Study	Full time
Maximum student cohort	75 apprentices per cohort
Proposed first intake	20 apprentices (approx.)
Date of inspection	16 to 18 July 2024
Inspection team	Laura Gordon (Education Quality Assurance Officer) Luke Tibbits (Lay Inspector) Anne Mackay (Registrant Inspector)

Language

16. In this document we describe The Open University as ‘the education provider’ or ‘the university’ and we describe the Postgraduate Diploma social work apprenticeship as ‘the course’. Throughout the report reference is made to both ‘students’ and ‘apprentices’ interchangeably.

Inspection

17. A remote inspection took place from 16 to 18 July 2024. As part of this process the inspection team planned to meet with key stakeholders including students, course staff, employers and people with lived experience of social work.

18. These meetings formed the basis of the inspection plan, agreed with the education provider ahead of inspection. The following section provides a summary of these sessions, who participated and the topics that were discussed with the inspection team.

Conflict of interest

No parties disclosed a conflict of interest.

Meetings with students

20. The inspection team met with 6 students across years one and two of the current PG Dip social work course and 3 second year BA apprentices. Discussions included admissions, placements, skills days, curriculum, teaching, and support.

Meetings with course staff

21. 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

22. The inspection team met with people with lived experience of social work who have been involved in the university's service user and carer group. Discussions included involvement with admissions, course review and monitoring, teaching and assessment.

Meetings with external stakeholders

23. The inspection team met with representatives from placement partners including the London Borough of Waltham Forest, Cornwall council, Kirklees council and Kent County council.

Findings

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

Standard one: Admissions

Standard 1.1

25. The university provided documentary evidence relating to the course admissions process. This process consists of an agency submission of an application, an applicant personal statement, written exercise online, and an interview. Any applicants will also complete a candidate pack and have to complete a short module within this that they have to then reflect on at the interview. Applicants will also complete a skills scan and submit this with their application.

26. During the inspection, the admissions team confirmed how the written test is moderated and marked and how the skills scan is used as an ongoing record to reflect learning.

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

Standard 1.2

28. Documentary evidence confirmed that prior experience is considered within the personal statement and through questions at interview.

29. The inspection team met with members of the admissions team who confirmed that there is no minimum set requirement for prior experience and that this will be considered on a case-by-case basis. They confirmed that they will consider diverse types of experience and have discussions with employers about this.

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

Standard 1.3

31. The university advised that their admissions processes are formally reviewed annually, and this process includes input from people with lived experience and employer partners.

32. During the inspection, the people with lived experience that met with the inspection team confirmed their involvement in the review and in the interview of applicants and felt that they were treated as equal partners. The admissions team also confirmed that employer partners are sometimes involved in the interviews.

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

Standard 1.4

34. Documentary evidence confirmed that applicants are required to sign a self-declaration of suitability and that enhanced DBS checks are required which can be completed up to 12 months prior to starting the course.

35. During the inspection, the admissions team advised that suitability forms are checked by the central administration team and where any issues are flagged these are passed to the Fitness to Practise Lead Academic for follow-up. They also explained how they consider health declarations and provide support for applicants.

36. The inspection team concluded that this standard was met.

Standard 1.5

37. Prior to inspection, the inspection team had sight of various Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies and the teaching and learning vision and plan aimed at widening participation.

38. During the inspection, the admissions team provided more information about how they work with the EDI lead for social work and provided specific examples of actions taken, including research around opening access to a range of ethnic groups and considerations around neurodiversity.

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

Standard 1.6

40. The inspection team noted that the webpages for this course were not yet available but were able to see the webpages for the current courses on the university website which included relevant information about the courses. A copy of the prospectus that is made available for applicants was also provided.

41. During the inspection, the course team advised that they also hold briefings for prospective employer partners and applicants.

42. The students that met with the inspection team, confirmed that they were provided with information about the course. However, the students raised concerns about not finding out information about the requirements of the residential weekend early enough.

43. The inspection team were unable to see clear reference to this in the online resources available to applicants. The inspection team agreed that as this element of the course takes place over a weekend and not during the usual working hours of an apprentice it would be important for applicants to be aware of this prior to taking up an offer.

44. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is recommending that a condition is set against standard 1.6. 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 two: Learning environment

Standard 2.1

45. Documentary evidence confirmed that apprentices will complete an 80 and 90 day placement. A contrast form is completed to ensure the contrast between placements and the requirement for statutory tasks to be completed is covered within the Practice Learning Agreement (PLA) and the agreed expectations of employer partners.

46. During the inspection, the inspection team met with employer partners who confirmed that they will discuss placements with the university to ensure that they are in line with Social Work England's standards.

47. The apprentices will also complete 30 skills days. 3 of these days are completed as a part of the residential weekend, half a day during induction and half a day practice skills reflection, and apprentices will be expected to complete 10 days of practice experience with their employer. There are 6 days of workshops delivered by the module tutors, and a further 10 days are embedded as module activities within the learning guides.

48. The inspection team heard more from the course team about the content of the skills days and how they are monitored throughout the inspection and received additional documentary evidence confirming where they took place throughout the course.

49. The inspection team agreed that the skills days appeared to be appropriate for developing student's skills for practice. They did however have concerns over the monitoring of the completion of these days and how students are made aware of the skills days. The inspection team agreed that this will be addressed under standards 5.5 and 5.6 below.

50. The inspection team therefore concluded that this standard was met.

Standard 2.2

51. Documentary evidence received prior to the inspection indicated that practice learning opportunities are covered within the PLA and discussed at various meetings during the placement.

52. The employer partners and practice educators that met with the inspection team confirmed how they consider the individual needs of apprentices and their prior experiences when considering appropriate learning opportunities.

53. The course team confirmed that whilst some placements do take place in the apprentice's own team, there is an ongoing review and audit of placements to ensure before every placement starts that each will provide suitable specific learning opportunities.

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

Standard 2.3

55. The inspection team received a copy of the PLA which covers induction, supervision, support needs and reasonable adjustments, off the job study time, responsibilities and whistleblowing. All apprentices are expected to receive a minimum of one and a half hours of individual supervision every week.

56. The inspection team met with students, employer partners and practice educators who confirmed that an appropriate induction takes place, that supervision relates to learning, and that there is a review of workloads at the tripartite meetings.

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

Standard 2.4

58. Documentary evidence received confirmed the expectations of employer partners regarding apprentice responsibilities whilst on placement and this is also covered in the PLA. The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) is used as framework for incremental learning.

59. During the inspection, the inspection team heard a range of opinions from students regarding their responsibilities.

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

Standard 2.5

61. The university confirmed prior to the inspection that readiness for practice consists of completion of the skills days, including 10 days of verified practice experience and a written reflective assignment following interaction with people with lived experience which is academically assessed.

62. During the inspection, the course team provided further information about the procedure around failure of the readiness for practice element of the course and resubmissions.

63. The inspection team concluded that this standard was met.

Standard 2.6

64. The documentary evidence confirmed that the practice tutor has responsibility for quality assuring the suitability of practice educators. This is recorded in an audit undertaken prior to the start of the placement and recorded on the PLA.

65. During the inspection, the placement team confirmed that the practice tutor will carry out the registration and currency checks and that completion of the relevant level of practice educator professional standards (PEPS) training is also confirmed. They also advised that they are looking at ways to support practice educators to ensure that they have the required currency to take an apprentice.

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

Standard 2.7

67. The whistleblowing policy was provided as part of the documentary evidence. Any apprentice concerns about placement are covered in the PLA meeting and the practice learning guide provides information about managing difficulties on placement.

68. The students that met with the inspection team confirmed that they were able to raise issues and provided examples of this.

69. The inspection team concluded that this standard was met.

Standard three: Course governance, management and quality

Standard 3.1

70. The university provided various job descriptions, governance structures and school organisational charts in the documentary evidence.

71. During the inspection, the inspection team heard from members of the senior leadership team about how resourcing of social work courses is managed and the commitment to the proposed course.

72. The inspection team also received further evidence during the inspection around the specific roles involved in the social work courses.

73. The proposed course will also be supported by the apprenticeship team and evaluated through the quality monitoring and enhancement process.

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

Standard 3.2

75. Prior to the inspection a copy of the collaboration template agreement was included in the documentary evidence. Processes for consents, contingencies and disruption or

breakdown of placements are set out in the practice learning guide and practice tutors have a key role in operationalising these arrangements on behalf of the university.

76. During the inspection, the employer partners and practice educators that met with the inspection provided examples of difficulties with placements and how these are managed.

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

Standard 3.3

78. The employer handbook sets out employer responsibilities for student health, wellbeing and support. The employer policies are checked as part of the audit of new placement providers and are also covered within the practice learning agreement.

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

Standard 3.4

80. The university advised prior to the inspection that employer partners and practice educators are members of the practice reference group and also sit on the Practice Assessment Panel (PAP).

81. The employer partners that met with the inspection team did not confirm involvement in the monitoring of the social work courses nor involvement in the practice reference group. They confirmed that they were consulted on the review of the admissions process and that there were informal feedback mechanisms. They gave an example of feedback leading to a change within the existing courses.

82. The course team advised that regional tutors have conversations early on about placement capacity and potential planning with employer partners.

83. The inspection team agreed that on balance this standard was met.

Standard 3.5

84. Documentary evidence detailed the various quality assurance mechanisms in place across the courses. An online evaluation of placement is completed by students and practice educators and the practice reference group includes employer partners, practice educators, and service users and meets to discuss feedback on practice issues and makes reports and recommendations to the social work directorate.

85. Each social work module and programme submits annual quality monitoring and enhancement reports to the board of studies and engages with the cyclical periodic quality review.

86. The people with lived experience that met with the inspection team confirmed their involvement with interviews, briefings, research, and the review of practice assessment reports.

87. The inspection team met with students who confirmed that they complete feedback forms and a questionnaire about their portfolio.

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

89. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team noted that the involvement of employer partners in the monitoring and review of the course did not appear to be as robust as other stakeholder involvement. The inspection team is therefore making a recommendation in relation to standard 3.5 that the university look to strengthen the involvement of employer partners in the monitoring and review of the course. [Full details of the recommendation can be found in the proposed outcomes section of the report.](#)

Standard 3.6

90. Prior to the inspection, the university advised that the local expertise of staff tutors ensure that provision is responsive to local workforce needs by developing and building on working relationships with employer partners.

91. The senior leadership team that met with the inspection team provided further information about the university's strategy to expand the apprenticeship provision. They confirmed how they have considered resources and staffing with a clear ratio.

92. Further documentation was received during the inspection with clarification of the proposed cohort numbers for next few years and confirming a maximum of 75 students per cohort.

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

Standard 3.7

94. The senior management team confirmed who the lead social worker was, and the inspection team had received a CV for this individual prior to the inspection.

95. The inspection team were satisfied that this individual is a registered social worker and appropriately qualified and experienced, and therefore agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.8

96. Documentary evidence confirmed that all regional staff tutors, associate lecturers and central academic staff are qualified social workers. Central academics are responsible for the design of new modules and lead on reviewing, evaluation and updating of existing content. Central academics and associate lecturers come from a range of different practice

and academic backgrounds and are expected to have both teaching and writing skills alongside their subject and practice expertise. Central and locality staffing needs are kept under review by the senior management team. There is a programme of observation to ensure all tutors have a yearly observation.

97. During the inspection, the inspection team met with various staff from admissions teams, support services, cluster managers, tutors, and academic staff. They also heard more about the specialised apprenticeship support team.

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

Standard 3.9

99. The university advised that they have an early alert indicator dashboard to monitor performance and attendance. Progression and completion boards are also used to track and monitor the progress of all the apprentices on the programme and RAG rating spreadsheet is used for all apprentices.

100. The data and student analytics team provides a detailed analysis of apprentice data to the module teams. Data from the annual module reviews is scrutinised carefully to evaluate apprentice performance, progression, and outcomes.

101. During the inspection, the course team provided more information about how data on protected characteristics is also evaluated as part of the annual review process and gave examples of proactive steps being taken in relation to the awarding gap.

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

Standard 3.10

103. Academic staff are encouraged to enhance their teaching skills by seeking fellowship or senior fellowship of Advance HE. All central and regional academic staff have access to research and study leave and this is planned and agreed as part of the annual appraisal process. Associate lecturers are allocated staff development time and expected to participate in online and face to face events delivered across the academic year. These teaching staff also receive an annual appraisal.

104. There is a research and scholarship development plan and staff take part in research groups across the university as well as being part of the Social Work Research Group. All central staff are expected to use some of their academic workload allocation for professional updating activities.

105. The inspection team concluded that this standard was met.

Standard four: Curriculum assessment

Standard 4.1

106. The course content is mapped to Social Work England's professional standards and mapped to the PCF and apprenticeship standards.

107. The PLA covers how Social Work England's professional standards will be covered during placement. The learning online is supported by a series of learning guides with activities to complete, reading lists.

108. During the inspection, the course team provided the final version of the course handbook which is to be read in conjunction with the Postgraduate Diploma Social Work (England) handbook.

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

Standard 4.2

110. The university advised within the mapping evidence that people with lived experience are involved in the design and review of courses through their core service user group and a key focus of the group is to co-produce the social work education curriculum.

111. The people with lived experience that met with the inspection team confirmed that they had been involved in the planning and design of the new course curriculum.

112. The employer partners that met with the inspection team confirmed they had not been involved in the design of the new course curriculum.

113. The inspection team noted that the university had indicated that module reviews involve employers but noted that no evidence had been provided of employer involvement in the design or development of the new course.

114. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is recommending that a condition is set against standard 4.2. 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 4.3

115. Documentary evidence included the university's EDI plan and inclusive curriculum tool template and guidance.

116. During the inspection, the course team provided further details about the work towards decolonising the curriculum and their review of course materials. They also gave examples of their consideration of neurodiversity and the diverse needs of student cohorts in their assessments. Further examples were provided of reasonable adjustments that can be put in place for students.

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

Standard 4.4

118. The documentary evidence confirmed that there is an annual review of the curriculum to ensure currency.

119. During the inspection, the course team advised of recent research on the responsibility to act on climate change which involved students and was then used to develop the curriculum. The course content is also used to link students understanding of research based practice to current examples of research. Another example was provided of a review of content in line with developments such as trauma informed practice.

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

Standard 4.5

121. Documentary evidence provided prior to the inspection confirmed the use of theory within the course materials. The PLA is used to ensure that apprentices link theory with practice, and the practice educators that met with the inspection team confirmed that they use supervision to link theory to practice.

122. The inspection team concluded that this standard was met.

Standard 4.6

123. The university advised that interprofessional learning is explicitly built into the modules with an example of this being the use of perspectives from other professionals being conveyed in audio-visual materials and through a dedicated practice skills workshop. The apprentices also work alongside other professionals during placement and are expected to reflect on interprofessional working in both their academic and practice assessments.

124. During the inspection, the course team provided further information about how interprofessional working is frontloaded into the residential weekend and based on recent learning and research.

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

Standard 4.7

126. Documentary evidence in the form of learning guides give apprentices clear time limits for tasks and activities to be completed across the course. There are two modules divided into blocks of teaching and learning guides with 3 face to face workshops.

127. During the inspection, the course team advised that engagement with the course materials is closely monitored through their dashboard.

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

Standard 4.8

129. The university provided a copy of the assessment guide prior to the inspection, which contained the assessment strategy. The learning outcomes are mapped to the assessments and there are a range of assessments for the course. Formative feedback is provided to support the apprentice's summative assessments.

130. The end point assessment is no longer a stand-alone 60 credit module and is now the final examination board on completion of the course. The course team explained more during the inspection about how the Gateway is signed off and considered at the progression and completion board.

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

Standard 4.9

132. As stated above under standard 4.8, the assessments are mapped to the course learning outcomes. There is a scaffolding of formative and summative assessments to match students' progression through the course through use of tutor marked assignments and end of module assessments.

133. The inspection team concluded that this standard was met.

Standard 4.10

134. Tutor marked assignments are marked by associate lecturers and a copy of the monitoring handbook provided confirmed that a selection is taken for monitoring and quality assurance. Apprentices receive feedback and feedforward from their tutor on each assignment as a means of scaffolding their learning.

135. During the inspection, the inspection team met with students who confirmed that feedback supported their development.

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

Standard 4.11

137. The university provided CVs for the course staff detailing qualifications and confirmed that academic tutors and practice tutors are required to be experienced social work professionals. Many of the practice tutors continue to work in practice and bring their perspectives to their teaching. Practice educators are required to meet the Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS).

138. The central academic staff also have a range of practice, academic and teaching expertise and are registered social work professionals.

139. During the inspection, the practice educators that met with the inspection team advised that there were challenges in accessing some of the placement documentation. The course team advised that practice educators are given a letter by the apprentice to access the system, and this can cause issues if they do not set up their access promptly.

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

141. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is making a recommendation in relation to standard 4.11 that the university undertake a review of how information is accessible and shared with practice educators to enable them to carry out their role as an assessor. [Full details of the recommendation can be found in the proposed outcomes section of the report.](#)

Standard 4.12

142. Documentary evidence confirmed that direct observations of apprentices include feedback from service users and practice educators. The practice educators that met with the inspection team provided further information about how direct observations are considered.

143. The course team provided further information about the academic boards and how the end point assessment is considered. They also confirmed that the practice assessment report is submitted to practice assessment panel who make a pass/fail recommendation to the module results panel who will then confirm this with the cluster examination assessment board.

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

Standard 4.13

145. Documentary evidence indicated that research is introduced and supported in the first weeks of the programme in the induction and is built into every topic of the curriculum. Apprentices explore the role of research and begin to learn about research skills and processes, in preparation for the second module when they submit a research proposal relevant to their chosen area of social work practice. There is a specific learning guide on research in social work practice that includes 20 hours of activities.

146. The inspection team were therefore satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard five: Supporting students

Standard 5.1

147. The documentary evidence received prior to the inspection detailed a range of comprehensive support services available to apprentices. This includes a counselling service, careers and wellbeing services.

148. During the inspection, the inspection team met with support services staff who confirmed that there is 24/7 support available, different methods of accessing support and the referrals that can be made. They gave examples of the various reasonable adjustments available and how they undertake an assessment of learning needs and ensure support is in place.

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

Standard 5.2

150. All apprentices will have a module tutor who they will meet at the residential weekend and a practice tutor. Apprentices will continue to have regular contact with both through subsequent face-to-face and online workshops.

151. The university understands that it may be some time since apprentices have undertaken academic studies and therefore offer a short free Open Learn course on developing good academic practice, which covers referencing. They also recommend that apprentices complete a level 1 introductory free course looking at essay and report writing skills.

152. During the inspection, the support services staff explained that there are dedicated webpages for tutors to access sessions around supporting students with disability and mental health issues. There is also an English for academic purposes service for all students.

153. The inspection team concluded that this standard was met.

Standard 5.3

154. The documentary evidence received prior to the inspection indicated that the ongoing suitability requirements are clearly stated within the course handbook. There was advice for apprentices on personal and professional conduct issues, academic misconduct, confidentiality, health and fitness to practise.

155. The university provided evidence of clear processes and policies in place for assessing suitability. Apprentices are required to sign a declaration confirming their Fitness to Practice

at regular intervals throughout the programme: on application; on submitting the readiness to practice assessment; and at the start, middle and end of each placement.

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

Standard 5.4

157. Documentary evidence from the university indicated a comprehensive list of potential reasonable adjustments available to apprentices. Services for disabled apprentices include identification and assessment of needs and specific support for those with mental health needs, disability or medical conditions, specific learning disability, or sensory impairments.

158. There are also regular reviews between the tutor, apprentice, and line manager to consider any specific learning needs ensuring the apprentice is appropriately supported.

159. During the inspection, examples of reasonable adjustments were provided by the course team, support staff, students and employer partners.

160. The inspection team concluded that this standard was met.

Standard 5.5

161. The Postgraduate Diploma Handbook provides a summary of the programme content including the placement arrangements, outlines the integrated approach to the academic and practice curriculum, and explains how apprentices will be assessed. The Practice Learning Guides also provide detailed information about practice placements and practice assessment. The university confirmed that information and teaching about the transition to being a qualified and registered social worker is provided in the final module of the course.

162. During the inspection, the inspection team were provided with a copy of the finalised apprentice handbook for this course to be read in conjunction with the Postgraduate Diploma handbook.

163. It was not clear to the inspection team where the information about the skills days is provided to the apprentices. During the inspection, the inspection team asked students about the skills days, and they were not able to confirm which elements of the course were counted as skills days.

164. The inspection team agreed that as the skills days form part of the mandatory 200 days of practice learning it was important that students were informed of what the days consisted of and where they took place.

165. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is recommending that a condition is set against standard 5.5. 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

166. The course handbook provided clear information about what apprentices need to do if they miss the workshops and residential days that form part of the mandatory skills days. The students that met with the inspection team also confirmed their understanding of this requirement.

167. During the inspection, the course team provided further details about how attendance is recorded and monitored at workshops. They confirmed that practice educators keep a record of placement attendance and must confirm that the required number of days have been completed in the practice assessment report.

168. The inspection team were unclear about how the embedded skills day activities across the learning guides are monitored to ensure completion. The course team advised that they had a system in place that can monitor engagement but appeared to be at a higher level and was not specifically used for checking completion of skills day activities for all apprentices.

169. The inspection team agreed that to ensure that all apprentices had completed all the mandatory skills day elements a robust system of monitoring needed to be in place. The inspection team were not assured that this was currently taking place.

170. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is recommending that a condition is set against standard 5.6. 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 5.7

171. As stated under standard 4.10, apprentices receive feedback and feedforward from their tutor on each assignment as a means of scaffolding their learning.

172. During the inspection, the inspection team met with students who confirmed that feedback supported their development and was mostly on time.

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

Standard 5.8

174. The inspection team received a copy of the appeals policy which appeared to include a robust process for academic appeals and therefore agreed that this standard was met.

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

Standard 6.1

175. As the qualifying course is a Postgraduate Diploma social work apprenticeship the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Proposed outcome

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

Conditions

177. Conditions for approval are set if there are areas of a course that do not currently meet our standards. Conditions are binding and must be met by the education provider within the agreed timescales.

178. Having considered whether approval with conditions or a refusal of approval was an appropriate course of action, we are proposing the following condition for this course at this time.

	Standard not currently met	Condition	Date for submission of evidence	Link
1	Standard 1.6	The education provider will provide evidence that information about the mandatory attendance elements of the course is made available to applicants prior to them accepting an offer on the course.	21 st January 2025	Paragraph 44
2	Standard 4.2	The education provider will provide evidence of employer involvement in the design of the proposed course curriculum.	21 st January 2025	Paragraph 114
3	Standard 5.5	The education provider will provide evidence of how apprentices are given information about the mandatory skills days within the course.	21 st January 2025	Paragraph 165

4	Standard 5.6	The education provider will provide evidence of a robust system for checking the attendance and completion for all apprentices of the 30 skills days.	21 st January 2025	Paragraph 170
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Recommendations

179. 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 3.5	The inspectors are recommending that the university consider how they can strengthen the involvement of employer partners in the monitoring and review of the course.	Paragraph 89
2	Standard 4.11	The inspectors are recommending that the university consider undertaking a review of how information is accessible and shared with practice educators to enable them to carry out their role as an assessor.	Paragraph 141

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

180. Approved with conditions.

Annex 2: Meeting of conditions

181. 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](#).

182. Inspectors will undertake the conditions review and make recommendations to Social Work England's decision maker.

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

	Standard not met	Condition	Inspector recommendation
1	Standard 1.6	The education provider will provide evidence that information about the mandatory attendance elements of the course is made available to applicants prior to them accepting an offer on the course.	Met
2	Standard 4.2	The education provider will provide evidence of employer involvement in the design of the proposed course curriculum.	Met
3	Standard 5.5	The education provider will provide evidence of how apprentices are given information about the mandatory skills days within the course.	Met
4	Standard 5.6	The education provider will provide evidence of a robust system for checking the attendance and	Met

		completion for all apprentices of the 30 skills days.	
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Findings

184. 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 1.6

185. The course provider has confirmed that the mandatory aspect of the programme is made available to sponsors and applicants from the initial agency approval form. They also confirmed that due to the approval timeline and process crafted to facilitate admissions for 2025 February, candidates were obliged to attend a briefing. They advised that this briefing explained the requirements of the programme and offered an opportunity to discuss the mandatory aspects and that all candidates had to attend a briefing prior to completing their registration. The course provider confirmed that this briefing will take place for all cohorts.

186. The inspectors agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.2

187. The course provider confirmed that on 5th February 2025 a workshop was arranged for all employers currently engaged in the courses that they work with. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss the launch of the PG apprentice degree programme. They advised that this will be followed up with two subsequent workshops to encourage employer engagement in the ongoing design of the programmes as they are refreshed for 2026. The first workshop will also set a timetable for review of the new programme for the first cohort.

188. The inspectors agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.5

189. Evidence was provided of the apprenticeship programme guidance which sets out the mandatory skills days and how these will be achieved including where they take place across the course. The course provider confirmed that this will be provided to all apprentices on commencement of the programme.

190. The inspectors agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.6

191. The course provider has provided a copy of the apprenticeship guidance which sets of the skills days mapping and makes it clear the requirements for attendance at skills days.

Appendix 2 requires the completion of the attendance and engagement record for each workshop and requires a declaration that where students have been unable to attend they confirm that they have undertaken a set alternative activity agreed with their tutor in advance.

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

193. Following the review of the documentary evidence submitted, the inspection team are satisfied that the conditions set against the approval of the PG Dip social work apprenticeship are met.

Regulator decision

194. Conditions Met.