

Inspection Report

Course provider: University of Central Lancashire

Course approval:

BA (Hons) social work degree apprenticeship

PG Dip social work Step Up

MA social work degree apprenticeship

Inspection dates: 5th to 8th March

Report date:	15 th April 2024
Inspector recommendation:	Approved with conditions
Regulator decision:	Approved with conditions
Date of Regulator decision:	21 st June 2024
Date conditions met and approved:	

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Introduction

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

What we do

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

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

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

Summary of Inspection

15. The University of Central Lancashire's BA (Hons) social work degree apprenticeship and PG Dip social work Step Up courses were 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. At the same time the inspection considered that the University of Central Lancashire wish to run a new MA social work degree apprenticeship.

Inspection ID	UCLR2
Course provider	University of Central Lancashire
Validating body (if different)	
Course inspected	BA (Hons) social work degree Apprenticeship PG Dip social work Step Up MA social work degree Apprenticeship
Mode of study	Full time
Maximum student cohort	BA Apprenticeship – 100 per year across 2 cohorts Step Up – 50 per cohort MA Apprenticeship – 30 per cohort
Date of inspection	5 th to 8 th March 2024
Inspection team	Laura Gordon (Education Quality Assurance Officer) Sally Gosling (Lay Inspector) Aidan Philips (Registrant Inspector)

Language

16. In this document we describe the University of Central Lancashire as 'the education provider' or 'the university' and we describe the BA (Hons) social work degree apprenticeship, PG Dip social work step up, and the MA social work degree apprenticeship

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 apprenticeship', 'MA apprenticeship' or 'Step Up programme'. For the purpose of the report, we refer to students and apprentices throughout the report as 'students'.

Inspection

17. An onsite inspection took place from 5th to 8th March 2024 at the Brook building in Preston where the University of Central Lancashire is based. As part of this process the inspection team planned to meet with key stakeholders including students, course staff, employers and people with lived experience of social work.

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

Conflict of interest

19. No parties disclosed a conflict of interest.

Meetings with students

20. The inspection team met with sixteen students consisting of six Step Up students and ten BA apprenticeship students across all three years of the course and including student representatives. Discussions included admissions, placements, support, the curriculum and assessment.

Meetings with course staff

21. Over the course of the inspection, the inspection team met with university staff including members from the course team involved in all three courses, 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 Commensus group. Discussions included their experiences of working with the course team and students, the specific activities they have been directly involved in on the current course and opportunities to provide feedback to the university.

Meetings with external stakeholders

23. The inspection team met with representatives from placement partners and practice educators from local authorities across Lancashire, Blackpool, Cumbria, Liverpool, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and from the Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust.

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. Documentary evidence received prior to the inspection for the apprenticeship courses included the employer handbook, a sample application form, example interview questions, the written test and marking criteria and a copy of the skills scan which applicants complete to assess their competency against the apprenticeship standards.

26. Documentary evidence also confirmed the entry requirements to apply for the Step Up programme are set by the Department for Education and provided copies of the applicant briefing, guidance for assessment centres, assessment centre materials and scoring criteria.

27. During the inspection, the inspection team heard more about the admissions processes from the admissions team, course team and employer partners. The inspection team heard additionally about the assessment centres and how the university has oversight and involvement in the process for the Step Up programme.

28. The inspection team also heard more from employer partners about their approach to admissions and how joint decisions are made between the university and employer as to whether applicants will complete a personal statement or a written academic piece for the apprenticeship courses.

29. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses with a recommendation for the BA and MA apprenticeship courses that the course team consider their approaches to the assessment of applicants. [Full details of the recommendation can be found in the proposed outcomes section of this report.](#)

Standard 1.2

30. The documentary evidence submitted prior to the inspection confirmed that prior experience is considered as part of the application and interview process for all of the courses. The university confirmed that they require applicants to complete a skills scan that is then used to adapt the delivery of the course based on that cohort.

31. During the inspection, the inspection team heard more about how the university will consider recognition of prior learning in limited circumstances and will ensure that any prior learning is mapped against the courses to ensure that gaps in learning can be identified and picked up.

32. The inspection team were in agreement that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 1.3

33. During the inspection, the inspection team met with employer partners across the courses who provided further details about their involvement in the admissions process.

34. Some of the employer partners confirmed that they do not currently involve people with lived experience in interviews but have involved them in developing the questions for interviews. There was also confirmation from the admissions team that involvement of people with lived experience in interviews may vary.

35. The inspection team met with people with lived experience from the university Commensus group who confirmed their involvement in interviews and in writing questions for interviews.

36. It was also noted that some employer partners will use their own groups of people with lived experience and service users and the Step Up programme use a group of young people in the group exercise.

37. The inspection team were assured that people with lived experience were involved in various aspects of the admissions process across all of the courses.

38. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses with a recommendation for the BA and MA apprenticeship courses that the course team consider ways in which they can strengthen the consistency of involvement of people with lived experience in the admissions process for all applicants. [Full details of the recommendation can be found in the proposed outcomes section of this report.](#)

Standard 1.4

39. The university provided documentary evidence of the declaration of suitability form detailing the requirements around disclosure of conduct, health and criminal issues, and the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) requirements.

40. The inspection team met with members of the admissions team and employer partners who confirmed the process for checking DBS and that this is overseen by the university for all of the courses.

41. The inspection team also heard examples of health disclosures and the support put in place for applicants and more about the suitability panel process.

42. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 1.5

43. Prior to the inspection, the inspection team was provided with a copy of the university's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) annual report, details of the Black and Asian mentors pilot scheme and a screenshot of the EDI dashboard data.

44. During the inspection, the inspection team heard more about how EDI data is used to widen participation and to consider learning needs and ensure that reasonable adjustments are provided.

45. Examples were provided by employer partners of specific steps taken to streamline questions and provide applicants with additional time. The Step Up programme's employer partners also provided details of their outreach activities to reach diverse groups of potential applicants.

46. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 1.6

47. Documentary evidence was provided of information provided to applicants via the website, information sessions, open days and through handbooks which can be shared with applicants.

48. During the inspection, the students that met with the inspection team confirmed that they had all of the information needed to decide to take up the course. The Step Up students confirmed that the information was clear, and they were made aware of the intensity of the course and expectations were outlined to them.

49. It was noted by the inspection team that the website for the proposed MA apprenticeship was not yet live, but they had been provided with a proforma for the content and were satisfied that this contained the appropriate information.

50. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard two: Learning environment

Standard 2.1

51. The documentary evidence confirmed that on both apprenticeship courses there is a 70 day and 100 day placement and that the Step Up programme has an 80 day and 100 day placement. Details of the skills days for the courses were provided within a skills day log which allowed some flexibility for choice for apprentices.

52. During the inspection, the inspection team spoke with members of the placement team, course team and employer partners who confirmed how they ensure a contrast between placements and the inclusion of statutory tasks. The employer partners confirmed that they plan placements from the outset of the course and have early discussions with the university to explore options.

53. Examples were provided of how contrast is ensured through a broad spectrum of placements and that these will consider individual prior learning and experience to optimise the value and allow stretch on the placement.

54. The inspection team also heard further details about how skills days are incorporated, logged and checked.

55. The Step Up programme employer partners confirmed that through their steering group the local authorities commit to an offer regarding placement provision.

56. The inspection team were therefore satisfied that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 2.2

57. The apprenticeship employer handbooks stipulate that students must spend at least 6 hours per week on off the job learning activities. Each student has an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) put in place to consider strengths and development, learning needs and support which is reviewed quarterly. There is also a Practice Learning Agreement (PLA) and midpoint review including a presentation by students on their learning.

58. During the inspection, the inspection team heard more from the course team and employer partners about how learning opportunities are considered to develop and stretch each individual.

59. The Step Up programme employer partners also confirmed that placements consider the breadth of social work learning by including adult social work and ensure that they plan the students learning journey ensuring that final placements offer more challenge and different experiences.

60. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 2.3

61. Documentary evidence provided prior to the inspection indicated that discussions with students around support, supervision and workload take place during ILP and PLA meetings, progress review meetings and midpoint reviews.

62. The students and practice educators that met with the inspection team confirmed that students receive inductions, supervision and support during placement. They also provided examples of flexibility for different learning needs and confirmed that there are pre-placement meetings and shadowing opportunities available for students.

63. It was noted by some students that there had been some confusion around where their final placement would be. This issue was also acknowledged by the university and employer partners who confirmed that they are looking at ways to address this.

64. The Step Up students confirmed that whilst they had not yet been on placement, they felt support in preparation for this.

65. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 2.4

66. The university submitted documentary evidence prior to the inspection that confirmed that students begin placement by undertaking shadowing and co-working opportunities with a gradual increase of autonomous working.

67. Learning opportunities are mapped against the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and reviewed regularly through the PLA and midpoint review.

68. During the inspection, the inspection team spoke to practice educators who confirmed that they have briefings and are aware of what modules the students have studied prior to their placement so that they can tailor learning experiences appropriately. They also confirmed that they were robust in ensuring that students were treated as students and that they would have discussions with students to remind them of the distinction.

69. The students that spoke to the inspection team gave a range of responses in relation to whether they felt their responsibilities were appropriate for their stage of training.

70. The inspection team were satisfied that learning opportunities are well documented and regularly reviewed and that there were opportunities for the discussion of responsibilities to take place throughout the placement.

71. The inspection team therefore agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 2.5

72. The documentary evidence confirmed that completion of the first year for the BA apprenticeship, the first semester of the MA apprenticeship and two of the modules for the Step Up programme are required before commencing placement. Across all courses the attendance of the student is also considered as part of readiness for practice.

73. During the inspection, the course team provided further information about the readiness for practice panel that assess students across all of the courses and advised of the contingencies in place if a student does not pass, including for example providing reflections on missed work.

74. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 2.6

75. Prior to the inspection, the university confirmed that employer partners source all practice educators. The university practice learning team attends the Greater Lancashire

Teaching Partnership (GLTP) practice learning subgroup meetings and takes part in the assessment and quality assurance of practice educator portfolios where the qualification has been provided by a local authority.

76. During the inspection, the practice learning team confirmed that a list of all of the practice educators is held by them and is reviewed at meetings to check currency and completion of any Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS) training. They also confirmed that practice educator registration details are included in the PLA and checked by them.

77. The university provide practice educator briefings, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) opportunities and PEPS training.

78. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 2.7

79. Documentary evidence within the course handbook provides guidance on raising concerns and whistleblowing. This is also discussed at the ILP meeting, within the PLA and forms part of the practice learning guidance.

80. The course team provided further details and examples of the concern process during the inspection. They provided examples of issues that have been raised by students and that they take learning from placements and feed this back into their teaching, for example around professional behaviours.

81. The students that met with the inspection team confirmed that they felt confident speaking to tutors about any issues and an example was given of a student being supported through the process.

82. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard three: Course governance, management and quality

Standard 3.1

83. Prior to the inspection, the university provided details of the academic and course leaders for the courses and their responsibilities. They also provided details of the internal validation and review processes for the course and provided a copy of the action log.

84. The apprenticeship courses are part of the GLTP and various subgroups which contribute to the provision of placements, admissions, curriculum development, facilitation of learning and Practice Issue Panels (PIP).

85. The university also has partners outside of the GLTP and meets with these each semester at partnership operational meetings to discuss feedback and improvements.

86. During the inspection, the inspection team met with members of the senior leadership team who provided details of the restructure of the school and support for resourcing the courses.

87. The Step Up programme is part of the East Midlands regional partnership (EMRP) who provide input into the course and placement provision.

88. The inspection team therefore agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 3.2

89. The university have provided a copy of the written agreement template setting out the employer partner obligations for the apprenticeship and confirmed that contracts and agreements are in place for all employer partners.

90. Within the Step Up programme process the identification and allocation of placements is undertaken by the host authority. The placement letter of expectations is required to be signed by any placement provider and the placement audit form is used for quality assurance of the placement.

91. During the inspection, the inspection team heard from the course team more about the process for placement breakdown and the Practice Issues Panel (PIP). Examples were also provided of where this process has been implemented and prior to the inspection the inspection team were provided with the PIP yearly report.

92. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 3.3

93. For apprenticeship students' issues around health, wellbeing and support and relevant policies are discussed within the ILP and discussed at each progress review meeting.

94. The Step Up placements have a formal auditing process which includes health and safety matters and accessibility.

95. Students also receive information through lectures about health and safety whilst on placement.

96. During the inspection, employer partners across the courses provided examples of ways in which they work with the university to ensure the safety and support for students.

97. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 3.4

98. The documentary evidence provided details of the involvement of employers in the apprenticeship courses through the GLTP and its subgroups, involvement in suitability

panels, PIP and readiness for practice panels. There is also involvement from employers through the wider partnership operational meetings.

99. Employer partners are involved in the Step Up programme through the EMRP and there are link leads and a close working partnership with the department for education.

100. During the inspection, the course team confirmed that employer partners take the lead in the placement provision and practice educator capacity and that this will be the same for the proposed MA apprenticeship and this was verified by the employer partners that the inspection team met.

101. The inspection team were therefore satisfied that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 3.5

102. Documentary evidence received prior to the inspection provided information about the various mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of the courses such as the self-analysis reports, operational meetings, Quality Assurance in Practice Learning (QAPL) forms, periodic reviews and module evaluations.

103. During the inspection, the inspection team met with employer partners, people with lived experience and students who confirmed their involvement in the courses through various feedback avenues.

104. The employer partners and people with lived experience that met with the inspection team confirmed that they had not yet been approached for any involvement in the proposed MA apprenticeship. However, the inspection team noted that as the course is not yet running the processes for monitoring, evaluation and improvement to the course were not yet taking place, and that the intention was for the level of involvement to match that of the BA apprenticeship and Step Up programme.

105. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses with a recommendation for the MA apprenticeship course that the course team consider how they will ensure that employers, people with lived experience and students are involved in the processes for monitoring, evaluating and improving the MA apprenticeship. [Full details of the recommendation can be found in the proposed outcomes section of this report.](#)

Standard 3.6

106. The university confirmed prior to the inspection that capacity of placements and practice educators is considered by employer partners during their recruitment planning. In relation to the Step Up programme the employer partners confirm their offer for each tender, but the process is led by the department for education's offer of places.

107. During the inspection, the inspection team spoke with members of the senior leadership team who confirmed their strategy for teaching and resourcing. The employer partners that met with the inspection team also confirmed their considerations of workforce demand and how they consider the logistics of placement capacity.

108. It was noted by the university that there had been an increase in the numbers on the recent BA apprenticeship intake but a drop in numbers on other social work courses that were not the subject of this inspection.

109. The course team were asked to confirm the maximum cohort numbers for each of the courses. They confirmed that the BA apprenticeship has two cohorts per year with a maximum of 100 students per year. The proposed maximum cohort for the MA apprenticeship will be a single cohort of 30 students per year, and the Step Up programme would look to tender for a maximum cohort of 50 students per intake.

110. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 3.7

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

112. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 3.8

113. Prior to the inspection, additional documentary evidence was received in the form of CVs for the course team. The university also confirmed that all staff teaching on the BA apprenticeship have or are working towards Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (HEA), and all apprenticeship/outreach educators have either achieved or are working towards their Associate Fellowship of the HEA.

114. During the inspection, the inspection team heard more about the proposed teaching for the MA apprenticeship. The course team confirmed that the course leads have experience of teaching on the BA apprenticeship and that the teaching team will consist of members of staff who teach on their current MA social work course.

115. The course team also confirmed that the Step Up programme is taught by staff who teach on their current MA social work course and that one of the course leads has previously been involved in running a Step Up programme elsewhere.

116. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 3.9

117. Documentary evidence provided prior to the inspection confirmed that the university's Strategic Data & Policy Insight team work with the school to provide attainment data regarding progression and outcomes, which is also linked to data on equality & diversity.

118. Examples of this were provided in relation to the work done by the decolonisation working group to address the attainment gap and of how disability data has been used to revise guidance for personal tutors.

119. During the inspection, the course team confirmed their awareness of trends and issues and how data from the PIPs is analysed to consider the reasons for placement breakdown. They advised that they take a proactive approach of early intervention and flexibility to look at a student's individual learning needs and pick up issues with academic performance quickly. An example was provided of support given by an apprenticeship/outreach educator.

120. The inspection team were therefore satisfied that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 3.10

121. The university confirmed that all staff are appointed an appraiser who will support them to devise and enact quarterly action plans, which include identifying how development needs will be met. In addition to mandatory training, all staff have the opportunity to spend time in practice and there is a school fund which enables them to access additional CPD opportunities such as specialist training or attend conferences.

122. The GLTP provides information about practitioners who have offered shadowing or joint working opportunities for staff to contact directly to set up opportunities for maintaining knowledge and experience of professional practice.

123. During the inspection, the inspection team heard more about the research opportunities available to the course team and examples of how this has then been incorporated into the teaching on the courses were provided.

124. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard four: Curriculum assessment

Standard 4.1

125. Documentary evidence received prior to the inspection showed evidence of the mapping of the courses against Social Work England's professional standards, the PCF and the apprenticeship standards.

126. During the inspection, the course team provided further information about the scaffolding and incremental approach to the learning journey of students throughout the courses. They confirmed that professional behaviours are considered as part of the course

and the students that met with the inspection team could link their learning to their practice.

127. The inspection team explored with the course team how the proposed MA apprenticeship has been designed to ensure learning at level 7 in line with the requirements of an apprenticeship.

128. The inspection team also heard more from the course team about the blended learning approach to the Step Up programme. The students that met with the inspection team had only been on the course for a brief time but confirmed that their experiences so far had been positive.

129. The inspection team therefore agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 4.2

130. Documentary evidence was provided prior to the inspection in relation to the involvement of employer partners in the BA apprenticeship through the GLTP curriculum development group and the university confirmed that they have a list within the GLTP of a pool of practitioners that they can draw upon to deliver sessions.

131. During the inspection, the course team gave examples of feeding in currency through guest speakers. The people with lived experience that met with the inspection team also confirmed their involvement in simulation activities, teaching on modules, reflective assessments, time to talk work and the Congress Day. Relating to the Step Up programme, the course team confirmed that sessions had already been delivered by practitioners and that members of the Commensus group had been involved in the simulation and providing feedback around this.

132. The inspection team asked both employer partners and people with lived experience what involvement they had had in relation to the design and development of the proposed MA apprenticeship. Both groups that met with the inspection team advised that they had not yet had any involvement in the development of the MA apprenticeship.

133. The course team confirmed that their intention is to include people with lived experience and employer partners using the same approach as the existing courses. The course team advised that the proposed MA apprenticeship was a standing agenda item at the partnership operational group meetings and has been discussed at the Commensus steering group meetings.

134. The inspection team returned to the documentary evidence provided in the form of minutes of meetings of the Commensus group and partnership operational group meetings. Whilst it was noted that there was reference to notification to the Commensus group about a proposed MA apprenticeship course there was no evidence within the minutes of their involvement in the design or development of the course.

135. There was no mention of the MA apprenticeship in the copies of partnership operational group meeting minutes that had been provided as evidence. Whilst the inspection team noted that the curriculum development group minutes provided as documentary evidence indicated the development of the MA apprenticeship, they did not provide evidence of any discussion or input from employer partners about the course.

136. The inspection team noted the intention to include employer partners and people with lived experience in the MA apprenticeship course in the future. However, the inspection team had not been provided with any evidence that this had taken place in the development of the course and curriculum so far. The inspection agreed that there had been opportunities for the university to ensure the involvement of these groups as the course was developed and that this standard had therefore not been met in relation to the MA apprenticeship course.

137. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for the BA apprenticeship and Step Up programme.

138. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is recommending that a condition is set against standards 4.2 for the MA apprenticeship 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 4.3

139. The university provided documentary evidence in relation to their approach to ensuring inclusive delivery of the courses, a flexible and agile approach to teaching and explained how skills scans are used to inform the teaching.

140. During the inspection, the course team and support teams provided examples of reasonable adjustments and how they consider different learning styles by ensuring flexibility through a variety of assessments. They confirmed that students are supported through apprenticeship/outreach educators, achievement coaches and diagnostic tools such as the Basic and Key Skills Builder (BKSB) aptitude test and Quickscreen dyslexia screening test.

141. The inspection team therefore agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 4.4

142. Documentary evidence provided prior to the inspection confirmed the process of review of the courses to ensure currency and that changes in social work practice are

reflected within the curriculum. Examples were provided of specific updates that have been made.

143. During the inspection, the course team provided further examples of how research and experts in different fields of practice are used to feed into the courses and how they consider the future landscape of social work change within the courses.

144. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 4.5

145. Documentary evidence included module descriptors for the courses, and these referenced the use of case studies, practice scenarios and simulated learning activities to support the integration of theory and practice.

146. The employer partners and practice educators that met with the inspection team provided examples of how they draw links between theory and practice with students. The students also confirmed that they understood how what they had learnt will help them in practice.

147. The inspection team therefore agree that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 4.6

148. The university provided documentary evidence of the inter-professional education event with learners from different professions and the skills days that include other professionals.

149. The course team advised the inspection team of the available opportunities for students to work with other professionals on the job and off the job and whilst on placement. Students also confirmed examples of working with other professions during their placement.

150. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 4.7

151. Documentary evidence in the form of module descriptors for the courses included details of the activities undertaken within each module and the number of contact hours and independent learning hours.

152. During the inspection, the inspection team heard more from the course team about how this is managed on the Step Up programme with the blended approach to learning. The course team confirmed how the learning is structured with two masterclasses held in person per module along with online seminars and workbooks that provide further information and reflective activities.

153. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 4.8

154. Documentary evidence received prior to the inspection confirmed that there is a written assessment strategy in place for all of the courses which includes guidance on marking, a range of assessments and allows for a flexible approach to consider different learning styles.

155. During the inspection, the course team confirmed how assessments are reviewed to avoid overassessment and that they use a mix of formative and summative assessments to develop and test student's learning.

156. Quality assurance processes in place include internal and external moderation processes, engagement with the external examiner, course review meetings, and department assessment boards.

157. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 4.9

158. The documentary evidence confirmed that assessments are mapped to the module descriptors with an incremental progression in assessment through a scaffolding approach to learning.

159. The students that met with the inspection team commented upon the wide range of assessment types and that any issues with assignments can be fed back and are acted upon by the course team.

160. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 4.10

161. The documentation provided prior to the inspection confirmed that feedback for module assignments is linked to the learning outcomes so that students can see how/why they have met them or where they have work still to do. The school's minimum standard of feedback is to offer three points the student has done well, identifies three areas for development and provides some overall comments including how future grades might be improved.

162. Students also receive feedback from mentors, at progress reviews and from service users of people with lived experience on their performance. The students that met with the inspection team confirmed that feedback is generally supportive but that there can sometimes be differences dependent upon the marker.

163. The inspection team heard from the course team that there are marking rubrics and standard marking criteria and that module leaders provide guidance to the marking team. There is also a process of secondary moderation.

164. The inspection team were therefore satisfied that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 4.11

165. Prior to the inspection the inspection team reviewed documentary evidence in the form of staff CVs and the external examiner details. The inspection team noted that staff had appropriate expertise to undertake assessments for social work and that the external examiners for the BA apprenticeship and Step Up programme are suitably qualified and on the register.

166. All staff either have formal teaching qualifications or are working towards them or hold Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy in recognition of their teaching experience. Marking teams work together prior to beginning the marking process to ensure that everyone understands the nature of the assessment and how it is aligned with the learning outcomes. There is also guidance from the module leader and discussion about what a good submission will look like.

167. During the inspection, the course team confirmed that an external examiner is yet to be recruited for the MA apprenticeship, though discussions relating to the recruitment of an external examiner have begun.

168. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met for the BA apprenticeship and Step Up programme.

169. However, they noted that without details of the external examiner for the MA apprenticeship they were unable to confirm that the course will have a suitably qualified and experienced external examiner.

170. Following a review of the evidence, the inspection team is recommending that a condition is set against standards 4.11 for the MA apprenticeship 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 4.12

171. Documentary evidence provided prior to the inspection indicated that student progression is monitored through a system called Onefile which can be used to assess

assignment progress and record progress reviews. Direct observations of practice form part of the assessment framework of the placement and students receive feedback from service users and people with lived experience.

172. Students on the apprenticeship courses also complete a work-based skills reflection document each year and achievement coaches work with the course team to monitor at risk students.

173. The Step Up students have a personal development plan that can assist them in reviewing and planning their own learning with the support of staff.

174. During the inspection, the course team advised that they take an early intervention approach to monitoring progress and use course team meetings to consider student progress. The Step Up course team also confirmed how they maintain contact with students and check student engagement with resources.

175. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 4.13

176. The documentary evidence provided examples of evidence informed approaches to practice within the course modules.

177. Students have access to online resources with research and journals through Community Care Inform and the course team provided examples of how research as part of practice is instilled.

178. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard five: Supporting students

Standard 5.1

179. The university provided documentary evidence of various support available to students in relation to careers, counselling and wellbeing.

180. During the inspection, the inspection team met with members of support services who provided more information on various support available to students such as carers support, disability support, hardship and financial support and how students could access services and resources. They advised that they use a system called Starfish through which they can share information about all the students with their consent to the relevant people.

181. The support services confirmed that students on the Step Up programme who may be in a different geographical location can access the same level of support and confirmed that they have agreements in place for students to access local libraries.

182. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 5.2

183. Documentary evidence confirmed the support available from personal tutors, achievement coaches and for apprenticeship students the apprenticeship/outreach educators. During the inspection, the students confirmed that communication with tutors was supportive.

184. During the inspection, the course team and support services provided further information about the general support and bespoke support available for students right from the induction at the start of the courses.

185. The inspection team heard more about the resources available to students through the WISER service, library support, and achievement coaches and how support can be tailored to the individual to help students manage academic pressures in the context of their personal circumstances.

186. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 5.3

187. A copy of the course handbook was provided prior to the inspection which provided reference to the fitness to practise process and practice issues panel which is a sub-committee of the assessment board.

188. During the inspection, the course teams confirmed that students across all of the courses are required to submit an annual self-declaration in relation to suitability. They also provided examples of support provided to students with an emphasis on the early intervention of any issues that arise.

189. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 5.4

190. Prior to the inspection, the university provided documentary evidence about the inclusive support team who offer support to students who have a disability or learning need which affects their studies. This included information about the availability of student wellbeing ambassadors and the Starfish system for recording reasonable adjustments.

191. During the inspection, examples of reasonable adjustments were provided by the course teams, support services, students, employer partners and practice educators. It was confirmed that support was considered within the ILP, PLA and also as part of the pre-placement checklist to ensure that it continues whilst on placement.

192. The inspection team therefore agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 5.5

193. The course handbook provides information about the curriculum, assessments and professional development planning. The practice learning guidance and PLA also provide information in relation to placements.

194. The students that met with the inspection team confirmed that they received sufficient information about the course but indicated that they had had minimal information about careers.

195. It was noted by the inspection team that the documentary evidence had indicated that information about the ASYE and input into teaching about careers took place in the final social work practice module and therefore may not have taken place at the time of the inspection.

196. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses with a recommendation for all of the courses that the course team consider providing more information to students on careers, CPD and ASYE earlier in the courses. [Full details of the recommendation can be found in the proposed outcomes section of this report.](#)

Standard 5.6

197. The documentary evidence indicated that the university has a clear policy in relation to attendance in place and provided information about how attendance is monitored across the courses including whilst on placement.

198. The course team provided further details during the inspection about how attendance is reviewed in practice and how attendance issues are addressed.

199. The students that the inspection team met with confirmed their understanding of the attendance requirements.

200. The inspection team therefore agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 5.7

201. The documentation provided prior to the inspection confirmed that feedback on summative work is provided within fifteen working days and that formative feedback is provided through quizzes, live activities and question and answer sessions.

202. The school's minimum standard of feedback is to offer three points the student has done well, identifies three areas for development and provides some overall comments including how future grades might be improved.

203. The students that met with the inspection team confirmed that feedback is timely and useful but that there can sometimes be differences dependent upon the marker.

204. The inspection team heard from the course team that there are marking rubrics and standard marking criteria and that module leaders provide guidance to the marking team. There is also a process of secondary moderation.

205. The inspection team were therefore satisfied that this standard was met for all of the courses.

Standard 5.8

206. Documentary evidence provided information about the university's academic appeals process, including guidance for students within the course handbook.

207. Students that met with the inspection team confirmed that if they needed further information about appeals, they would feel confident speaking to their tutor about this.

208. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for all of the courses.

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

Standard 6.1

209. As the qualifying courses are a BA (Hons) social work degree apprenticeship, MA social work degree apprenticeship and PG Dip social work Step Up course, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Proposed outcome

210. The inspection team recommend that the BA (Hons) social work degree apprenticeship and the PG Dip social work Step Up courses be approved, and that the MA social work degree apprenticeship be approved with conditions. These will be monitored for completion.

Conditions for the MA social work degree apprenticeship

211. 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.

212. 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 the MA social work degree apprenticeship course at this time.

	Standard not currently met	Condition	Date for submission of evidence	Link
1	Standard 4.2	The education provider will provide evidence that demonstrates that employers and people with lived experience have input into the design, ongoing development and review of the curriculum for the new MA social work degree apprenticeship.	21 st August 2024	Paragraph 138
2	Standard 4.11	The education provider will provide evidence that an appropriately experienced and qualified external examiner has been appointed for the MA social work degree apprenticeship.	1 st September 2024	Paragraph 170

Recommendations

213. 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
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1	1.1 Relating to the MA and BA apprenticeship	The inspectors are recommending that the university reviews how it assures the consistent and fair assessment of all applicants, including by exploring apparent variation in individual employer partners' admissions processes	Paragraph 29
2	1.3 Relating to the MA and BA apprenticeship	The inspectors are recommending that the university consider looking to strengthen the involvement of people with lived experience in the assessment of applicants during the admissions process.	Paragraph 38
3.	3.5 Relating to the MA apprenticeship	The inspectors are recommending that the university consider how they will ensure that people with lived experience have the same level of involvement in regular and effective monitoring, evaluation and improvement systems for the MA social work degree apprenticeship course as with the current courses.	Paragraph 105
4.	5.5 Relating to all of the courses.	The inspectors are recommending that the university consider how they ensure that students on all of the courses are provided with information about the transition to social worker earlier in the courses.	Paragraph 196

Annex 1: Education and training standards summary

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
Admissions			
1.1 Confirm on entry to the course, via a holistic/multi-dimensional assessment process, that applicants: i. have the potential to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the professional standards ii. can demonstrate that they have a good command of English iii. have the capability to meet academic standards; and iv. have the capability to use information and communication technology (ICT) methods and techniques to achieve course outcomes.	☒	☐	☒
1.2 Ensure that applicants' prior relevant experience is considered as part of the admissions processes.	☒	☐	☐
1.3 Ensure that employers, placement providers and people with lived experience of social work are involved in admissions processes.	☒	☐	☒
1.4 Ensure that the admissions processes assess the suitability of applicants, including in relation to their conduct, health and character. This includes criminal conviction checks.	☒	☐	☐
1.5 Ensure that there are equality and diversity policies in relation to applicants and that they are implemented and monitored.	☒	☐	☐
1.6 Ensure that the admissions process gives applicants the information they require to make an informed choice about whether to take up an offer of a place on a course. This will include	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
information about the professional standards, research interests and placement opportunities.			
Learning environment			
2.1 Ensure that students spend at least 200 days (including up to 30 skills days) gaining different experiences and learning in practice settings. Each student will have: i) placements in at least two practice settings providing contrasting experiences; and ii) a minimum of one placement taking place within a statutory setting, providing experience of sufficient numbers of statutory social work tasks involving high risk decision making and legal interventions.	☒	☐	☐
2.2 Provide practice learning opportunities that enable students to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to develop and meet the professional standards.	☒	☐	☐
2.3 Ensure that while on placements, students have appropriate induction, supervision, support, access to resources and a realistic workload.	☒	☐	☐
2.4 Ensure that on placements, students' responsibilities are appropriate for their stage of education and training.	☒	☐	☐
2.5 Ensure that students undergo assessed preparation for direct practice to make sure they are safe to carry out practice learning in a service delivery setting.	☒	☐	☐
2.6 Ensure that practice educators are on the register and that they have the relevant and current knowledge, skills and experience to support safe and effective learning.	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
2.7 Ensure that policies and processes, including for whistleblowing, are in place for students to challenge unsafe behaviours and cultures and organisational wrongdoing, and report concerns openly and safely without fear of adverse consequences.	☒	☐	☐
Course governance, management and quality			
3.1 Ensure courses are supported by a management and governance plan that includes the roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability of individuals and governing groups in the delivery, resourcing and quality management of the course.	☒	☐	☐
3.2 Ensure that they have agreements with placement providers to provide education and training that meets the professional standards and the education and training qualifying standards. This should include necessary consents and ensure placement providers have contingencies in place to deal with practice placement breakdown.	☒	☐	☐
3.3 Ensure that placement providers have the necessary policies and procedures in relation to students' health, wellbeing and risk, and the support systems in place to underpin these.	☒	☐	☐
3.4 Ensure that employers are involved in elements of the course, including but not limited to the management and monitoring of courses and the allocation of practice education.	☒	☐	☐
3.5 Ensure that regular and effective monitoring, evaluation and improvement systems are in place, and that these involve	☒	☐	☒

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
employers, people with lived experience of social work, and students.			
3.6 Ensure that the number of students admitted is aligned to a clear strategy, which includes consideration of local/regional placement capacity.	☒	☐	☐
3.7 Ensure that a lead social worker is in place to hold overall professional responsibility for the course. This person must be appropriately qualified and experienced, and on the register.	☒	☐	☐
3.8 Ensure that there is an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff, with relevant specialist subject knowledge and expertise, to deliver an effective course.	☒	☐	☐
3.9 Evaluate information about students' performance, progression and outcomes, such as the results of exams and assessments, by collecting, analysing and using student data, including data on equality and diversity.	☒	☐	☐
3.10 Ensure that educators are supported to maintain their knowledge and understanding in relation to professional practice.	☒	☐	☐
Curriculum and assessment			
4.1 Ensure that the content, structure and delivery of the training is in accordance with relevant guidance and frameworks and is designed to enable students to demonstrate that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the professional standards.	☒	☐	☐
4.2 Ensure that the views of employers, practitioners and people with lived experience of social work are incorporated into the design,	☐	☒	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
ongoing development and review of the curriculum.			
4.3 Ensure that the course is designed in accordance with equality, diversity and inclusion principles, and human rights and legislative frameworks.	☒	☐	☐
4.4 Ensure that the course is continually updated as a result of developments in research, legislation, government policy and best practice.	☒	☐	☐
4.5 Ensure that the integration of theory and practice is central to the course.	☒	☐	☐
4.6 Ensure that students are given the opportunity to work with, and learn from, other professions in order to support multidisciplinary working, including in integrated settings.	☒	☐	☐
4.7 Ensure that the number of hours spent in structured academic learning under the direction of an educator is sufficient to ensure that students meet the required level of competence.	☒	☐	☐
4.8 Ensure that the assessment strategy and design demonstrate that the assessments are robust, fair, reliable and valid, and that those who successfully complete the course have developed the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the professional standards.	☒	☐	☐
4.9 Ensure that assessments are mapped to the curriculum and are appropriately sequenced to match students' progression through the course.	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
4.10 Ensure students are provided with feedback throughout the course to support their ongoing development.	☒	☐	☐
4.11 Ensure assessments are carried out by people with appropriate expertise, and that external examiner(s) for the course are appropriately qualified and experienced and on the register.	☐	☒	☐
4.12 Ensure that there are systems to manage students' progression, with input from a range of people, to inform decisions about their progression including via direct observation of practice.	☒	☐	☐
4.13 Ensure that the course is designed to enable students to develop an evidence-informed approach to practice, underpinned by skills, knowledge and understanding in relation to research and evaluation.	☒	☐	☐
Supporting students			
5.1 Ensure that students have access to resources to support their health and wellbeing including: i. confidential counselling services; ii. careers advice and support; and iii. occupational health services	☒	☐	☐
5.2 Ensure that students have access to resources to support their academic development including, for example, personal tutors.	☒	☐	☐
5.3 Ensure that there is a thorough and effective process for ensuring the ongoing suitability of students' conduct, character and health.	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
5.4 Make supportive and reasonable adjustments for students with health conditions or impairments to enable them to progress through their course and meet the professional standards, in accordance with relevant legislation.	☒	☐	☐
5.5 Provide information to students about their curriculum, practice placements, assessments and transition to registered social worker including information on requirements for continuing professional development.	☒	☐	☒
5.6 Provide information to students about parts of the course where attendance is mandatory.	☒	☐	☐
5.7 Provide timely and meaningful feedback to students on their progression and performance in assessments.	☒	☐	☐
5.8 Ensure there is an effective process in place for students to make academic appeals.	☒	☐	☐
Level of qualification to apply for entry onto the register			
6.1 The threshold entry route to the register will normally be a bachelor's degree with honours in social work.	☒	☐	☐

Regulator decision

Approved with conditions

Annex 2: Meeting of conditions

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

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

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

	Standard not met	Condition	Recommendation
1			
2			

Findings

Regulator decision