



Inspection Report

Course provider: University of Bedfordshire

Course approval: PgDip Social Work and PgDip Social Worker (Integrated Apprenticeship)

Inspection dates: 10th to 13th June 2025

Report date:	21/07/2025
Inspector recommendation:	Approved
Regulator decision:	Approved
Date of Regulator decision:	22/09/2025

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Introduction

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

What we do

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

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

officer if they have any queries that may be able to be addressed in advance of the inspection.

9. During this time a draft plan for the inspection is developed and shared with the education provider, to make sure it is achievable at the point of inspection.

10. Once the inspectors and officer are satisfied that an inspection can take place, this is usually undertaken over a three- or four-day visit to the education provider. We then draft a report setting out what we found during the inspection and if and how our findings demonstrate that the course meets our standards.

11. The inspectors may recommend in this report that the course is approved with conditions, without conditions or that it does not meet the criteria for approval.

12. A draft of this report is shared with the education provider, and once we have considered any comments or observations they may wish to provide, we make a final decision about the approval of the course.

13. The decisions that we can make are as follows, that the course is approved without conditions, the course is approved with conditions or that the course does not meet the criteria for approval. The decision, and the report, are then published.

14. If the course is approved with conditions, we will write to the education provider setting out how they can demonstrate they have met the conditions, the action we will take once we decide that the conditions are met, and the action we will take if we decide the conditions are not met.

Summary of Inspection

15. Course details: The University of Bedfordshire wish to run a 19-month Postgraduate Diploma (PgDip) in Social Work which will replace their current MSc Social Work, and a 17-month Postgraduate Diploma (PgDip) Social Worker (Integrated Apprenticeship) which is based upon their Step Up to Social Work PgDip programme.

Inspection ID	UBECPP482 and CPP481
Course provider	University of Bedfordshire
Validating body (if different)	
Course inspected	Postgraduate Diploma (PgDip) in Social Work and Postgraduate Diploma (PgDip) Social Worker (Integrated Apprenticeship)
Mode of Study	Full time
Maximum student cohort	30 for the PgDip Social Work 20 for the PgDip Social Worker (Integrated Apprenticeship)
Proposed first intake	January 2026
Date of inspection	10 to 13 June 2025
Inspection team	Caroline Reynolds, Education Quality Assurance Officer Dr Rebecca Khanna, Lay Inspector Professor Jane Reeves, Registrant Inspector
Inspector recommendation	Approved
Approval outcome	Approved

Language

16. In this document we describe the University of Bedfordshire as ‘the education provider’ or ‘the university’ and we describe the PgDip Social Work and the PgDip Social Work Apprenticeship as ‘the courses’, ‘the programmes’ or the ‘apprenticeship’ where relevant.

Inspection

17. An onsite inspection took place from 10th to 13th June 2025 at the University of Bedfordshire's Luton campus. 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 a mix of 9 students from the current MSc Social Work, and the Step Up to Social Work PgDip programmes. Two of the attendees were student representatives. One attendee was a MSc Social Work 2024 graduate. Discussions included their reflections on their readiness for direct practice, placement experiences including the quality of placements and supervision, feedback, assessments and student support.

Meetings with course staff

21. Over the course of the inspection, the inspection team met with university staff members including the Head of School, the Principal Lecturer and Portfolio Lead for Social Work, senior lecturers, the course leads for these two new programmes, and the Professional Lead for Practice Learning.

22. The inspection team met with the senior management team including the Dean of the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, the Faculty Head of Quality and Practice, the Associate Dean for Education and Student Experience, the university Apprenticeship's Lead, and the Head of Compliance, Apprenticeships and Higher Training Qualifications (HTQs).

23. The inspection team also met with staff involved in practice-based learning and placement provision, staff involved in admissions, the Head of Student Support and the Academic Liaison Librarian who provided an overview of student support services and student's access to academic support including library services.

Meeting with people with lived experience of social work

24. The inspection team met with 4 people with lived experience of social work from the university's Experts by Experience (XBX) group including the group chair. The group was formed in 2003. Discussions included their levels and types of involvement, including

their contribution to these two new courses, and their thoughts on the overall preparedness of students for their first placement.

Meetings with external stakeholders

25. The inspection team met with representatives from placement partners including representatives from Bedford Borough Council, Luton Borough Council, Milton Keynes City Council, Hertfordshire County Council and Buckinghamshire County Council. The inspection team also met with several practice educators (PE) from local councils, including one independent PE.

Findings

26. 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

27. Applicants for the PgDip Social Work, whose UCAS applications meet threshold standards, are invited to a multi-dimensional selection day. Applicants for the PgDip Social Worker (Integrated Apprenticeship) who are nominated by their employers, are also invited to a multi-dimensional selection day.

28. The inspection team heard that selection days are held online, and they comprise a written task, and an individual interview which encompasses a role-play exercise. These selection events review the candidate's potential to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the professional standards, the demonstration of their command of English, their capability to meet academic standards and to use information and communication technology (ICT) methods and techniques to achieve course outcomes.

29. The inspectors reviewed a broad range of documentary evidence including the university's admissions policy, the 800-word written test, interview questions, the role play scenario, the interview score sheets and the guidance for candidates. During the inspection, the course team and admissions staff outlined the process regarding the mitigations in the use of artificial intelligence (AI) within the written test and across the courses.

30. The inspection team concluded that admissions for both programmes demonstrate a holistic multi-dimensional assessment of candidates and were therefore satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 1.2

31. The inspection team heard that course entry requirements are tested within the interview. This draws out the candidate's ability to draw upon their past experiences to demonstrate their aptitude and potential for social work. This was further evidenced within admissions documentation including the interview questions and the university's admissions policy in specific regard to the recognition of prior learning.

32. During the meeting with staff involved in admissions, they outlined how they define relevant prior experience, and how this is assessed through for example, the applicant's personal statement, declaration of work experience, consideration of their lived experience and their transferable skills which is further drawn upon during the interview itself.

33. For the apprenticeship programme, the inspectors heard that employers have their own criteria for putting forward employees for the programme, and this usually includes recognition of their prior work experience. During the inspection meeting with employer partners, they outlined their selection process and spoke of the collaborative and joint approach with the university. The university admissions policy states that candidates undergo a mandatory skills gap analysis if they are applying for a degree apprenticeship.

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

Standard 1.3

35. The inspection team heard that the admissions process involves academics, practitioners from partner authorities and members of the XBX group of people with lived experience of social work.

36. At a strategic level, the inspectors heard that the Executive Board of the Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes (BLMK) Teaching Partnership, together with members of the XBX group, have worked with the course team to develop their admissions strategy, and they have co-produced a range of selection day tasks including interview questions, written task and a role play, as referenced within standard 1.1.

37. The selection day briefing presentation slides, which is explicitly for the XBX group and practitioners, was reviewed by the inspectors. This document highlights the selection process and people's roles within it, the interview day activities, and the linkage with the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF).

38. Evidence of the XBX admissions meeting minutes dated 5 and 7 November 2024 showed the co-production of the group being involved in reviewing interview questions. During the inspection, members of the XBX group highlighted how they were involved in the admissions processes and the training they receive including training in equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), and how the group work together to discuss their availability for attending selection events. They all felt the selection events were well organised, and they felt an equal part of the interview panel.

39. Staff involved in admissions also outlined how members of the XBX group are equitably involved.

40. The apprenticeship/mainstream partnership meeting minutes dated 18 December 2024, encompassed recruitment updates for 2025, and during the meeting with employer partners, they shared their experiences of their involvement within the admissions processes.

41. For the apprenticeship programme, the inspectors heard that before the programme commences, apprentices sign a privacy agreement which was reviewed by the inspection team, where they agree to the terms and conditions of data transfer between their employer and the university.

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

Standard 1.4

43. A broad range of documentary evidence was reviewed for this standard, this included the pre-course declarations, the admissions policy which encompasses information on criminal convictions, the social work safeguarding and fitness to practice handbook, external occupational health referrals documentation, the annual declaration of good health and character and the practice learning handbook.

44. Narrative provided by the course team stated that enhanced criminal conviction checks are carried out by university admissions and this is a requirement before a candidate commences their course. Successful applicants are required to complete pre-course declaration forms which ask for information about any criminal convictions, disciplinary procedures or contact with social services. During the inspection, admissions staff outlined how the safeguarding process works in practice.

45. Applicants who make positive declarations are asked for further information, and they may then be invited to a Safeguarding Panel. Prior to and during the inspection, the inspectors heard further information about the safeguarding panel, membership of the panel, and the processes that are in place.

46. Documentary evidence specifically regarding apprenticeship students stated that in the case of a social work apprentice learner, their employing agency should be

informed of the outcomes of any investigation as this may have a bearing on the apprentice's continuing employment.

47. Examples were provided of the reasonable adjustments that had been put in place for postgraduate and undergraduate social work students, this included providing extra time for the written task for students with dyslexia, and two apprentices from the deaf community were given double the amount of time for the role play exercise and they had access to an interpreter.

48. Admissions staff explained that the university uses an external occupational health supplier (Kays Medical), and once an applicant has accepted a place, where applicable the applicant is referred for an assessment. Admissions staff outlined the time frame for assessment, and they provided an example of a past referral during the inspection.

49. On entry to a programme students complete a health management statement which sets out the agreement to identify and manage any health needs in line with professional requirements.

50. For the apprenticeship programme, additional evidence supplied by the course provider highlighted the formal arrangements that are in place to permit the exchange of student information between the employer and the university, and vice versa as referenced in standard 1.3.

51. The inspection team concluded that there are robust and documented processes in place and determined that this standard was met.

Standard 1.5

52. Narrative provided by the course team stated that admissions data is analysed in relation to ethnicity, gender, disability and care leaver status at university level, with data disaggregated by the faculty. The admissions policy reviewed by the inspection team makes specific reference to the provision for care leavers and applicants with disabilities and it was evident within the access and participation plan that there are sensitive admissions processes in place for care leavers.

53. The inspectors heard that the candidate's invitation to interview information encourages them to inform the university if they require any reasonable adjustments to take part in the selection events.

54. Staff involved in the admissions interviews have training in managing unconscious bias, and training pertaining to EDI. Online links were provided to the inspectors on the EDI and unconscious bias e-learning, for their review. The inspectors were informed that the XBX members also access this online training and during the meeting with XBX group members, they corroborated that they receive training for admissions activities.

Examples of certification of completed training was included within documentary evidence provided by the course team.

55. Staff involved in admissions spoke of how EDI admissions data is reviewed, and additional evidence reviewed by the inspection team included the university's 2024/2025 EDI policy action plan, the 2023/24 EDI annual report, and the EDI strategic plan framework 2022. During the meeting with senior managers, they provided assurance that the EDI policy action plan is being implemented and monitored at programme level, and that EDI is a key strategic priority.

56. The inspection team concluded that there are equality and diversity policies in place in relation to applicants and that they are implemented and monitored and therefore agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.6

57. Prior to the inspection, the inspection team reviewed the university's admissions website information, a marketing video about the current social work courses, and admissions documentation including the admissions presentation, the applicant day schedule and the apprentice briefing sessions.

58. The course team outlined that the university hold open days throughout the year, and those who are considering social work receive a presentation about the respective course including information about teaching and learning, the professional frameworks and placements.

59. Admissions staff outlined that hardship funds are available to help students with living expenses, travel and childcare costs, and during the placement matching process, referenced in standard 2.1, the Practice Learning Team (PLT) consider the location of placements to help students and apprentices minimise travel costs.

60. Applicants are invited to an applicant day event where they experience taster teaching sessions, meet current students or apprentices and ask questions. Briefing events are held online and these provide information around the expectations regarding the professional standards.

61. Clarification was provided that in the event of candidates having further questions, the respective course leads, and the apprenticeship lead are the main point of contact. The inspection team heard that newsletters are sent out to offer holders, and applicant Q&A sessions are frequently arranged.

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

Standard two: Learning environment

Standard 2.1

63. The inspectors heard that the university is committed to the development and maintenance of practice learning opportunities to ensure students receive contrasting and high-quality learning opportunities.

64. Two practice learning placements are arranged, the first is a 70-day placement and the second is 100-days, providing contrasting experiences. The inspection team heard that the 100-day placement takes place within a statutory setting, and some students have both placements within statutory contrasting settings.

65. For the apprenticeship, employers arrange for the two practice learning placements, and apprentices are provided with a bespoke programme of 30 work-based skills days which they undertake in their work-based settings. The inspectors reviewed documentary evidence and heard that placements are arranged directly by employers, and they are quality assured by the PLT through the Placement Audit and Quality Assurance of Practice Learning (QAPL) processes.

66. Placement staff outlined that for the apprenticeship it is highly probable that both placements would take place in statutory settings, and that employer partners will ensure that the final placement is within a contrasting experience of statutory tasks. During the inspection, the course team outlined how they have oversight of the 30 work-based skills days.

67. The inspectors heard that the workload of apprentices is regularly reviewed and audited through the Independent Learning Plan (ILP) within tripartite meetings to ensure that apprentices are undertaking suitable statutory tasks.

68. Students on the PgDip Social Work programme will complete a student profile form which is checked by the tutor, and this aids the placement matching process, referenced in standard 1.6. The inspectors heard that the final placement is where students will gain experience of statutory tasks, and these tasks are recorded in their record of evidence within their placement workbook which is checked by the Practice Educator (PE) and the Practice Assessment Panel (PAP).

69. The inspectors heard that students are provided with a structured programme of at least 30 skills days which are delivered by or with practitioners, social work academics, members of the XBX group or academics from other departments within the university. Examples were provided, and this included specific interprofessional learning, and decision making and analysis. An indicative skills day schedule was also provided as part of the evidence submission.

70. During the inspection, the course team outlined how they ensure statutory tasks have been completed, checked and recorded, and how deficits of tasks are made up if needed.

71. Expectations around placement attendance was explored, including absence management. Attendance requirements are clearly described within both course handbooks. This includes skills days and the arrangements for replacement activities should these be missed.

72. The inspectors reviewed both the 70-day and 100-days placement workbooks. Both workbooks reference the practice learning requirements, the PCF, Social Work England's Professional Standards and the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) Code of Ethics.

73. The inspection team were satisfied that students spend 200 days gaining different experiences and learning in practice settings and concluded that this standard was met.

Standard 2.2

74. Prior to the inspection, documentary evidence was reviewed relating to the quality assurance of learning experiences and the agreements that are in place between the university and the teaching partnership, local authority (LA) and private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector practice partners. Documentation included the LA and PVI Direct Agreement, placement audit documentation, and placement meeting minutes.

75. The inspection team heard that all placements are audited to ensure they provide appropriate learning opportunities. They are audited by the PLT every 3-years or earlier if there are changes to the organisation.

76. For the apprenticeship programme employer partners are responsible for coordinating the audits and sharing the completed documentation with the PLT for oversight and record keeping.

77. The Learning Agreement Meeting (LAM) is held within the first 3 weeks of each placement, and this is attended by the student, the PE, personal academic tutor (PAT), and on-site supervisor (OSS) if applicable. The inspectors heard that these meetings are held either in person or online. During this meeting the supervision and induction arrangements are discussed, the target dates for completion of workbook items, and that the learning opportunities which are linked to the PCF domains are appropriate and sufficient.

78. For the apprenticeship programme the LAM establishes how each apprentice placement proceeds including how individual learning needs will be met.

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

Standard 2.3

80. Clear narrative and documentary evidence provided by the course team included the 70-day and 100-day workbooks, and the evidence in relation to the LAM corroborated that whilst on placements, students have appropriate induction, supervision, support, access to resources, and workload discussions take place.

81. The course team outlined that prior to both placements, students attend a Placement Workshop, facilitated by the PAT.

82. An induction checklist is included within the workbooks, this is where students upload a copy of their induction plan, and the outline of the practice learning arrangements. For the apprenticeship students, the apprentice workbook includes an induction checklist, and an induction plan which outlines the arrangements for the placement.

83. The LAM provided further evidence of the induction process, the content, the roles and responsibilities and the milestones. The inspectors heard that the PAT checks that a Learning Opportunities Chart (LOC) has been completed, this maps the opportunities to the PCF. For the apprentices, the apprenticeship co-ordinator establishes that a LOC has been provided, which again maps the opportunities to the PCF.

84. The inspectors heard that during the LAM, the student, PE and OSS if applicable, discuss the supervision arrangements, the target dates for the submission of critical reflections, the direction observations and other workbook tasks. This is validated by the PAT as part of this meeting.

85. During the midway meeting, the PAT checks that each student has been provided with direct work with people with lived experience of social work. At the end of the placement a QAPL process is undertaken, this encompasses feedback from the PAT, the student, PE, and OSS where relevant.

86. During the inspection meeting with PEs, they outlined how the university encourages the consistency of supervision and assessment, and the mechanisms that are in place such as the templates and guidance contained within the student workbooks.

87. The course team outlined that additional support in the form of virtual drop-in sessions take place, and students are encouraged to attend placement wellbeing cafes.

88. During the meeting with students, they spoke of the quality and frequency of their placement supervision and provided examples of the support they had received such

as being able to bring theory into practice via theory cards and reflection during supervision.

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

Standard 2.4

90. The Placement Learning Handbook reviewed by the inspectors identifies the responsibilities of the PE and the OSS in the overarching assessment and integration of the PCF domains.

91. The LOC, as referred to in standard 2.3, records the individual learning needs within the 70-day and 100-day placements. The LOC is reviewed by the PAT or the apprentice co-ordinator. Completion of the LOC requires discussion to take place between the PE and/or OSS and the apprentice/student regarding their learning needs and how these may be achieved to ensure their responsibilities are appropriate for their stage of education and training.

92. The inspectors heard that the regular review of the students/apprentices learning at their supervision meetings ensures that the relevant evidence of their capability is continually reviewed. This enables the PE and/or OSS to increase the apprentice/student's responsibilities to further develop their skills and knowledge.

93. The inspectors were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 2.5

94. The inspection team heard that apprentices/students complete a DBS and occupational health check as referenced in standard 1.4, to ensure they are safe and well enough to undertake direct practice. For apprentices, it is the responsibility of employers to ensure this takes place, and the university placement co-ordinator keeps a record of this.

95. Students are required to demonstrate their preparedness for placement through the submission of a Readiness for Direct Practice (RfDP) online workbook which is held on PebblePad. The RfDP sits as part of the Developing Academic and Professional Social Work Practice Module, the details of which were reviewed by the inspection team. This module requires the completion of elements including a practice observation, and engagement in tasks with members of the XBX group which they assess. The apprenticeship co-ordinator/PAT provides their evaluation of the process, including providing commentary on the PCF domains, and the portfolio is assessed on a pass/fail basis.

96. A RfDP panel assesses the submission, membership of this panel includes the XB group, PEs, and the apprenticeship co-ordinators/PATs. Guidance is provided to the RfDP panel, and the results are endorsed by an Exam Board.

97. During the inspection meeting, employer partners reflected on how prepared students are for their first placement, and the preparation, induction and supervision they provide with PEs and/or OSS. They spoke of some challenges in relation to the COVID pandemic, non-student/apprentice drivers, and current hybrid working practices.

98. During the meeting with PEs, they stated that generally students are well prepared for their first placement, and if there are any issues these are picked up early through the university's RfDP process.

99. During the meeting with students, they stated that they felt well prepared for placement and talked about the activities to help them prepare including undertaking role play exercises.

100. Within documentation arrangements are described for any apprentice/student who is deemed not ready for practice, and this includes the university providing them with bespoke additional work, formal resits, and if they remain unsuccessful the option to transfer to a non-professional course. During the inspection the course team outlined that some social work students have failed in the past, and they touched upon elements of the RfDP process.

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

Standard 2.6

102. The inspectors reviewed the Practice Educator Register provided by the course team and were informed that the PLT maintains the register of PEs, this includes independent PEs.

103. PEs are required to complete a Practice Educator Profile which details their experience, Social Work England registration number and their qualifications including confirmation that they have successfully completed their training aligned to the PE Professional Standards (PEPS), at stage 1 or 2. This Profile form was also reviewed by the inspection team.

104. The inspectors were informed that the PLT run practitioner workshops during the year, and this includes training for new PEs and OSSs and training for those whose currency has lapsed. The inspection team were given sight of the training dates for 2024-25, together with an example of a communication that was sent out from the university regarding upcoming PLT workshops for placements that are due to commence in the new year for masters and apprenticeship students.

105. Further narrative provided by the course team identified that a bi-annual Practice Educator Conference is hosted within the Teaching Partnership; the last one was hosted in March 2025.

106. During the inspection, the course team outlined how they oversee and monitor the attendance of PEs at workshops and conferences, and PEs spoke of some of the workshops they had attended, including the benefits of attending such as shared peer learning opportunities.

107. The inspectors also heard that PEs and OSSs receive updates regarding any changes to the assessment process to ensure that they are familiar with the student's/apprentice's placement workbooks.

108. From the documentary evidence review, together with information provided prior to and during the inspection, the inspection team concluded that this standard was met.

Standard 2.7

109. The course team provided a copy of the university's Whistleblowing Policy, and an example of an employer partner LA Whistleblowing Policy which the inspection team reviewed. The inspectors heard that the Policy is introduced to students during their induction, and during the LAM the student's PAT or apprenticeship co-ordinator ensures that each student has sight of, and understands, the policy. The inspectors heard that students are expected to be able to identify the lines of responsibility for reporting concerns and know their own rights.

110. The Midway Progress Review Meeting includes a further check by the PAT/apprenticeship co-ordinator regarding any whistleblowing concerns that students may have experienced whilst on placement.

111. During the inspection students confirmed that they were aware of the Whistleblowing Policy and how they would locate the information.

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

Standard three: Course governance, management and quality

Standard 3.1

113. Comprehensive information was provided explaining how both courses are supported and managed within the Faculty of Health & Social Sciences, and the School of Society, Community & Health.

114. A School organogram was provided which included the lines of accountability and roles. The roles of the course team members were set out in the respective course handbooks which the inspectors reviewed.

115. The Terms of Reference Student Outcomes and Quality Assurance Committee identify this as the forum which supports the university's formal oversight of quality assurance at course level, including the evaluation and feedback from stakeholders. The inspectors also heard about the Faculty Teaching Quality and Standards Committee.

116. The course team outlined that course governance includes the Head of School, the Social Work Portfolio Lead, course leaders and unit leads who work alongside the PLT, which comprises academic members of staff and a Practice Learning Co-ordinator.

117. The academic quality of both courses is overseen by the Faculty Head of Quality, and there is an Associate Dean of Partnerships and an Associate Dean of Student Experience, who work with the course team to optimise practice with partners and student experience.

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

Standard 3.2

119. An LA and PVI direct agreement were reviewed by the inspection team, as referenced in standard 2.2. The course team stated that formal written agreements are in place with each LA and PVI placement provider. These agreements stipulate the requirements for review ahead of each placement being utilised to ensure that it meets all the required standards.

120. Information about the Teaching Partnership Memorandum of Co-operation 2024-25 between Bedford Borough Council, Luton Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, and Milton Keynes City Council (BLMK) and the university was also provided. The course team stated that they have a long standing and collaborative relationship with the LA employers through the well-established, non-funding Teaching Partnership.

121. The Teaching Partnership Implementation Group (TPIG) serves as the formal mechanism for involving employer stakeholders in the management, monitoring, and development of the university's qualifying social work programmes.

122. The TPIG and BLMK make up the university's Teaching Partnership, which includes representatives from statutory and voluntary sector employers, people with lived experience of social work, and academic staff.

123. Consents in relation to confidentiality, intellectual property, assignment of rights and obligations and data protection are included within the written agreements, and

signatories are signposted to the practice review process, which is detailed within the Practice Placement Handbook, also reviewed by the inspection team.

124. During the inspection, senior managers and the course team outlined how they work with employer partners to mitigate any risks in relation to the quality and capacity of placements. Staff outlined that they always have sufficient relevant placements for all social work students across all the courses, and they have a stringent QAPL process in place as referenced in standard 2.1.

125. The course team also highlighted how placement breakdowns are currently handled, and they advised that they are currently reviewing this process particularly in regard to apprenticeships to ensure that there is a greater involvement from employers due to the dual nature of the programmes.

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

Standard 3.3

127. A range of documentary evidence was provided by the course team. This included the placement audit, risk assessment, Practice Learning Handbook, details of the external occupational health provider Kays Medical, and the 70-day and 100-day placement handbook, all of which were reviewed by the inspection team.

128. This documentary evidence corroborated that all placements are audited to ensure that placement providers have the relevant policies and procedures in place to support the health and wellbeing of students and apprentices.

129. Placement reviews take place before a new placement is offered, and all placements are reviewed every 3 years or sooner, if necessary, as referenced in standard 2.2. During the inspection, staff involved in practice-based learning and placement provision explained how they oversee the level of risk assessment in practice placements, including the auditing process.

130. Students can access the health and wellbeing guidance through their PebblePad workbook, and the inspectors heard that they must confirm that they have read and understood the information.

131. During the LAM, which is held during the first 3 weeks of each placement, the PAT/apprenticeship co-ordinator checks and confirms that the student/apprentice has read and understood the relevant policies, and as referenced in standards 1.4, 2.5, 4.3, 5.3 and 5.4, students and apprentices are encouraged to declare health issues to enable support to be put in place as required. Subsequently, risk assessments are completed to ensure reasonable adjustments are put in place.

132. As referenced within standards 5.1 and 5.2, the inspection team heard about the broad range of student support available at the university in relation to students' health and wellbeing, including the occupational health assessments which can be requested from the university's external provider, as referenced in standards 1.4, and 4.3.

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

Standard 3.4

134. The inspection team heard that the university has a well-established relationship with employer partners, and this was supported by the Teaching Partnership Memorandum of Cooperation and the Teaching Partnership Terms of Reference, which the inspectors reviewed in addition to minutes of the Teaching Partnership meetings.

135. The inspectors heard that the Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Teaching Partnership (BLMKTP) is committed to the sustainable development of social work education, with the Executive Group of the BLMKTP providing strategic direction within the TPIG 6-weekly meetings. Examples were provided of the current areas of the BLMKTP activity, these included admissions, curriculum and placements, improving data collection and sharing, including in relation to student outcomes and progression.

136. During the inspection, employer partners spoke positively of their close working relationship and approachability with the course team, the investment that the university provides for social work education and their commitment to offering different routes into the social work profession to meet market and student/apprentices needs.

137. The course team's Practice Co-ordinator works closely with each LA and PVIs to match students with suitable practice learning opportunities, and to facilitate matching, students complete profile forms as referenced in standards 1.6 and 2.1.

138. In relation to the apprenticeship programme, employers put candidates forward as highlighted in standard 1.2. The inspection team heard that apprentices usually take their practice learning with their supporting authority, although there are some reciprocal arrangements in place between employers.

139. Prior to and during the inspection, employer partners highlighted their involvement in these new courses, and in the planning for recruitment onto the programmes. Within the 'new course consultation with employers' documentary evidence, this showed the university's decision to adapt their current Step Up to Social Work PgDip programme for the apprenticeship route, and the wish for this new apprenticeship came originally from employer partners.

140. During the inspection, the course team outlined how they consider feedback from practitioners and employers on social work issues and current practice and how this is reflected within the respective unit content, and skills days. The team highlighted their

Teach-to-Teach conversational sessions which they run, which practitioners are invited to with the aim of providing opportunities to share knowledge and understanding.

141. The inspection team were satisfied that employers are involved in elements of these programmes and concluded that this standard was met.

Standard 3.5

142. The inspection team heard, and this was further corroborated by comprehensive documentary evidence, that all practice placements are reviewed and evaluated against the QAPL benchmark standards.

143. Placement providers are required to outline the learning opportunities available within their setting. This information then enables the PLT to assess the placement's ability to support students and apprentices in developing the practical skills, knowledge and understanding necessary to meet the PCF, Social Work England's Professional Standards, and the BASW Code of Ethics.

144. Quality assurance for practice learning includes the collection of feedback from students, academic tutors, onsite supervisors, and PEs through an online survey. This feedback provides an evaluation of each placement, and this information is captured within the QAPL report.

145. The course team participate in the assurance processes which centre on the university's annual report and monitoring cycle, evidenced within the Course Enhancement plan reviewed by the inspectors. This is reviewed at the School Outcomes and Quality Assurance Committee (SOQAC), the Terms of Reference were provided as part of the evidence submission. Course leaders develop annual course enhancement plans, and as part of this student data is reviewed.

146. At an external level, quality enhancement is supported by the External Examiner's feedback and some of the External Examiner's reports were reviewed by the inspectors.

147. Students and apprentices feedback through several mechanisms which was further evidenced within documentation, this includes the Student Experience Committee (SEC) meetings which take place each semester. The SEC is chaired by the Head of School, minutes and an action log are recorded. Student course representatives provide written and oral feedback to the SEC.

148. Course leads also meet with students at the end of each academic year to collect informal verbal feedback. Examples of 'you said, we did' feedback was provided as part of the university's evidence submission, and during the meeting with students, they provided examples of how they have provided feedback on improvements.

149. Students complete the mid unit review for each unit they study, the results of which are disseminated and provided to unit leaders to enable them to consider and implement enhancements for future cohorts.

150. The XBX group hold meetings each term. The group's involvement within all the social work qualifying courses was corroborated by documentary evidence which included the XBX Terms of Reference, and the XBX Group Membership Agreement. During the inspection, the course team explained the ways in which feedback and recommendations from the XBX group is shared, and the ways in which actions are taken forward. During the meeting with members of the XBX group, they stated that they felt well involved, well informed and their specific individual needs were taken into consideration, examples of which were provided to the inspection team.

151. Practitioners from local employers, who work as PEs are included in the Practice Assessment Panels (PAPs), and they are involved in moderating RfDP and placement workbooks, identifying areas for improvement in placement arrangements.

152. The inspectors heard that feedback from students, tutors, onsite supervisors and PEs are collated and shared with partners to inform future practice learning opportunities.

153. As referenced in standard 3.4, the BLMKTP Executive Board and the frequent TP meetings which involve academic members of the course team, and employers, provide the mechanism for continual evaluation and improvement planning to take place.

154. The inspection team determined that effective regular monitoring, evaluation and improvement systems are in place, and these involve a range of stakeholders including employers, the XBX group, and students, and therefore concluded that this standard was met.

Standard 3.6

155. During the inspection meeting with senior managers, they outlined how these two new courses align to their strategic plan, how they are building on an established area of work that fits with their model of continued growth specifically in terms of apprenticeships, and how student numbers take into consideration their local and regional placement capacity.

156. With reference to the apprenticeship programme, the inspectors heard that the numbers of apprentices each year is informed by employer capacity. The BLMKTP stated they want to wish to take two intakes per year, one in September and one in January, with the maximum number for each cohort capped at 20.

157. The new PGDip Social Work will replace the current MSc Social Work course at the university. The MSc recruits around 25 students each year, and the number for the PgDip will be capped at 30. The BLMKTP has made a commitment to support this new programme, and to utilise the placements that have been made available for the MSc course.

158. The inspectors heard that the course team have a strong relationship with the PVI sector, and they will continue to support this new course. During the inspection, the rationale for moving from the MSc to the PgDip was explored. It was evident that there is a clear consideration of environmental and cost factors for applicants, and employers had specifically asked for the apprenticeship route to provide an alternative route into the social work profession which provides cost savings and equality of access for potential applicants/employees.

159. The commitment from employers was further corroborated within the new course consultation documentation provided by the course team. It was evident from documentary evidence and from the meetings with employers and the course team, that there is a good level and range of placements, including placements within statutory settings. Employers also spoke of how they try to accommodate the diverse needs of students and apprentices such as non-drivers, which can be challenging.

160. Placement capacity is supported by the university's post qualifying provision of Practice Educator Stage 1 and Stage 2 training, which ensures a regular input of qualifying or qualified PEs.

161. The inspection team were satisfied that the planned number of students admitted to these two programmes are aligned to a clear strategy, which includes consideration of the local/regional placement capacity and concluded that this standard was met.

Standard 3.7

162. Prior to the inspection, the inspection team reviewed the curriculum vitae (CV) of the professional lead for social work. They have overall professional responsibility for these two new courses and are involved in the development and delivery of the curriculum.

163. The individual is a registered social worker who is active in research and is a published author of social work literature. The professional lead for social work is a member of the Faculty Teaching Quality Standards Committee (FTQSC) and is the co-ordinator for the XBX group.

164. The inspection team were satisfied that this individual is appropriately qualified and experienced and therefore agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.8

165. The university provided CVs of the core academic social work course team which showed their wide and varied experience, including their practice and research expertise.

166. The inspectors heard that generally, lecturers work across all qualifying social work courses in accordance with their expertise and specialisms. During the inspection, the inspection team met with most of the team, who spoke fluently about their research, and specialist subject areas.

167. In addition to the core team, hourly-paid lecturers undertake sessional teaching and tutoring. The inspectors heard that the university may recruit one or two senior lecturers in time for these new courses to start in January 2026, and they plan to retire their current MSc course as highlighted in standard 3.6. The course team provided assurance that if student numbers increase on social work programmes, staff numbers would in turn increase. There is an 18:1 student to staff ratio for all pre-qualifying social work courses.

168. Academic staff undertake course and unit co-ordination, personal academic tutoring and for apprentices, apprenticeship co-ordination. Course and unit co-ordinators are responsible for the curriculum and assessment design and development, and the quality assurance processes.

169. During the inspection, employer partners, PEs and members of the XBX group spoke positively of the approachability and the timely responses they receive from members of the course team. One PE spoke of the complex issue they had with a student, and that the academic member of staff involved was very supportive and approachable.

170. Students also spoke of the availability and responsiveness of their PAT, and the level of support they received. Overall, they felt well supported.

171. Within the wider meetings (with those staff involved in admissions, the practice learning team and student support), it was evident that there are appropriately qualified staff in these specialist areas.

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

Standard 3.9

173. The Course Enhancement Plan as referenced within standards 3.5 and 4.4 is the cornerstone of retention, progression and continuation, and this includes the analysis of data on equality and diversity. Furthermore, the inspectors heard that there are plans

in place at a corporate level to develop dashboards providing granular details to inform faculty and course planning.

174. The SOQAC meetings, referenced within standard 3.5, is held every semester. The SOQAC monitors exam board results for each student in every unit of study and considers the progression and retention of students and apprentices.

175. The inspectors heard that exam boards sit at the end of each semester and any student who fails an assignment or is given an extension longer than 14 days will have an opportunity to resit the assessment ahead of the following exam board.

176. The inspection team concluded that the university evaluates information regarding the students and apprentices' progression, performance, and outcomes by collecting, analysing and using student data, including data on equality and diversity, and determined that this standard was met.

Standard 3.10

177. There is provision via an annual staff review process for staff to identify targets for their continuous professional development (CPD), alongside time allocations. A copy of the Annual Workload Plan was reviewed by the inspection team.

178. The inspectors heard that each member of staff has a research mentor, who provides support for their research and publication activities from 50 to 250 hours per year. In addition, 30 hours per year is allocated to staff for social work practice related activities.

179. As part of the Social Work England registration requirements, staff are required to engage in regular and recorded CPD activities as a condition of their registration. Examples were provided of recent CPD activities which included continued involvement in practice, organised educational activities and shadowing practice.

180. During the inspection, the inspection team were provided with a list of research that had been undertaken by members of the social work course team, and during the inspection meeting with the senior leadership team they highlighted that experienced staff mentor less experienced staff in terms of their research development.

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

Standard four: Curriculum assessment

Standard 4.1

182. During the inspection, the course team gave a presentation which introduced the course team members, outlined the rationale for these two courses and the

differentiation between them. The presentation provided a thorough overview of the structure and content of both programmes including all unit content and assessments.

183. The team highlighted that the apprenticeship programme content reflects that of the university's current Step Up to Social Work PgDip programme, the inspectors heard that the structure of this programme works well, and some additional improvements have been made for this new apprenticeship programme.

184. Documentary evidence provided by the course team clearly showed that these two new programmes are fully mapped to Social Work England's Professional Standards, and PCF. The final stage units were also mapped to the Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS) for Social Workers in Adult Services and for Child and Family Practitioners as part of the preparation for qualified practice.

185. For the apprenticeship programme, the units were mapped to the Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSBs) expected of social work apprentices.

186. Both courses comprise four units of study, and as referenced within standard 2.1, two assessed practice placements of 70 and 100 days, and 30 skills days. All units are mapped to the Professional Standards and during the inspection, the course team presented how the units flow and fit together.

187. The course team's highlighted that their approach to teaching and learning is underpinned by relational pedagogy. The team highlighted that they teach inclusively, using the Universal Design for Learning approach, ensuring that their teaching is flexible to suit students and apprentices different learning styles and needs.

188. It was clear within the documentary evidence, and from the information provided during the inspection that the curriculum is well structured and the content is designed to enable students to develop their knowledge and skills to meet the professional standards.

189. The inspection team concluded that the content, structure and delivery of the training for these two new courses is in accordance with relevant guidance and frameworks and were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 4.2

190. The inspection team heard that these two new courses will utilise the same processes to ensure that the views of employers, practitioners and people with lived experience of social work are incorporated into the design, ongoing development and review of the curriculum.

191. Documentary evidence in relation to the involvement of the XBX group in the design, ongoing development and review of the curriculum was provided by the course

team. This included the XBX Terms of Reference, and the XBX Agreement, as referenced in standard 3.5. It was clear from speaking to members of the XBX group that the group has been established for some time, and some members have been involved for over 15 years. Members of the group who attended the inspection meeting spoke of their involvement in the current social work courses, from admissions through to inputting in the design of the courses. However, they stated that have not been directly involved in the design of these new courses.

192. As referenced within standards 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6, the partnership meetings provide a forum for both employer and XBX views. Documentary evidence including minutes from meetings of the Teaching Partnership, and the new course consultation documentation was provided as documentary evidence. As referenced within standard 3.6, employers had clearly requested the apprenticeship route.

193. During the inspection meeting with employer partners, they corroborated that they had specifically asked for an apprenticeship route and outlined how their ongoing views on the development of social work courses is taken into consideration, including the mechanisms that are in place to provide feedback.

194. The course team explained that due to declining numbers on the MSc Social Work with the cost of fees being a contributory factor, the PgDip route will cost approximately £6,000 less than the MSc over the two years and will provide a more cost-effective alternative into the social work profession.

195. The inspection team heard that the curriculum content for all social work courses including the readiness for practice activities, unit assessments and teaching delivery has direct input from practitioners and members of the XBX group.

196. The inspectors also heard that the XBX group contribute regularly to the bi-monthly Social Work Newsletter, which is sent out to all social work students, a copy of which the inspectors reviewed.

197. The inspection team felt assured that this standard was met.

198. Following the meeting with some members of the XBX group, the inspection team is making a recommendation in relation to standard 4.2. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [proposed outcome section](#).

Standard 4.3

199. As highlighted within standards 1.4, 2.5, 4.3, 5.3 and 5.4, upon accepting a place on one of these courses, students and apprentices are encouraged to declare any health conditions and impairments, and they are subsequently directed to the appropriate student support service. As highlighted within standards 1.4, 3.3 and 4.3, an external supplier Kays Medical provide the occupational health services. The

inspection team heard that the occupational health assessments inform the arrangements for any adjustments required.

200. The inspection team reviewed comprehensive documentary evidence which included the university's website containing information on the student support services, risk assessment and pre-course declarations documentation, and the Student Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Policy.

201. In regard to practice placements for the apprenticeship programme, any identified support needs relevant for placement inform the planning and adjustments in discussion with the apprentice, the PE and or OSS. For the PGDip programme, this involves the student, PAT and the placement provider.

202. Students with support needs identified in a Learning and Teaching Support Assessment are offered support. Examples were provided by the course team, these included students being permitted to record lectures, access to a hearing loop, and dyslexia students applying for an assessment submission extension.

203. Each unit information form includes an Equality Impact Assessment that considers any issues that might present barriers to inclusion or success.

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

Standard 4.4

205. The inspection team heard that the university's annual monitoring process makes provision for the regular review and development of courses, with the Course Enhancement Plan, (referenced within standards 3.5, 3.9 and 4.4) template asking for comments on the drivers for development, including how unit leaders plan to address those developments.

206. Recent examples were provided of teaching enhancements which included the incorporation of the new law on domestic violence, and the recognition of digital teaching methods as well as challenges in assessment including the use of AI by students.

207. Where there are substantive changes to course or unit information, these are submitted for approval to the Faculty Teaching Quality Standards Committee (FTQSC). The Terms of Reference for the FTQSC were reviewed by the inspection team, together with an example Course Enhancement Plan.

208. The involvement of practitioners and teaching staff in practice, ensures that teaching in relation to practice is kept up to date. The course team run workshops for health and social care practitioners to develop their skills, knowledge, and experience in delivering taught content, details of which were provided. The inspectors also heard

that unit reading lists and teaching schedules are reviewed regularly in preparation for delivery and updates are included as necessary.

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

Standard 4.5

210. Information provided by the course team referred to the integration of theory through academic study and practice learning placements, which was further evidenced from a range of documentary evidence including the unit information forms, the 70-day and 100-day placement workbooks and the provisional course timetables.

211. The inspection team heard that the academic learning and placement practice run in parallel across both programmes, as does the involvement of the XBX group members, and practitioners within the academic curriculum.

212. The inspectors reviewed the programme units which demonstrated that theory and legislative frameworks are embedded across both courses, this is particularly evident within the law module and the reflective practice and research unit.

213. For the apprenticeship programme, prior to the apprentices commencing each unit they meet with their apprenticeship co-ordinator to identify how the unit learning outcomes relate to the outcomes for work-based learning in relation to the KSBs. These are then monitored and tracked every 6 weeks.

214. During the inspection meeting with PEs, they outlined the approaches they take to integrate theory into supervision meetings, including taking into consideration the preferred learning styles of students and apprentices.

215. During the meeting with students, they spoke of their experiences of the teaching of theory and the integration of research into their course through, for example, case studies and writing reflective pieces of work.

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

Standard 4.6

217. Senior managers outlined that interprofessional learning is a central part of their strategy and the XBX group is a key part of this. The inspectors heard that there is a clear faculty strategy in place for interprofessional learning, and a faculty interprofessional learning lead has been appointed who will focus specifically on interprofessional learning and drive that across the faculty, working with teams to develop and embed interprofessional learning. The post holder will be in place from August 2025.

218. The inspection team heard that social work students currently engage in direct academic learning alongside other students undertaking subjects such as health, allied health, and policing. During the inspection, the inspection team visited the simulation suite 'Sim Street' which facilitates this, as referenced within standard 4.9.

219. Within practice learning, the reviews of placements are overseen by the PLT. These reviews include ensuring that students and apprentices have opportunities to learn from other professionals, this is discussed as part of LAM and is recorded within the LOC.

220. Interagency working is explicitly addressed within the learning outcomes in the Research Informed Social Work Practice unit, and there are a variety of events which take place to encourage interprofessional learning. This is evidenced within the World Social Work Day flyer, and a variety of workshops, the details of which were reviewed by the inspection team. The inspectors heard that there are two members of the team who are interprofessional learning leads, and they are instrumental in ensuring the success of previous interprofessional learning workshops continue.

221. Students shared their experiences and highlights of interprofessional learning during the inspection and spoke positively about working with students from other disciplines, including the input of practitioners and guest speakers.

222. The inspection team determined that this standard was met.

Standard 4.7

223. An example unit teaching plan was provided which demonstrated the number of hours required and how this is aggregated. The inspectors heard that all units have been validated in line with the university's expectations of contact hours, and study time which is detailed within each specific unit. The overall expectation is 10 hours in total per academic credit.

224. The scheduled, guided and independent learning materials are broken down for students and apprentice's week by week and these are held on the Bedfordshire Resources for Education Online (BREO) portal. During the inspection, the lead social worker provided an overview of the VLE which included PebblePad and BREO, and the inspectors were provided with information on the teaching schedules and the structure for these new programmes.

225. The inspection team were confident that the number of hours spent in structured academic learning under the direction of an educator is sufficient to ensure students meet the required level of competence, and concluded this standard was met.

Standard 4.8

226. The inspection team heard that university regulations stipulate that all students must pass every assessment to complete their course and gain the professional qualifying award.

227. An Assessment Handbook, which was reviewed by the inspection team, is provided to students via BREO, this encompasses the process of assessment within academic and practice learning, including information on grading, moderation, referrals and plagiarism.

228. All unit information forms are mapped to Social Work England's Professional Standards, and these include the details of the assessments, the unit learning outcome(s) and the threshold at which students need to meet to pass. These details are included within the brief for each assessment, and the marking rubric shows students/apprentices the criteria against which they work will be assessed, and the standards they must demonstrate to reach the various grade levels.

229. The inspection team heard that students and apprentices are assessed on placement by qualified PEs, and tasks are recorded within the placement workbooks, including the recording of direct observations of practice, critical reflective accounts, and records of evidence.

230. The inspection team also heard that the brief for each assessment is discussed within a scheduled teaching session to support students in understanding the requirements. Students may apply for mitigation and exception requests may be made available for students whose support needs are such that they may require assessment adaptations.

231. Within the inspection meeting with students, they provided examples of their experience of the timing of assessments, and an example was provided of an improvement that had been made for the second year of study in relation to the number of written assignments.

232. The inspection team were satisfied this standard was met.

Standard 4.9

233. The course team outlined that assessments on both programmes are distributed across 19 months for the PgDip course, and 17 months for the apprenticeship route to avoid assessment bunching and pressure points for students, as well as staff marking, alongside responding to the needs of their employer partners.

234. The social work course team utilise the university's Curriculum Change Framework to ensure that assessments have elements of choice or flexibility, they are

inclusive, authentic and linked to practice. The sequencing of assessments to positively support student progression was further explored during the inspection meeting with the course team. The team provided assurance that assessment sequencing would be reviewed annually, and adjustments would be made if needed. The team highlighted that there is time designated for assignment preparation within all unit teaching plans.

235. The inspection team determined all assessments are mapped to the curriculum and they are appropriately sequenced to match students' progression through these new programmes and therefore concluded that standard was met.

Standard 4.10

236. Comprehensive feedback documentary evidence was provided prior to the inspection, this included the 70-day and 100-day placement practice assessment panel feedback, the XBX feedback form, and an assignment briefs folder containing the marks and feedback information.

237. The inspectors heard that students receive feedback on each academic assessment using a 2Q format which was developed with input from the Students' Union. As well as stating the grade, the feedback focuses on what students have done well and areas for development. Within the assessment briefs, the date by which students can expect to receive feedback is captured, the university standard is within 20 working days.

238. During the meeting with members of the XBX group, they provided examples of the mechanisms used to provide feedback to students. This included formal meetings, being equally involved in the interview processes and providing feedback via interprofessional training days and role play exercises.

239. Students and apprentices' preparedness for practice is informed by the XBX group members, and the PATs/apprenticeship co-ordinators as part of the RfDP.

240. The requirements for formal supervision whilst on practice learning placements is an hour for each 5 days of placement. PEs are explicitly expected to review the student's/apprentice's progress against the PCF, Social Work England's Professional Standards and BASW's Code of Ethics.

241. Placement workbooks are moderated at a Placement Assessment Panel (PAP), which comprises academics, XBX group members, and PEs.

242. Students also receive feedback within a 10-day deadline on their learning logs and direct observations.

243. Within the meeting with students, they stated that they are provided with timely feedback on their written assessments, and overall felt it was very thorough, detailed and constructive.

244. As evidenced within documentation, as well as summative assessments these two new courses include formative tasks, for example there is a formative assignment early on within the course in which students reflect upon their own learning from their induction and other early activities. The inspectors reviewed PowerPoint slides from a support session that was held with students to support them in completing a formative assignment.

245. Further documentary evidence supplied by the course team included past External Examiners reports which reported on the authenticity of assessments, and ongoing improvements such as the scope to evolve assessment design in line with developments in generative AI.

246. The inspection team agreed that students are provided with feedback throughout the course to support their ongoing development and were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 4.11

247. As referenced under standards 3.7 and 3.8, the inspection team reviewed the CVs of the professional lead for social work and members of the course team which showed their academic qualifications, practice knowledge and research interests. The inspection team subsequently checked the team's Social Work England registration numbers.

248. The course provider stipulated the level of qualifications and the range of relevant knowledge and experience required of External Examiners, and they provided the details of their current External Examiners including their Social Work England registration numbers. At the time of the inspection, an External Examiner had not been appointed for these new programmes, an appointment was pending. The inspection team therefore determined that this standard was not met, and at the time of the inspection a condition was recommended against this standard.

249. However, prior to the completion of the inspection report, the university were able to evidence that they had appointed an External Examiner who is registered with Social Work England as required. The inspectors therefore agreed that a condition was no longer warranted and were satisfied that this standard was now met.

Standard 4.12

250. Prior to the inspection, a website link was provided containing information on the university's exam boards, and within the respective Course Handbooks there was clear information explaining the role of the Examination Boards.

251. The inspectors heard that the university regulations include standard requirements for student progression. It was clear within documentary evidence that all units for both programmes must be passed in order for a student to progress, and there is no guaranteed right of a repeat placement should a student fail.

252. Student's/apprentice's progression is reviewed at the Prep Meetings; these meetings comprise the portfolio lead, board secretary and they are chaired by the Head of School. The main Examination Board confirms the grades and progression, and these are ratified by the Scheme Board.

253. As part of the RfDP process, members of the XBX group observe students undertaking formative tasks, and they provide verbal and written feedback to students.

254. During the 70-day and 100-day placements, students' practice is observed at least 3 times by qualified professionals. Whilst some of these observations may be undertaken by an OSS, it is stipulated that the final observation must be undertaken by the PE who has the responsibility for passing or failing the student.

255. During the inspection, staff involved in practice-based learning and placement provision outlined the circumstances in which a student or apprentice would not be allowed to repeat a placement, and how this is managed through the university's processes, including the role of all parties involved.

256. The inspection team concluded that there are systems in place to manage students' progression, and these have input from a range of people, and therefore agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.13

257. A range of documentary evidence was provided in advance of the inspection. This included the Placement Workbooks which demonstrated that a self-assessment component is held at the midway and final review point. The RfDP workbook showed the tasks including a reflective element.

258. The Developing Academic and Professional Social Work Practice unit includes an explicit focus on theories and research related to child development, and the Research Informed Social Work Practice unit focuses on accessing, applying and disseminated research within the interprofessional context.

259. On the apprenticeship programme, a mentor provides reflections on the apprentice's practice.

260. The inspectors heard that students are expected to engage with research which is listed within their unit reading lists, and they are encouraged to attend events run by the Making Research Count (MRC), a national research dissemination initiative which is free to students.

261. Graduates who wish to continue with their learning in relation to research will have the opportunity to undertake a 60-credit dissertation unit.

262. During the inspection, the inspection team were taken on a tour of the university's simulation facilities 'Sim Street' at their Luton campus, where it was clearly evident that there has been investment in the breadth of facilities available to students. These two new courses will be based at the Luton campus, and students will have access to a range of environments to practice their skills and role play.

263. The inspection team were satisfied this standard was met.

Standard five: Supporting students

Standard 5.1

264. The inspectors were directed to a range of online student support information which included details on the support available to students regarding mental health, community and faith, mitigation, student engagement and student financial support. The inspectors heard that students can self-refer or be referred by staff to the confidential counselling services at any point in their student journey.

265. The inspectors reviewed information about the university's Curriculum Change Programme which has a specific focus on enhancing employability, inclusivity and mental wellbeing across all courses. The inspectors heard that since the COVID pandemic, emotional first aid and emotional resilience sessions have been introduced for all social work students, and the course team outlined that students have access to wellbeing cafes within their placement workshops, which was evidence within the Placement Support for Students document.

266. During the inspection, the Head of Student Support provided a comprehensive overview of the broad range of support services, student engagement and mitigation including the patterns of support that social work students generally access, including outlining how students access these services.

267. The Academic Liaison Librarian also provided an overview of the services available to students such as the Study Hub, library resources, online reading lists and Studiocity which provides instant feedback on referencing and academic writing.

268. The inspectors heard that current students and alumni are able to access the Careers and Employability services, and apprenticeship students are supported by their workplace in taking forward their social work career.

269. The inspection team concluded that students have access to a range of resources to support student health and wellbeing, including counselling services, careers advice and support, and occupational health services, and therefore deemed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.2

270. The inspection team reviewed documentary evidence which included the university's Personal Academic Tutoring Policy encompassing the Student Success Framework. The Assessment Handbook provided comprehensive guidance on study skills, and covered issues such as plagiarism and how work is marked and moderated. All students receive guidance on the appropriate use of AI in their assessment briefs, and via wider information within the university's AI Policy.

271. Students are allocated a PAT, and apprentice students are allocated an apprenticeship co-ordinator. The inspectors heard that students usually have the same PAT or apprenticeship co-ordinator for the duration of their course. During the inspection, the course team outlined these roles in more detail, including how the role holders support students.

272. The role holders provide group and individual tutorials and attend at least two placement meetings per placement, as well as reviewing regularly the student's progress against their PebblePad workbook. For apprentice students, the apprenticeship co-ordinator regularly reviews the student's progress against their Individual Learning Plans in conjunction with their mentor.

273. As outlined in standard 5.1, the range of support services were highlighted to the inspectors. Social work students have input from the School's Academic Liaison Librarian, and additional support is available via the university's Study Hub and the online skills service, Studiocity, which offers students feedback on their work prior to submission.

274. The inspectors heard that students also have access to BREO, where there is a page for every unit they study, and learning topics are clearly laid out. Consistency is ensured via a BREO audit, and this is carried out by course leads and the portfolio leads.

275. The inspectors were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 5.3

276. As highlighted in standard 1.4, suitability is first considered as part of the admissions process. Students complete a Health Management Statement where declarations are considered.

277. The inspectors heard that at the beginning of each year of study, students complete an Annual Declaration of Good Health and Good Character. The inspectors reviewed the corresponding documentary evidence, including the Safeguarding and Fitness to Practice (FtP) Handbook. Concerns regarding fitness to practice are dealt with as part of the university's FtP process, and the inspectors heard that the university works closely with employer partners should any concerns about an apprentices' suitability arise.

278. Examples were provided by students during the inspection of some of their self-declarations such as dyslexia, ADHD, pregnancy and carer responsibilities and they spoke positively of the support they received from student services, occupational health, their PAT and PE.

279. The inspection team determined that there is a thorough and effective process for ensuring the ongoing suitability of students' conduct, character and health, and were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 5.4

280. Information provided by the course team identified the key points during the student and apprentice lifecycle where any learning support needs are encouraged to be shared, this was further corroborated within documentary evidence. As highlighted in standards 1.4, 2.5, 4.3, and 5.3, students are encouraged from the point of application to share any learning support needs. This was evidenced within the invitation to interview documentary evidence.

281. The inspectors heard about the occupational health process and the subsequent yearly health declarations which are intended to ensure students receive reasonable adjustments and appropriate support to complete their course.

282. As highlighted within standard 5.1, the inspectors heard about the broad range of student support services, including in relation to mental health and disability.

283. Whilst on placement the PAT or the apprenticeship co-ordinator review whether within the LAM any necessary risk assessments have been completed, and health and safety concerns are discussed.

284. Staff involved in practice-based learning and placement provision outlined the wide range of support that is available to students whilst on placement. This included

monthly wellbeing cafes that students and apprentices can attend, toolkits, and student support signposting information is contained within placement workbooks.

285. During the meeting with PEs they spoke of the range of support the university provides students, how this was accessed, and the effectiveness of those levels of support.

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

Standard 5.5

287. The inspectors heard that students receive information about their curriculum from the beginning of their course. Information including the professional expectations are embedded within taught sessions, in particular within the Preparation for the Readiness for Direct Practice assessment.

288. At the beginning of each level of study, students receive a handbook detailing their assessments, including the unit teaching schedules and materials.

289. To prepare students for transitioning, career preparation sessions are provided, and this includes students having access to a platform called Handshake, which allows them to explore employment opportunities. Students also have access to AI powered tools for mock interviews and CV checking.

290. The inspectors heard that ASYE leads from different local authorities are invited in to help students prepare for their ASYE within the Research Informed Social Work Practice unit. Towards the end of every pre-qualifying social work course, learning and development representatives from local employer partner organisations are invited into the university to talk to students about their recruitment processes and ASYE programmes. An example PowerPoint presentation was provided from one of the university's local partners as part of the evidence submission.

291. The university runs an ASYE conference every year at their Putteridge Bury campus where final year students from all courses learn more about partner recruitment opportunities and ASYE programmes.

292. The inspectors agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.6

293. The course team provided assurance that all parts of these courses are mandatory and there are no optional units. The expectation regarding attendance is detailed within the respective Course Handbook and at the start of each academic year students sign the Attendance, Punctuality and Engagement Agreement, copies of which were reviewed by the inspection team.

294. The course co-ordinator monitors registers so that any issues in relation to health or other issues can be identified. The inspection team heard that if students are absent for any reason, they are expected to make up for any missed academic learning by accessing materials.

295. In relation to the skills days, more than 30 days are included within the timetable so that students who miss any are still able to achieve the full 30 days.

296. During the meeting with PEs, they outlined how student attendance was monitored during practice placements including the checking of workbooks, PebblePad, and the sharing of calendars.

297. Students spoke of how their attendance is monitored on campus including scanning in, and lecturers taking registers.

298. The inspectors concluded that comprehensive information is provided to students about attendance and were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 5.7

299. As referenced in standard 4.10, the inspectors reviewed the Assessment Handbook, the Course Handbook and assignment briefs which highlighted the dates that student feedback is due. External Examiner reports were also reviewed which provided an external viewpoint.

300. Student feedback is provided using the university's 2Q assessment feedback form within 20 working days. The course team outlined that PATs and apprenticeship co-ordinators provide regular tutorials to students to review their overall progress, and signpost them to the relevant support services as required.

301. The inspection team were satisfied that students are provided with timely and meaningful feedback on their progression and performance in assessment, and concluded this standard was met.

Standard 5.8

302. The course team provided the website link to the university's academic appeals process, and the inspectors reviewed the Academic Appeals Policy. Students are signposted to the academic appeals information within the Assessment Handbook, also reviewed by the inspection team. The inspection team heard that the Assessment Handbook is provided to students at the beginning of their course.

303. The course team provided assurance that appeals are treated fairly, and students will not suffer any disadvantage or recrimination as a result of making an appeal.

304. During the inspection students stated that they were aware of the academic appeals process and they knew where to find the information.

305. The inspection team determined that this standard was met.

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

Standard 6.1

306. As the qualifying courses are the PgDip in Social Work and the PgDip Social Worker (Integrated Apprenticeship), the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Proposed outcome

The inspection team recommend that the courses be approved.

Recommendations

The inspectors identified the following recommendation for the education provider. This recommendation highlights areas that the education provider may wish to consider. The recommendation does not affect any decision relating to course approval.

	Standard	Detail	Link
1	Standard 4.2	The inspectors are recommending that the XBX group are specifically involved in the design and development of units and modules for these two new programmes.	Paragraph 190

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	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
take up an offer of a place on a course. This will include 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	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
current knowledge, skills and experience to support safe and effective learning.			
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.	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
3.5 Ensure that regular and effective monitoring, evaluation and improvement systems are in place, and that these involve 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	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendati on given
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, 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	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendati on given
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.	☒	☐	☐
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	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendati on given
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.	☒	☐	☐
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			

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendati on given
6.1 The threshold entry route to the register will normally be a bachelor’s degree with honours in social work.	☒	☐	☐

Regulator decision

Approved.