

Inspection Report

Course provider: University of Nottingham

Course approval: BA Social Work, MA Social Work
(& PGDip exit route)

Inspection dates: 6th – 9th August 2024

Report date:	25 th November 2024
Inspector recommendation:	Approved
Regulator decision:	Approved
Date of Regulator decision:	5 th December 2024

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Introduction

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

What we do

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

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

9. During this time a draft plan for the inspection is developed and shared with the education provider, to make sure it is achievable at the point of inspection.
10. Once the inspectors and officer are satisfied that an inspection can take place, this is usually undertaken over a three to four day visit to the education provider. We then draft a report setting out what we found during the inspection and if and how our findings demonstrate that the course meets our standards. Inspections are carried out either on site at the education provider's campus, or remotely using virtual meetings.
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 previously been 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 Nottingham's BA and MA Social Work programmes (including PGDip exit route) 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. The inspection was for reapproval of the existing courses and approval of updated new versions of the courses. As there were no substantial differences in how these awards met the Education and Training Standards, they are being written up together within this report.

Inspection ID	UNR1
Course provider	University of Nottingham
Validating body (if different)	N/A
Courses inspected	BA Social Work, MA Social Work, PGDip Social Work (exit route)
Mode of study	Full time
Maximum student cohort	BA – 40, MA – 20
Date of inspection	6 th – 9 th August 2024
Inspection team	Joseph Hubbard (Education Quality Assurance Officer) Surj Sall-Dullat (Registrant Inspector) Bradley Allan (Lay Inspector)
Inspector recommendation	Approved
Approval outcome	Approved

Language

16. In this document we describe the University of Nottingham as 'the course provider' or 'the university' and we describe the BA Social Work and MA Social Work (inclusive of PGDip exit route) as 'the course/s', 'the BA', 'the MA', 'the PGDip' or 'the programme/s'.

Inspection

17. A remote inspection took place from 6th – 9th August 2024. As part of this process the inspection team met with key stakeholders including students, course staff, employers and placement providers, pastoral and academic support services, practice educators 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 3 MA students from across both year groups and 2 BA students from years 2 and 3. Discussions included admissions, student support, and assessments.

Meetings with course staff

21. Over the course of the inspection, the inspection team met with university staff members from the course team, admissions team, senior management, practice-based learning team, and support services.

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 design and delivery of the university's social work programmes through EPPIC (Experienced Patient and Public Involvement Community) and SEA (Services for Empowerment and Advocacy). Discussions included admissions, readiness for direct practice, training and support.

Meetings with external stakeholders

23. The inspection team met with representatives from placement partners including Nottinghamshire County Council, Derby City Council, Framework, and New Futures. They also met with a number of practice educators who work with the university, including independent practice educators.

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 for this standard including the BA and MA Social Work Admissions Policies. These policies and the evidence mapping form outline the entry requirements and admissions processes of both programmes. All applicants apply through UCAS, and for both programmes must have grade 4/C or above in Maths and English at GCSE level, and an IELTS score of 7.0 or above for international applicants where relevant. To confirm applicants' capability to meet the academic standards required, BA applicants must have ABB at A-level (or equivalent), and MA applicants must have a 2:1 undergraduate degree (or 2:2 in exceptional cases with significant relevant experience). Applicants to the MA must also have at least 400 hours of relevant prior work experience.

26. For applicants who meet these initial requirements, academic capacity and potential to meet the professional standards are further assessed through a written test. The written test for the MA is set at a higher level to reflect the difference in academic level required. Applicants' IT skills are assessed through their ability to navigate the admissions process itself, which is conducted entirely online and requires competence with a variety of IT skills. Applicants who are successful in the written test phase are then interviewed by a panel including a person with lived experience of social work, a registered practitioner from an employer partner, and a member of the social work academic staff. The interview questions and process serve to further assess applicants' ability to meet academic and professional requirements, as well as their verbal command of English. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.2

27. The mapping form states that both lived experience and relevant work experience are considered during the admissions process for the programmes. Applicants to the BA are given a score regarding prior relevant experience ahead of the interview, and the interview questions include aspects around reflecting on prior experience. For the MA, applicants are required to have 400 hours of previous relevant experience, and cannot progress to interview without this prerequisite. MA applicants are also given a score ahead of interview which takes into account the quality of this experience, and the interview includes questions regarding experience. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 1.3

28. The university's documentary evidence outlined that employers, placement providers, and people with lived experience contribute to both the design and the operation of the admissions process. These stakeholders are represented on the Social Work Advisory Board (SWAB), where they can input into decisions about the ongoing development of the admissions process. Employers and practitioners also participate in wider discussions with the university around admissions at a regional level through the D2N2 Teaching Partnership. A video developed by members of SEA is the central focus of the written test, and employers and people with lived experience participated in the development of the interview questions. There is also a practitioner from an employer partner agency and a person with lived experience on each interview panel. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.4

29. The university provided documentary evidence outlining their policies and processes for assessing the suitability of applicants' conduct, character, and health in the admissions process. Evidence included a Declaration of Suitability for Social Work Policy as well as the accompanying declaration form, which requires applicants to provide information on any criminal convictions, cautions, reprimands or warnings, disciplinary history, and lived experience of social work. The form also requires applicants to declare that they will identify and manage any mental or physical health issues such that these pose no risk to themselves or service users.

30. Should applicants declare any relevant issues through the declaration form, these will be discussed at interview and then referred to a suitability panel where appropriate. The suitability panel consists of employer partner representatives, who consider whether the applicant is suitable, including whether they would be willing and able to provide placements for the applicant. A suitability process was provided which has been agreed and implemented across the teaching partnership.

31. All offer-holders must undergo an occupational health assessment, and those who require support are signposted to the university's central Disability Support Services, where a support plan can be developed. Every student joining either programme is subject to a DBS check, and international students are subject to an additional overseas criminal records check. Applicants who disclose having lived experience of social work themselves are signposted to available support, and care is taken to ensure they are not allocated to placements where they have received services. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.5

32. Documentary evidence was provided prior to the inspection indicating that there is a university-wide EDI (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) policy in place which both programmes comply with. Contextual offers are made to eligible students, additional support is provided for care experienced applicants, and taster sessions are run for potential applicants from various historically underrepresented groups. In line with the principles of the EDI policy, all staff involved in admissions are required to complete annual refresher training in EDI and unconscious bias, as are all employer partners and people with lived experience involved with admissions. An email is sent to all applicants providing the opportunity to disclose any additional needs and request reasonable adjustments to the admissions process. The mapping document states that the BA social work programme recruits a substantially higher proportion (79%) of students from 'widening participation' backgrounds than the institution average of 33%. At inspection, the course team stated that the decision to keep the admissions process entirely online has been made largely to avoid the inadvertent exclusion of applicants due to the cost of travelling to campus for interview. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.6

33. Review of the university's course webpages confirmed that clear information is provided regarding staff research interests, placement opportunities, fees and funding, course structure, content, and assessment. Open days and a 'welcome talk' video provide further opportunities for applicants to receive any information they need to make an informed choice about enrolling on either of the programmes. Clear information is also provided on the programme webpages regarding the professional standards and regulation of social work. At inspection, students from both programmes confirmed that they had all the information they needed to make an informed decision as to whether to undertake their course. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard two: Learning environment

Standard 2.1

34. Documentary evidence provided prior to the inspection confirmed that students on both programmes spend the required 200 days of learning in contrasting practice settings. This includes 30 skills days for which attendance is mandatory and monitored, through both manual registers and a digital register system. Students are also required to complete reflective tasks following each skills day, which serve to further evidence attendance and engagement. An audit is undertaken annually of all students' skills days attendance to flag up any missed days which students need to make up. Attendance at placement days is monitored on the Placement Attendance Sheet by the student's practice educator (PE), who signs and submits the form as part of the student's portfolio.

35. To ensure all students access two contrasting placements, including at least one within a statutory setting, the university state that they ensure they keep their admissions numbers across both programmes capped in accordance with local placement availability. Regular partnership discussions are also undertaken with the D2N2 teaching partnership to ensure each student across the TP region has at least one statutory placement. While there are some challenges with placement availability across the region, work is ongoing to address this, for example, through developing partnerships with agencies outside of the TP. At inspection, the placement-based learning team confirmed that despite these challenges they have continued to successfully ensure all students have a statutory placement and only occasionally start placement a few days late. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 2.2

36. The documentary evidence provided by the university for this standard included a set of documentation developed in partnership with the D2N2 teaching partnership. These documents include a Placement Learning System which establishes the commitment of agencies to provide learning opportunities which foster students' ability to meet the professional standards. Also included is a Learning Agreement Meeting Form which gathers information at the start of placement to ensure students will be provided with the necessary learning opportunities to develop the professional standards. A Midway Review Form provides the basis of the midway meeting where students' progress against the learning objectives is checked to ensure they are developing the skills needed to meet the professional standards. Regular placement audits are undertaken to review the learning opportunities available at each placement. The inspection team determined that the standard was met.

Standard 2.3

37. Documentary evidence was provided ahead of the inspection, confirming that a Learning Agreement Meeting Form is completed for each placement which sets out requirements in relation to students' induction, supervision, and support. A learning agreement meeting is then held to confirm mutual understanding of the expectations, and document the agreed induction, supervision, and workload plans. The learning agreement establishes the requirements for all students to receive a comprehensive induction and regular 1 to 1 supervision. Expectations of placement providers are also set out at a regional level in the teaching partnership's Placement Learning System document. An audit process is in place to ensure any non-teaching partnership placements also meet the requirements set out in these documents. The practice learning handbooks for both programmes confirm these requirements in order that students have a further reference point for what they should expect while on placement. At inspection, students confirmed that they all had thorough inductions on their placements, and the practice-based learning team outlined the

comprehensive training which is provided for work-based supervisors to ensure they can supervise students as required. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.4

38. Documentary evidence provided by the university for this standard demonstrated that a range of processes are in place, as discussed within standard 2.3, to establish students' learning needs at the beginning of each placement and ensure their responsibilities on placement are appropriate. The Practice Learning Handbooks lay out the relevant learning level indicators for reference for students, practice educators, and work-based supervisors; these are reiterated through briefings for PEs and work-based supervisors, and through Preparation for Practice days for students. There is a documented Placement Matching Process in place, and each student's individual Practice Learning Information Form records their previous experience and learning requirements to ensure their responsibilities are set at an appropriate level. This is kept under review by the practice educator once the student is on placement, with any concerns about the suitability of a student's responsibilities being flagged through supervision and escalated as necessary. The inspection team determined that the standard was met.

Standard 2.5

39. Prior to inspection, the university outlined the ways in which students' readiness for direct practice is developed and assessed prior to beginning placement. The groundwork for students' ability to practice safely and effectively is laid through consistent attendance at taught content and skills days, the latter of which is monitored as outlined under Standard 2.1. The content of all modules and skills days is mapped to the Professional Capability Framework (PCF) and the professional standards, and students' grasp of the professional standards is assessed through the skills day reflective logs. Prior to beginning their first placement, students on both programmes undergo formal Assessment of Readiness for Direct Practice (ARDP), in which they engage in a role play interview of a person with lived experience of social work. The student's performance in the role play is co-marked by a social work academic and the person with lived experience who the student interviews. The ARDP is a pass/fail assessment, with a re-sit opportunity, and students cannot begin placement unless they have passed the ARDP.

40. At inspection, the people with lived experience who had been involved in the ARDP stated that their evaluation of students' readiness is heard and respected. Employer partners reported that there have been concerns broadly across the teaching partnership regarding a decline in student readiness for direct practice since the Covid 19 pandemic. They confirmed that this has been raised through teaching partnership channels as well as the SWAB, and discussions are underway as to how this can be addressed. This was questioned further by inspectors, and employers confirmed that although some students

are needing extra support to meet expectations, they are not arriving on placement unsafe to practice. The inspection team therefore agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 2.6

41. The university's mapping narrative for this standard stated that the primary way PEs' registration, qualifications, and currency are established is through the D2N2 teaching partnership's Placement Learning System. The teaching partnership system sets out the responsibility of Placement Learning Leads for confirming that all PEs are qualified and on the Social Work England register. The mapping form states that this is then checked by the university prior to students beginning placement. The Placement Learning System also sets out the details of the PE role, including the requirement for PEs to maintain currency, which is facilitated through teaching partnership provision. For PEs outside of the teaching partnership, the university's documented Placement Audit Process Non-TP Placements outlines the process in place to ensure the university carries out all required checks annually, including the qualifications and registration of PEs. The inspection team determined that the standard was met.

42. The inspectors did however agree that, given the recent withdrawal of national funding for teaching partnerships, the university would benefit from a recommendation to establish independent oversight of all PEs' qualifications, registration, and currency, in order that this process can function without the teaching partnership if necessary. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) section of this report.

Standard 2.7

43. Documentary evidence provided prior to the inspection confirmed that there are both formal and informal routes in place for students to report any concerns openly, both at university and on placement. The evidence included university-wide safeguarding, complaints, and whistleblowing policies, and confirmed that students are signposted to all of these policies through the intranet, as well as during welcome week. To ensure students feel able to raise concerns while on placement as well as at university, skills days content includes training on raising concerns and this information is also provided in the Practice Learning Handbooks for both programmes. All placement providers are required to have whistleblowing, complaints, and bullying policies in place, and this is confirmed through both the placement audit process and the Learning Agreement Meeting Form. At inspection, students confirmed that they were made aware of the whistleblowing and complaints policies during induction and also referenced being able to find these in the relevant handbooks. The inspection team determined that this standard was met.

Standard three: Course governance, management and quality

Standard 3.1

44. The university provided documentary evidence ahead of the inspection which confirmed that governance of the programmes is managed through the School of Sociology and Social Policy. The management of the Centre for Social Work consists of a director and two programme directors. Governance of the programmes is in compliance with the university's Quality Manual and associated policies. The evidence provided included flow charts showing the school management and governance structures, as well as the Centre for Social Work management structure. Details of the management and governance of the programmes were triangulated clearly at inspection in discussion with the course team and senior management. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.2

45. Documentary evidence provided prior to the inspection indicated that formal agreements are in place with all placement providers through the Learning Agreement Form. Learning Agreement Forms are completed for every placement and confirm the expectations the university has of placement providers. The Learning Agreement form lays out how placement learning must meet the relevant regulatory standards, and the placement handbooks for each programme outline procedures for dealing with concerns and placement breakdown. Placement providers within the teaching partnership are also subject to the agreements outlined within the D2N2 Memorandum of Understanding and the Placement Learning System document. Non-teaching partnership placement providers are further subject to the Placement Audit Process Non-TP Placements to ensure that they meet the same standards. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.3

46. Prior to inspection, the university confirmed that all necessary health and wellbeing policies and associated expectations are addressed as part of the Learning Agreement Form and meeting. These confirm the students' understanding of policies and procedures whilst on placement. This includes policies relating to health and safety, lone working, and risk assessment. Any specific needs of the student related to health, disability, caring responsibilities, etc. are noted through the Placement Learning Information Form (PLIF) and there is also provision within the Learning Agreement Form to record any reasonable adjustments or additional support required. The mapping form states that it is communicated to students through the Learning Agreement Form and Preparation for Placement days that they can access university support systems while on placement, and how to raise any concerns about their wellbeing. At inspection, support services staff confirmed the various services which are available remotely and outside of office hours, and therefore accessible for students who are on placement. Students from both programmes also confirmed that they received comprehensive induction and support while on placement. The inspection team determined that this standard was met.

Standard 3.4

47. Documentary evidence provided by the university confirmed that employers are involved in the management and monitoring of the programmes through the D2N2 teaching partnership pre-qualification hub, representation on the Social Work Advisory Board and Student-Staff Forum, and membership of fitness to practise, suitability, and interview panels. Practitioners also regularly contribute to the programmes as guest lecturers, and the university works with employers on the allocation of practice education through the Placement Planning Group. At inspection, employer partners confirmed their involvement in these mechanisms, and outlined how the allocation of practice education is managed through the teaching partnership. Employers reported that practitioner involvement in the programmes has been further bolstered to address the recent drop in readiness for practice. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.5

48. Review of the university's documentary evidence submission confirmed that a number of the quality assurance processes in place for the programmes involve employers, students, and people with lived experience of social work. As above, employer partners are involved with monitoring of the programmes through the D2N2 teaching partnership pre-qualification hub, representation on the Social Work Advisory Board and Student-Staff Forum. People with lived experience are also represented on the SWAB, as well as participating in an annual evaluation meeting regarding PWLE involvement on the programmes. Students contribute to programme quality assurance through the Student-Staff Forum and Student Evaluation of Modules. The documentary evidence included a diagram outlining the Annual Curriculum Updating Cycle, and the QAMP (Quality Assurance Monitoring Policy) laid out how placements are evaluated and improved. Quality assurance of taught content is evaluated through the programme boards, Education and Student Experience Committee, and Assessment Scrutiny Board. The inspection team agreed the standard was met.

Standard 3.6

49. The university's documentary evidence submitted for this standard states that the target annual recruitment numbers are no more than 60 students across both programmes, approximately 40 for the BA programme, and 20 for the MA programme. These figures have been determined in collaboration with the teaching partnership to align with placement provision, in accordance with the D2N2 Memorandum of Understanding. At inspection, the course team and senior management reported that admissions numbers have been stable for over two decades, and that they manage this effectively through the 'near miss' and Clearing processes. It was reported that all students are successfully allocated a placement every year, and all students receive at least one statutory placement as required. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 3.7

50. The lead social worker for both programmes is registered with Social Work England and their CV confirms that they are appropriately qualified for the role. The inspection team concluded that the documentary evidence provided in advance of the inspection was sufficient to demonstrate that this standard was met.

Standard 3.8

51. The inspectors' review of the staff profiles provided within the university's evidence submission confirmed that staff are appropriately qualified and experienced, and represent a breadth of specialist knowledge. Documentation was also provided to evidence the expectations on staff to maintain continuing professional development. The inspectors determined that there appeared to be an adequate number of robustly experienced staff across the course team, practice learning team, and wider university support services to deliver the programmes effectively. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 3.9

52. Documentary evidence provided for this standard confirmed that the university monitors student progression throughout the academic year, and regularly evaluates progression with regards to equality and diversity. Evidence included the Sociology and Social Policy School Enhancement Plan, which incorporate data reports for each department. The department data reports cover awarding gaps, continuation data, and student engagement data, and sets out actions and next steps. A separate annual report is produced on student numbers, progression, and outcomes for the social work department, and module convenor analyse assessment outcomes by ethnicity, gender, and disability. This report is discussed at the yearly Social Work Development Day where any issues are addressed and actions agreed. As there is currently an awarding gap on the BA for black and minority ethnicity (BAME) students, staff are working with the school's Black Student Experience Group to consider how this can best be addressed. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 3.10

53. The evidence submission for this standard stated that all social work staff at the university are supported to maintain their knowledge of practice. A number of examples were provided of opportunities staff have to update their understanding of professional practice, including involvement with teaching partnership activity, continuing frontline practice, conducting practice-related research, and work with external organisations such as Social Workers Without Borders. At inspection, senior management and course staff outlined the annual Appraisal and Development Conversation process which contributes to the ongoing development of practice knowledge. All staff have set protected hours for continuing professional development which can be used for activities which support

understanding of current professional practice. The inspection team agreed that this standard had been met.

Standard four: Curriculum assessment

Standard 4.1

54. The documentary evidence provided prior to inspection demonstrated that the programmes have been developed in line with relevant guidance and frameworks. All modules for both programmes have been mapped to Social Work England's Professional Standards and BASW's (British Association of Social Workers) PCF. The mapping document outlined the structure and delivery of the programmes and confirmed that these meet university quality requirements as well as the QAA Subject Benchmark Statements for social work. At inspection, students from both courses were clear about their obligations to meet the professional standards. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.2

55. As discussed within standards 3.4 and 3.5, employers (including practitioners) and people with lived experience are directly involved in the development and review of the programmes through a number of routes. Employer partners are involved with review of the programmes through the D2N2 teaching partnership pre-qualification hub, representation on the Social Work Advisory Board and the Student-Staff Forum. People with lived experience are also represented on the SWAB, as well as participating in an annual evaluation meeting regarding PWLE involvement on the programmes. At inspection, practitioners and people with lived experience confirmed that they are involved in development of the programmes through the above routes as well as more informal collaboration with course staff on programme content. The inspection team agreed the standard was met.

Standard 4.3

56. As discussed within standard 1.5, documentary evidence was provided prior to the inspection indicating that there is a university-wide EDI (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) policy in place which both programmes comply with. At the admissions stage, contextual offers are made to eligible students, additional support is provided for care experienced applicants, and taster sessions are run for potential applicants from various historically underrepresented groups. In line with the principles of the EDI policy, all staff involved in admissions are required to complete annual refresher training in EDI and unconscious bias, as are all employer partners and people with lived experience involved with admissions. An email is sent to all applicants providing the opportunity to disclose any additional needs and request reasonable adjustments to the admissions process. The mapping document states that the BA social work programme recruits a substantially higher proportion (79%) of students from 'widening participation' backgrounds than the institution average of 33%.

57. The evidence mapping form stated that the university holds a gold Athena SWAN Award, while the school itself holds a bronze award. At inspection, the course team stated that the decision to keep the admissions process entirely online has been made largely to avoid the inadvertent exclusion of applicants due to the cost of travelling to campus for interview. The inspectors enquired about provision for the increasing population of international students on the MA programme in particular, and the course team and support services staff were able to outline the support available, including a dedicated wellbeing and support officer for international students. Employer partners noted that EDI principles are actively practiced by the course team, and people with lived experience commented on the quality of the EDI and unconscious bias training they receive from the university for their involvement with admissions. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.4

58. Review of the documentary evidence for this standard confirmed that the teaching materials and content are reviewed every year to ensure the programmes are up to date and relevant to current practice. There is also an expectation for module convenors to maintain their knowledge of current research, legislation, and best practice. This is achieved through conference attendance, training days, teaching partnership participation, and undertaking practice-related research. At inspection, library services staff confirmed that the materials available to students are also reviewed on an ongoing basis and updated accordingly. The inspection team agreed this standard was met.

Standard 4.5

59. Evidence provided prior to inspection indicated that the integration of theory into practice is central to the programmes, with both programmes including a module dedicated to theory. Further content on theory and the application of theory to practice is present through several other modules on the programmes. The theory-specific modules for both programmes take place prior to placement in order that students build an understanding of theory which they can then develop through practice learning. The assessments for each practice placement on both programmes specifically require students to link theory to practice, and there is an expectation that theory is discussed regularly during supervision. At inspection, practice educators discussed how they work with students to integrate theory and practice during individual and group supervision, using teaching tools and reflective practice. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 4.6

60. The university's documentary submission stated that students have many opportunities to work with and learn from other professions, including through the university's dedicated Centre for Interprofessional Education and Learning (CIEL). Activities provided by CIEL allow social work students to learn alongside student doctors, nurses, physiotherapists,

occupational therapists, and others in events such as safeguarding workshops. There is a CIEL Lead within the school who holds overall responsibility for oversight of interprofessional learning provision. In addition, several of the skills days on the programmes are delivered by other professionals such as nurses and magistrates. The Learning Agreement Form requires all students to access interprofessional working opportunities during their placements. At inspection, students confirmed that they had engaged with interprofessional learning opportunities and found these valuable. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 4.7

61. Documentary evidence for this standard confirmed that the designated hours of structured academic learning required are clearly stated in the module handbooks across both programmes. These hours conform to university-wide requirements for contact hours and self-led learning in accordance with the university's Quality Manual. Students are expected to attend at least 80% of taught content, and at inspection course staff explained the structures in place to identify and resolve situations when a student's attendance may not be sufficient to meet the required competence level. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 4.8

62. Review of the documentary evidence for this standard confirmed that an assessment strategy is in place for the programmes which complies with the university's Quality Manual. Every assessment is also mapped to the professional standards. The assessment strategy for the programmes sets out both the processes in place for developing assessments, and the rationale behind the assessment approach. A broad range of assessment types are used across the programmes, including essays, poster presentations, written correspondence, reflective writing, group presentations, and role plays. All module convenors hold two office hours per week to ensure students have the opportunity to seek advice or clarification regarding assessments. Placements are assessed through observed practice, review meetings, and a practice portfolio. An external examiner system provides external scrutiny of standards of assessments; recent external examiner reports were included in the evidence for this standard and were positive. At inspection, students reported that assessments are fair and varied. The inspection team were satisfied that the standard was met.

Standard 4.9

63. The university's evidence submission confirmed that all module assessments are mapped to curriculum content and learning outcomes, and sequenced to match students' progression. The marking criteria for assessments progresses from level to level, and learning outcomes become increasingly complex, as expected. Assessments are also

mapped to the appropriate PCF levels, and follow progression principles laid out in the university's Programme Design and Enhancement Toolkit. It was confirmed in documentation and at inspection that students must successfully complete the assessment of readiness for direct practice before going out on placement, and the first placement before undertaking the final placement. Formative assessments are provided for students in order that they can receive initial feedback to inform areas of development before submitting their summative assessments. Consideration is given to staggering assessments throughout the programmes to avoid unnecessary pressure caused by bunching. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.10

64. The evidence submission for this standard stated that all assessment feedback across the programmes follows university-wide requirements as set out in the Quality Manual. As discussed in standard 4.9, formative assessments are provided for students in order that they can receive initial feedback to inform areas of development before submitting their summative assessments. Feedback is also provided in a more ongoing and informal way through the personal tutoring system, with students' personal tutors providing individual feedback to support their tutees' development. Module convenors provide two office hours per week during which students are able to seek verbal feedback or discuss details of assessment feedback. At inspection, students confirmed that they find feedback clear and constructive. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 4.11

65. Prior to the inspection, the university provided staff profiles confirming that all teaching staff carrying out assessments are appropriately qualified and experienced. Details were also provided for the external examiners for each programme, and the inspection team were able to confirm that the external examiner for the BA programme is qualified and registered with Social Work England. However, while the current external examiner for the MA programme is a qualified and registered social worker, they are registered with the Scottish Social Services Council rather than Social Work England. At this standard requires external examiners to be on the Social Work England register, the inspection team therefore determined that this standard was not met, and at the time of inspection a condition was recommended against the standard. However, prior to the completion of the inspection report, the university were able to evidence that they had appointed a replacement external examiner who is registered with Social Work England as required. The inspectors therefore agreed that a condition was no longer required and this standard was now met.

Standard 4.12

66. The university's documentary evidence included the university's Quality Manual which includes governance mechanisms for student assessment and progression. For both

programmes, students cannot progress to their final year unless they have passed their first placement. Placement assessment includes direct observation of practice by the students' practice educator. Decisions about students' progression are contributed to by module convenors, people with lived experience, social work practitioners, and practice educators. Progression board and exam boards take place for each programme, and there is a university-wide extenuating circumstances policy in place. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 4.13

67. Evidence was provided ahead of inspection that both programmes are designed to enable students to develop an evidence-informed approach to practice. The assessment strategy for the programmes includes analysis and evaluation, which is a mandatory feature of all summative assessments. The learning outcomes for each module include the requirement to demonstrate an evidence-informed approach, and the placement portfolio also requires students to show competence in evidence-based practice. The mapping for this standard listed aspects of various modules which support this learning across both programmes, including through interviewing skills, comparison of research methodology, and poster presentations. The BA programme includes a dedicated module on Research for Social Work, while the MA includes a dissertation. Students who opt to exit the MA through the PGDip exit route learn research methodologies through the Understanding Research for Social Work module. The inspection team determined that this standard was met.

Standard five: Supporting students

Standard 5.1

68. Documentary evidence provided by the university confirmed that students have access to a broad range of support services, including a careers and employability service, confidential counselling service, disability support, and occupational health. In addition to the counselling service, the university provides a Mental Health Advisory Service, safeguarding team, and Report and Support system. Where a student requires reasonable adjustments, the university's disability support service works with the student and placement provider to identify and implement these both on campus and on placement. Students are made familiar with key support services during induction and are signposted to others as appropriate throughout their programmes. At inspection, course and support staff provided further details of the support services available, and students reported having had positive experiences of accessing the breadth of available support when needed. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 5.2

69. The university's documentary evidence submission confirmed that students have access to a range of resources to support their academic development, including personal tutors, a

subject librarian, library resources, study skills programmes through the Academic Support Hub, and IT support. The university uses a combination of permanent staff and sessional tutors for their personal tutoring provision, but ensures that first year BA students are always allocated a permanent member of staff to maximise access to the tutor during this year. At inspection, employer partners queried whether students' experience of personal tutors was consistent between those who have a sessional tutor and those who have a permanent staff tutor. The inspectors raised this with the course team, and enquired as to how they ensure all personal tutors provide the support students need. The course team were able to outline the thorough process they undertake in hiring, training, and supporting sessional tutors to ensure they provide the level of support required. The inspection team determined that the standard was met.

Standard 5.3

70. As discussed within standard 1.4, the university provided documentary evidence outlining their policies and processes for assessing the suitability of applicants' conduct, character, and health in the admissions process. Evidence included a Declaration of Suitability for Social Work Policy as well as the accompanying declaration form, which requires applicants to provide information on any criminal convictions, cautions, reprimands or warnings, disciplinary history, and lived experience of social work. The form also requires applicants to declare that they will identify and manage any mental or physical health issues such that these pose no risk to themselves or service users.

71. Should applicants declare any relevant issues through the declaration form, these will be discussed at interview and then referred to a suitability panel where appropriate. The suitability panel consists of employer partner representatives, who consider whether the applicant is suitable, including whether they would be willing and able to provide placements for the applicant. A suitability process was provided which has been agreed and implemented across the teaching partnership. All offer-holders must undergo an occupational health assessment, and those who require support are signposted to the university's central Disability Support Services, where a support plan can be developed. Every student joining either programme is subject to a DBS check, and international students are subject to an additional overseas criminal records check.

72. Applicants who disclose having lived experience of social work themselves are signposted to available support, and care is taken to ensure they are not allocated to placements where they have received services. The university's assessment of students' ongoing suitability for the programme, and for social work practice, involves oversight from the student's personal tutor, an Academic Misconduct policy, Student Support Process, and annual Declaration of Suitability form. Every student must complete the Declaration of Suitability at the beginning of each academic year, and all forms are then reviewed by the relevant programme director. Any concerns flagged up through the above processes can

then be evaluated and managed through a suitability panel or fitness to practise panel as appropriate. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.4

73. As discussed within standard 1.5, there is a university-wide EDI (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) policy in place which both programmes comply with. At the admissions stage, an email is sent to all applicants providing the opportunity to disclose any additional needs and request reasonable adjustments to the admissions process, if they have not already done so through UCAS. Following the admissions process, students who require reasonable adjustments are referred to the university's central Disability Support Service to develop a disability support plan. There is a dedicated Centre for Social Work Disability Liaison Officer who works with students, personal tutors, and teaching staff to establish how reasonable adjustments can be made. Consideration is also given to how reasonable adjustments can be applied while on placement, and students' needs are taken into account during the placement matching process. At inspection, course staff discussed the importance of being aware that some adjustments would prevent students from meeting the requirements of professional practice, and responding to these situations appropriately. Students confirmed that they have been well supported with reasonable adjustments to both study and assessment as needed. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.5

74. Review of the documentary evidence for this standard confirmed that information provided to applicants and students gives a clear picture of the details of the programmes. Programme handbooks for both courses give information on curriculum, assessment, and placements. The university has a careers and employability service who provide advice and support for seeking employment, and mock interviews are provided which students reported finding very valuable at inspection. A session is delivered to students regarding the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE), with current ASYE students in attendance to provide information and advice. At inspection, students confirmed that they are made aware of the requirement to meet the professional standards and record CPD once registered. Students also reported that the recall day regarding the ASYE and transition to registered social worker was very useful. The inspection team determined that the standard was met.

Standard 5.6

75. Documentary evidence provided prior to the inspection confirmed that the programme handbooks lay out the mandatory attendance requirements for all elements of the courses. This information is also communicated to students during welcome week, and reiterated throughout the programmes as appropriate. Attendance at placement and skills days is monitored and recorded within the placement portfolio by the student's practice educator.

Attendance at taught content is monitored through both a digital system and a paper register student are required to sign to confirm their attendance. A supportive approach is in place to address poor attendance, in recognition that absence can often indicate unmet support needs. In cases of ongoing or serious attendance issues, an Attendance Panel or Fitness to Practise panel may be held where necessary. Attendance at skills days is monitored as discussed in standard 2.1, and students are required to complete make-up activities for any skills days they miss. There are five extra days built into each student's placement to provide a buffer for any missed days due to unexpected leave. At inspection, students were clear about the attendance requirements of their programmes, including the 30 skills days and all placement days. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.7

76. As discussed within standards 4.8 and 4.10, all feedback across the programmes is in compliance with the university Quality Manual and the department's Assessment Strategy. The assessment strategy for the programmes sets out both the processes in place for developing assessments, and the rationale behind the assessment approach. Regarding timeliness, there is a university-wide requirement for assessment feedback to be provided within 15 days. All module convenors hold two office hours per week to ensure students have the opportunity to seek advice or clarification regarding assessment feedback. An external examiner system provides external scrutiny of standards of assessments; recent external examiner reports were included in the evidence for this standard and were positive. At inspection, students reported that assessment feedback is timely and constructive. The inspection team were satisfied that the standard was met.

Standard 5.8

77. Review of the evidence provided prior to inspection confirmed there is a robust university-wide academic appeals process in place, as well as a complaints procedure. Information and guidance on these processes is provided on the university website, and students reported at inspection that they can also access this information on the student intranet. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

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

Standard 6.1

78. As the qualifying courses are a BA, MA, and PGDip exit route, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met for the programmes.

Proposed outcome

The inspection team recommend that the course be approved.

Recommendations

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 2.6	The inspectors are recommending that the university establish independent oversight of all PEs' qualifications, registration, and currency.	Paragraph 41

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.