

Inspection Report

Course provider: Buckinghamshire New University

Course approval: PGDip Step Up to Social Work, MSc Social Work

Inspection dates: 2nd – 5th May 2023

Report date:	25 th July 2023
Inspector recommendation:	Approved with conditions
Regulator decision:	Approved with conditions
Date of Regulator decision:	1 st September 2023
Date conditions met and approved:	11 th December 2024

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Introduction

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

What we do

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

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

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

Summary of Inspection

15. Buckinghamshire New University's PGDip Step Up to Social Work and MSc Social Work courses were inspected as part of the Social Work England reapproval cycle, whereby all course providers with qualifying social work courses will be inspected against the new Education and Training Standards 2021. While the two programmes have differences in some areas, there is substantial crossover in how they meet the standards, therefore they will both be written up in this single report.

Inspection ID	BNUR2
Course provider	Buckinghamshire New University
Validating body (if different)	N/A
Course inspected	PGDip Step Up to Social Work and MSc Social Work (current and new)
Mode of study	Full time
Maximum student cohort	20
Date of inspection	2 nd – 5 th May 2023
Inspection team	Joseph Hubbard (Education Quality Assurance Officer) Sophie Kane (Lay Inspector) Lisa Brett (Registrant Inspector)
Inspector recommendation	Approved with conditions
Approval outcome	Approved with conditions

Language

16. In this document we describe Buckinghamshire New University as 'the education provider' or 'the university' and we describe the PGDip Step Up to Social Work as 'the course' or 'the programme'.

Inspection

17. A remote inspection took place from 2nd – 5th May 2023. Two inspection teams participated due to the number of courses being inspected; this team covered the current and new MSc programmes and the PGDip Step Up, and the other team covered the current and new BSc programmes.

18. As part of this process the inspection teams met with key stakeholders including students, course staff, employers and people with lived experience of social work. 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 five students; two Step Up students, and three MSc students from across both year groups. Discussions included support services, finance, social work registration, placement quality, readiness for practice, assessment, and admissions.

Meetings with course staff

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

Meeting with people with lived experience of social work

22. The inspection team met with people with lived experience of social work (PWLE) who have been involved with various aspects of the university's social work programmes. Discussions included recruitment, readiness for direct practice, course development, training, and support.

Meetings with external stakeholders

23. The inspection team met with representatives from placement partners including Slough Children First, Brighter Futures for Children, Buckinghamshire Adults' Services, Opthalis, Buckinghamshire Children's Services, and Berkshire Children's Services. The inspection team also met with three practice educators, and had a follow-up meeting with a group of Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS) students in order to gain further insight into the university's practice education provision.

Findings

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

Standard one: Admissions

Standard 1.1

25. The university provided documentary evidence for this standard, confirming their entry requirements and details of their four-stage admissions process. This consisted of an application form, written test, group interview, and individual interview. Further evidence provided details of the group interview, how applicants are assessed, and the makeup of interview panels. The details of the admissions process were triangulated at inspection through meetings with the admissions team, course team, people with lived experience, and students. Much of the admissions process for the Step Up programme is prescribed by the Department for Education and subject to national quality assurance. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.2

26. The university's documentary evidence did not provide detail of how previous experience is taken into account during the admissions process, therefore the inspectors sought to clarify and triangulate this at inspection. The admissions team and course team confirmed that prior experience is taken into account through the application form and the relevance of applicants' previous experience is drawn out at interview stage. For the Step Up, applicants are required to have 6 months' minimum relevant experience. There is also a university-wide process regarding consideration of accredited prior learning where applicable. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 1.3

27. Documentary evidence was provided to demonstrate that employer partners and people with lived experience of social work are involved in selection interviews alongside academic staff. At inspection, people with lived experience and employer partners confirmed they are involved in various stages of admissions, and that their involvement is meaningful. People with lived experience stated that their view on applicants' suitability has the same weight as all other interview panel members. For the Step Up, some aspects such as role play scenarios are provided by the DfE; these are also delivered with involvement from people with lived experience. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 1.4

28. The university provided documentary evidence which confirmed that students are required to complete initial and annual declarations to disclose any criminal convictions or relevant health conditions. At inspection, the course team outlined the procedure for instances where applicants declare a conviction, which includes consultation with employer partners and the regulator where appropriate to help inform suitability decisions. For the MSc, a DBS check is completed once students are accepted onto the course; for the Step-Up, a DBS check is completed during the admissions process. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 1.5

29. Documentary evidence was provided prior to the inspection showing that there are a range of university-wide equality and diversity policies in place. During inspection meetings, admissions and course staff confirmed that there is a specific section on the application form for applicants to state if they require reasonable adjustments. If an applicant does disclose that they need reasonable adjustments, the disability and inclusion team are notified and confer with the course team to put the necessary adjustments in place.

30. It was confirmed that all university employees undertake mandatory Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) training when they are first employed and are required to update this every two years. Employer partners involved in admissions undertake regular EDI training as required by their own employers. As people with lived experience also sit on admissions panels, they were asked at inspection whether they receive any EDI training and confirmed they have access to this via the university, but it is not mandatory. As mandatory EDI training for staff involved in admissions is not a requirement of this standard, the inspection team agreed that the standard was met, with a recommendation around requiring all interview panel members to undergo regular EDI training. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) section of this report.

Standard 1.6

31. Prior to the inspection, the university provided the programme specification and programme handbook to evidence this standard, however they later confirmed that the handbook is only made available to offer holders rather than applicants at earlier stages. The Programme Specification document makes clear the additional cost of the courses and expectations for students to fund these, but does not provide information regarding funding support. The document outlines assessment methods and also specifies that successful completion of the course allows students to apply for Social Work England registration.

32. At inspection, staff confirmed that relevant information is provided on the university website and at induction, though the latter takes place once a place on the course has already been accepted. Students from both courses understood that they would need to apply to register with Social Work England once they graduated.

33. Course team staff stated that the Step Up induction is delivered a couple of months ahead of course start to ensure students understand the intensity of the programme. Step Up students confirmed that it was made very clear to them how intensive the course would be. The inspection team felt that ideally steps could be taken to ensure the intensity of the course is fully clear earlier in the recruitment process, before a place is accepted. Therefore for the Step Up the inspection team agreed that the standard was met, with a recommendation around emphasising the intensiveness of the course earlier in the recruitment cycle (i.e. prior to induction). Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) section of this report.

34. Students on the MSc confirmed that there was plenty of detailed information about the course available on the website, as well as verbally from university staff. Students stated that they were provided with information relating to financial implications of the course, but not always early enough or in enough detail. Some students had found themselves struggling to manage additional costs, and clearer advice earlier on may have improved their ability to prepare for this. The inspection team felt that this standard was not met for the MSc, as the information available to students prior to accepting a place on the course was not sufficient to fully inform their decision, particularly around financial practicalities. A condition is therefore being recommended against this standard to ensure that detailed financial information is available to applicants before they accept a place. Consideration was given to whether the findings identified would mean that the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it was deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard. The inspection team is confident that once this standard is met, a further inspection of the course would not be required. Full details of the conditions, monitoring and approval can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) sections of this report.

Standard two: Learning environment

Standard 2.1

35. The programme specification and other documents provided prior to inspection set out the requirement that students spend at least 200 days on placement gaining different experiences. The inspectors brought questions to inspection regarding the content and monitoring of skills days, how the university ensures sufficient statutory tasks are undertaken, and the process for ensuring students undertake contrasting placements.

36. At inspection, practice learning staff were able to confirm that the current MSc programme includes 30 skills days within the placement provision, and the new MSc will instead feature 10 skills days in order to maximise students' settling and integration on placement. The Step Up includes one 80-day placement plus 2 skills days, one 110-day placement plus 3 skills days, and a further 10 skills days as part of the preparation for direct

practice module. The inspection team received and reviewed example placement offer documents during inspection, and confirmed that these outline the placement tasks including identifying which are statutory tasks. Staff confirmed that placement allocations are arranged closely with the placement coordinator, reviewing each students' placement application form and available placement offers to ensure the requirements for statutory tasks and contrasting settings are met. For the Step Up, as both of a student's placements take place in the same local authority, particular care is given to ensuring contrasting placement experiences by using a spreadsheet showing which teams each student has been allocated for their 70 and 100 day placements. Inspectors determined that their queries around skills days and placement allocations had been satisfactorily addressed at inspection, and agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 2.2

37. As noted in relation to Standard 2.1, the inspection team came into the inspection with questions around determination of statutory and contrasting placements, and allocation of these to ensure placements provide students with the necessary learning opportunities. The documentary evidence provided prior to inspection confirmed that the PLA provides a structured approach to students' learning once on placement, but did not specify how students are matched to placements based on their learning needs.

38. At inspection, practice-based learning staff confirmed that placement allocations are arranged with the placement coordinator, reviewing each students' placement application form and the available placement offer documents to ensure students' learning needs will be met. The placement offer documents and practice learning agreements reviewed by the inspection team included clear and detailed learning objectives and outcomes, and the PLA is mapped extensively to all relevant standards. Students from both courses were clear that they arrived on placement feeling well-prepared and were able to put their academic learning into practice. Practice educators confirmed that their placements provided the right opportunities for students to develop the skills and knowledge required. The inspection team were satisfied that the standard was met.

Standard 2.3

39. The inspectors agreed that this standard was likely to be met based on the documentary evidence, pending triangulation with stakeholders at inspection. The practice learning handbook provides comprehensive information for students, practice educators, and employers regarding responsibilities and expectations for induction, supervision, learning objectives, and assessment. The placement learning agreement (PLA) requires information on the induction process, and students have to verify which aspects they have completed, when, and how.

40. At inspection, students and university staff confirmed that robust procedures are in use to ensure appropriate induction, supervision, and support. However, practice educators working with MSc students raised some concerns around inadequate communication from the university regarding students' support needs, with important information not being shared in a timely manner or at all. Several PEPS student practice educators also stated that they had not had a mentor assigned in a timely manner or at all, which impacted on their ability to ensure quality supervision of students.

41. Following the discussion with practice educators, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met for the Step Up but requires a condition for the MSc to ensure that all practice educators are receiving the information and support they require to support students. Consideration was given to whether the findings identified would mean that the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it was deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard. The inspection team is confident that once this standard is met, a further inspection of the course would not be required. Full details of the conditions, monitoring and approval can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) sections of this report.

Standard 2.4

42. Documentary evidence provided by the university for this standard demonstrated that the practice placement handbook provides clear information to all parties around the placement milestones (initial meeting, mid-way, and final reviews). The example placement offer documents reviewed during inspection included further mechanisms for ensuring volume and level of work is appropriate.

43. At inspection, students confirmed that they found their responsibilities to be well matched to their stage in the programme. Practice educators and practice-based learning staff were asked how issues with workload or responsibilities are handled, and both groups were able to confirm how the processes above ensure this is largely avoided and addressed if it does arise. Practice educators stated that they are able to negotiate with placements around providing responsibilities which meet students' different learning needs, including ensuring exceptional students are being appropriately challenged. They confirmed that they feel able to advocate for students to make sure they are not being treated as a member of staff. The inspection team were satisfied that the standard was met.

Standard 2.5

44. Prior to inspection, programme specifications were provided confirming there are modules on each course dedicated to assessed preparation for direct practice, and students are not able to begin their first placement until they have passed this module. The modules are assessed by a written submission and a role play involving people with lived experience of social work.

45. At inspection, the people with lived experience who are involved in this module confirmed they find it to be an effective tool for assessing students' readiness for placement. Students found the involvement of people with lived experience particularly valuable, and felt that the module prepared them well for direct practice. Staff also confirmed that a number of skills days are also geared towards preparation for placement. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 2.6

46. Evidence provided by the university ahead of the inspection stated that the university monitors practice educators' (PEs) qualifications and currency using an annual audit process, whereby PEs confirm their details. At inspection, it was confirmed that the PEs' registration number and qualifications are also required to be listed on the placement offer document. Staff confirmed that all PEs are required to complete the annual audit, and that the university keeps a central spreadsheet of all PEs' up to date qualification and currency information.

47. The inspection team requested clarification of whether the university obtain evidence or complete checks on the information they hold regarding PEs, and staff confirmed that they rely on PEs' employers for confirmation of their credentials. As this standard expects the course provider themselves to have responsibility for confirming this information, the inspection team agreed the standard was not met. A condition is therefore being recommended against this standard to ensure that the course provider achieves the required oversight of practice educators' registration, qualifications, and currency. Consideration was given as to whether the findings identified would mean that the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it was deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard. The inspection team is confident that once this standard is met, a further inspection of the course would not be required. Full details of the conditions, monitoring and approval can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) sections of this report.

Standard 2.7

48. Documentary evidence provided prior to the inspection confirmed that the placement learning agreement includes a grid for students to complete, verifying they have read a range of key policies. A whistleblowing policy is in place and signposted to within the programme handbook. At inspection, students were able to confirm that they have been able to raise concerns where necessary and been fully supported in doing so. The inspection team determined that this standard was met.

Standard three: Course governance, management and quality

Standard 3.1

49. The university provided documentary evidence ahead of the inspection which outlined details of the management and governance structure of the courses. This information confirmed that the deputy head of school is the professional lead for social work, and is a qualified and registered social worker. Each course has a course leader and practice lead who manage academic and practice learning aspects of the courses, respectively. The inspection team were satisfied that there is a clear staff structure. Quality assurance processes include external examiners, programme committee meetings, module and placement evaluation forms, QAPL, and an annual monitoring process which produces a School Enhancement Report.

50. During the inspection, senior management cited the Placement Hub as a key aspect of the quality assurance framework around the courses. However, when course staff were asked about the role of the Placement Hub, they stated it was more of a management function than quality assurance. On further discussion, it was clarified that the Placement Hub is a very new initiative, with its audit process having been sent to departments for review only a couple of weeks prior to the inspection. The inspectors felt that while the standard was met, the lack of clarity regarding the role and remit of the Placement Hub warranted a recommendation. A recommendation is therefore being applied to this standard for both courses, around ensuring robust communication between course-level and school-level governance structures following introduction of the Placement Hub. Full details of the conditions, monitoring and approval can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) sections of this report.

Standard 3.2

51. Documentary evidence provided prior to the inspection indicated that practice learning agreements are in place for all placements, and there is information within the placement handbook regarding placement breakdown, roles and responsibilities, and support for students who fail a placement. An example form was also provided for students to request support in resolving placement issues. At inspection, staff, students, and employers were able to confirm the procedure that is followed in cases of placement issues or placement breakdown. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 3.3

52. Prior to inspection, the university provided their programme handbook which details support services available for students, however it was not clear how these support structures translate to placement. At inspection, practice-based learning staff were able to confirm that all placements undergo initial checks and are then audited every time a student is matched with the placement. Practice learning agreements include a checklist of policies and procedures which placement settings must have in place, however the inspectors were not assured that the university's audit process is robust enough to ensure support systems are in place to underpin these policies.

53. The inspection team agreed that this standard was not met. A condition is therefore being recommended against this standard to ensure that the university develops more robust oversight of placement providers' support systems for students. Consideration was given to whether the findings identified would mean that the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it was deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard. The inspection team is confident that once this standard is met, a further inspection of the course would not be required. Full details of the conditions, monitoring and approval can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) sections of this report.

Standard 3.4

54. Documentary evidence provided by the university confirmed employers are involved in the admissions process but did not provide any information regarding employer involvement in course development or delivery. Evidence was provided regarding a one-off 'away day' programme review event involving employers and people with lived experience, however no information was provided regarding any regular formal routes of employer involvement.

55. At inspection, practice educators and employer partners were able to provide examples of feedback they had provided informally to the university, which was listened to, but were not able to cite any regular formal avenues for their input on the programmes. University staff were similarly able to cite a number of examples of input they received from employers and used to improve the programmes, but no formal employer involvement processes or systems. While there is no regular communication with employers for the MSc programme, the Step Up coordinator confirmed that regular meetings are held with employers every 2 - 3 months regarding the Step Up.

56. On review of all the evidence available at the point of inspection, the inspection team felt that this standard was met for the Step Up, with a [recommendation](#) around formalising the existing employer engagement methods. The inspection team agreed that the standard was not met for the MSc, with a condition needed against this standard to ensure that the university develops formal processes for employer involvement in the course. Consideration was given to whether the findings identified would mean that the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it was deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard. The inspection team is confident that once this standard is met, a further inspection of the course would not be required. Full details of the conditions, monitoring and approval can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) sections of this report.

Standard 3.5

57. As discussed under Standard 3.1, the university's documentary evidence indicated quality assurance processes in place include external examiners, QAPL, and an annual monitoring process which produces a school enhancement report. No information was provided within the documentary evidence regarding involvement of employers, people with lived experience, or students in course evaluation and improvement.

58. At inspection, staff confirmed that student representatives attend programme committee meetings twice a year, and that students complete module and placement evaluation forms which inform course improvements. Staff confirmed that employers and people with lived experience are invited to the committee meetings, but acknowledged that attendance from these groups is low. Students confirmed that they have been asked for their input on review of the courses, and that staff have come back to inform them of changes made as a result of their input. People with lived experience confirmed that they are involved in many aspects of the programmes, and feel able to provide feedback and input via the staff coordinator for their group, though there is no formal avenue for gathering their input. As discussed within standard 3.4, employers confirmed effective ad hoc communication with the university to provide feedback, but the only regular avenue for this is the aforementioned meetings with the Step Up coordinator, who then passes any input regarding the MSc or BSc on to the relevant staff.

59. As the evidence for this standard aligns closely with Standard 3.4 and raises the same issues around formalising employer engagement, the inspection team agreed that the same recommendation for Step Up and condition for the MSc are appropriate for this standard. The inspection team felt that this standard was met for the Step Up, with a [recommendation](#) around formalising the existing employer engagement methods. The inspection team agreed that the standard was not met for the MSc, with a condition needed against this standard to ensure that the university develops formal processes for employer involvement in the course. Consideration was given to whether the findings identified would mean that the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it was deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard. The inspection team is confident that once this standard is met, a further inspection of the course would not be required. Full details of the conditions, monitoring and approval can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) sections of this report.

Standard 3.6

60. The university's documentary evidence submitted for this standard indicated a reduction in target number of students for the MSc, but no clear strategy or policy document on student numbers. At inspection, narrative was provided by senior management regarding intake numbers, and staff confirmed that they speak with other local HEIs to check for any issues with student numbers, but this information gathering is done informally. The Step Up programme has a regional board which includes employer involvement, and central strategy on student numbers from the Department for Education.

61. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for the Step Up due to the robust formal procedures and strategy in place. The inspection team agreed that the evidence indicated this standard was not met for the MSc, and a condition was necessary to ensure the university develops a clear strategy for determining student numbers on this course, including more robust consideration of local placement capacity. Consideration was given to whether the findings identified would mean that the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it was deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard. The inspection team is confident that once this standard is met, a further inspection of the course would not be required. Full details of the conditions, monitoring and approval can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) sections of this report.

Standard 3.7

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

Standard 3.8

63. The inspectors' review of the staff CVs provided within the university's documentary evidence confirmed that staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. Teaching staff have a wide range of experience and research interests, and there is a clear business planning cycle to plan academic staff to student ratios. At inspection, senior management confirmed that there is capacity within the staff team to accommodate unexpected absences. Senior staff confirmed that specialist associate lecturers come in to cover specific areas of expertise as needed, following a robust HR process to ensure they are appropriately qualified and experienced. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.9

64. Prior to inspection, the university provided a school enhancement report which evidences collection and analysis of student attainment data, including with reference to equality and diversity. A significant attainment gap between white and Black and minority ethnicity (BAME) students is noted in the report, with 57% of white students and 20% of Black students receiving a 2:1 or 1st classification in 21/22. There is an ongoing action on the report for the school to reduce the attainment gap; the steps listed against this action are timetabled learning development unit sessions on academic writing skills, personal tutors signposting to student services support, and regular review of curriculum content for inclusivity.

65. At inspection, practice educators also raised some concerns around lower retention and attainment for BAME students, as well as anecdotally poorer outcomes beyond graduation such as Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) failures. Inspectors enquired with staff regarding course-level attainment and EDI data, as the evidence provided was at school level only. Staff confirmed that this data is not available at course level for the MSc or Step Up, as the courses are too small for data to be anonymised effectively. Staff confirmed that in addition to the mandatory academic skills sessions, work is being done on a race equality charter, decolonising the curriculum, and undertaking EDI impact assessments for any changes to policy.

66. As both the data itself and practice educators' comments flagged up issues with BAME student outcomes, and the evidence provided indicated an action plan at school level but not subject area or course level, the inspection team felt that this standard was not currently met, and a condition was appropriate to ensure enough is being done to address this area of concern for the MSc and Step Up courses. Consideration was given to whether the findings identified would mean that the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it was deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard. The inspection team is confident that once this standard is met, a further inspection of the course would not be required. Full details of the conditions, monitoring and approval can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) sections of this report.

Standard 3.10

67. The university's professional development policy details the process in place for monitoring staff's academic and scholarly activity, and some staff CVs included examples of activities updating practice knowledge. At inspection, it was acknowledged that keeping practice knowledge up to date is currently a challenge for teaching staff. Work is in progress at university level to improve workloads, but there is not yet any protected time for maintaining currency. Although staff have annual personal development plans in place, the protected time is not in place to ensure quality and currency of practice knowledge. Staff discussed a community hub project that is currently being developed, but this is not yet in place.

68. As the evidence indicated that educators are not currently supported adequately to maintain currency of practice knowledge, the inspection team agreed that this standard was not met. A condition is needed to ensure teaching staff are provided with the time and resources to maintain their knowledge and understanding of professional practice. Consideration was given to whether the findings identified would mean that the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it was deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard. The inspection team is confident that once this standard is met, a further inspection of the course would not be

required. Full details of the conditions, monitoring and approval can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) sections of this report.

Standard four: Curriculum assessment

Standard 4.1

69. The documentary evidence provided prior to inspection demonstrated that the curriculum and learning outcomes have been mapped to both BASW's Professional Capability Framework and Social Work England's Professional Standards. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.2

70. The university's documentary evidence submission did not provide clear information regarding involvement of employers, practitioners, or people with lived experience of social work in the design and review of the course curriculums. Evidence was provided regarding a one-off 'away day' programme review event involving employers and people with lived experience, however no information was provided regarding any regular formal routes of employer involvement. At inspection, people with lived experience confirmed that they are involved in many aspects of the programmes, and feel able to provide feedback and input via the staff coordinator for their group, though there is no formal avenue for gathering this input. Practice educators and employer partners were similarly able to provide examples of feedback they had provided informally to the university, which was listened to, but were not able to cite any regular formal avenues for their input on the programmes. University staff also cited a number of examples of input they received from employers and used to improve the programmes, but no formal employer involvement processes or systems. As discussed within standards 3.4 and 3.5, employers confirmed effective ad hoc communication with the university to provide feedback, but the only regular avenue for this is meetings every few months with the Step Up coordinator, who then passes any input regarding the MSc or BSc on to the relevant staff.

71. As the evidence for this standard aligns closely with Standards 3.4 and 3.5 and raises the same issues around formalising employer engagement, the inspection team agreed that the same recommendation for Step Up and condition for the MSc are appropriate for this standard. The inspection team felt that this standard was met for the Step Up, with a recommendation around formalising the existing employer engagement methods. The inspection team agreed that the standard was not met for the MSc, with a condition needed against this standard to ensure that the university develops formal processes for employer involvement in the course. Consideration was given to whether the findings identified would mean that the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it was deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard. The inspection team is confident that once this standard is met, a further

inspection of the course would not be required. Full details of the conditions, monitoring and approval can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) sections of this report.

Standard 4.3

72. The university provided documentary evidence prior to inspection regarding a number of university-wide policies and initiatives related to equality, diversity, and inclusion, including a championing EDI network, steering group, charter, and working group. At inspection, staff provided further information relating to decolonising the curriculum and undertaking equality impact assessments. Staff and students confirmed that students are encouraged to disclose any relevant health conditions in order to access reasonable adjustments, and this appeared to be underpinned by robust student support services. The inspection team determined that this standard was met for both courses.

Standard 4.4

73. Review of the documentary evidence for this standard confirmed that all modules can be changed and adapted responsively to reflect current practice and legislation, but did not provide details of how this is achieved. At inspection, staff confirmed that module leaders are expected to keep course content up to date, and examples provided by module leads and students indicated that content is being reviewed on an ongoing informal basis. Step Up students are provided with information and materials on current adopted models in use at their respective local authorities, and MSc students discussed applying their knowledge of up to date legal frameworks once on placement. Staff also discussed the role of practitioner involvement in module teaching, and how this helps ensure taught content remains in line with current practice.

74. As there was no indication of concern around the currency of programme content, and triangulation at inspection confirmed mutual expectations and examples of ensuring up to date content, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met. The inspection team did however feel the university would benefit from a recommendation around formalising and recording this process to improve its robustness. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) section of this report.

Standard 4.5

75. Clear links between theory and practice were reflected in the module guides, learning outcomes, and assessments provided by the university prior to inspection. This was triangulated at inspection, with students stating that theory was a priority within taught content, and that they felt they were putting theory into practice once on placement. Personal tutors discussed how theory is central to their work with students in group tutorials and reflective supervision. The inspection team determined that this standard was met.

Standard 4.6

76. The university's documentary submission confirmed that there are modules on each course dedicated to interprofessional working. The module descriptors set out clearly the opportunity to be co-taught by and learn from other professionals. The Step Up programme also has interprofessional skills days. At inspection, students stated that the interprofessional practice modules prepared them well for multiagency working with different professionals once on placement.

77. While students are given opportunities to work with other professions through visiting lecturers and placement learning, there was little evidence of interprofessional working opportunities with other students within the school. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met, but determined that a recommendation would be beneficial around providing multidisciplinary working opportunities with students from other professions in the school. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) section of this report.

Standard 4.7

78. Documentary evidence for this standard confirmed that each module guide includes the designated hours for structured and independent learning, and that these are aligned to university-wide requirements. Details were provided of the attendance monitoring system, which requires students to register their attendance at all course content, and triggers a series of interventions if attendance falls below a set threshold.

79. At inspection, student support staff were able to provide further details of the attendance monitoring mechanisms. Attendance data is used both for directed intervention with individual students to determine potential support needs, and for broader thematic analysis and action to address attendance issues across particular cohorts or demographics. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 4.8

80. Review of the documentary evidence for this standard confirmed that a diverse range of assessment methods are used across the programme, including case studies, role plays, and written assessments. All assessments are linked to the skills required for students to meet the Professional Standards. An external examiner system provides independent quality assurance for the reliability and robustness of the programme's assessments. People with lived experience are involved in various aspects of assessment, and confirmed they feel their views carry weight. The inspection team were satisfied that the standard was met.

Standard 4.9

81. The module guides and descriptors provided within the university's documentary evidence detailed the assessment methods and criteria in use, and how these are mapped

to the required standards. The mapping document confirms that assessments progress in line with the development of the student throughout each year. Discussion with course staff on inspection demonstrated how the assessment methods are sequenced to match students' progression through the programme. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.10

82. The module handbooks and specifications for each course provided information on timescales for providing students with feedback on assessments, and the academic regulations policy outlines relevant the university-wide policy. At inspection, students raised no concerns around timeliness or quality of feedback. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 4.11

83. Prior to the inspection, the university provided staff CVs and details of external examiners; these confirmed that staff carrying out assessments are appropriately qualified, and external examiners are qualified and registered. The inspection team concluded that the documentary evidence provided in advance of the inspection was able to demonstrate that this standard was met.

Standard 4.12

84. The university's documentary evidence included a placement handbook, which provided clear details on direct observation as well as milestones such as PLA, mid-way, and final reviews. A range of information and guidance was provided regarding completion of direct observations, including working with service users. The appendix of the university's academic regulations also clearly documents the various progression points and outcomes from assessment. At inspection, practice educators confirmed that the requirements for direct observation are made clear in the handbook and course orientation sessions, and that university staff have been available for any clarifications or further detail needed. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 4.13

85. The module descriptors provided for the programmes confirm that the courses are underpinned by evidence-based theories and models, with a research-based module on each course. Further research-grounded content is delivered on skills days centred around recent practice and research. A wide range of resources are used to ground course content in evidence, and students demonstrate knowledge and use of adopted models. The inspection team determined that this standard was met, but felt a recommendation would be useful around bolstering student research opportunities. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) section of this report.

Standard five: Supporting students

Standard 5.1

86. Documentary evidence provided by the university confirmed that students have access to mental health and wellbeing services, disability and inclusion services, learning and development provision, and careers advice. An occupational health check is arranged for every social work student at the start of their studies. At inspection, library services confirmed that they run academic skills sessions which are integrated into course teaching so that students do not have to 'opt in' to access these. Robust quality assurance and improvement processes are in place within support services, for example, staff outlined a number of proactive steps which are being taken to reduce the counselling waiting list. Staff confirmed that the university's hardship fund had recently been expanded to include international students in response to the cost of living crisis, as it was recognised that this can have impacts for all students. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.2

87. The university's documentary evidence submission confirmed that students have access to a range of resources to support their academic development, including personal and practice tutors, a specialist librarian, library resources, study skills programmes, and IT support. At inspection, staff were able to provide further detail of these resources and how they work for students. The inspection team determined that the standard was met.

Standard 5.3

88. Review of the documentary evidence prior to inspection confirmed that students are required to complete a self-declaration form regarding their conduct, character, and health. At inspection, staff confirmed that each student completes the declaration form at the start of the course, and then completes annual declarations for the remainder of their programme. A DBS check is also undertaken on all students prior to beginning their course. Inspectors asked for details of how the university manage any declared convictions or other fitness to practice concerns, and staff were able to outline the process in place. Regarding convictions, staff confirmed that for each case they consult with employers to confirm whether the conviction could preclude the applicant from placement (and eventually potential employment). There is an escalation process in place for complex cases, including consulting with the regulator if the decision is borderline. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 5.4

89. Prior to inspection, the university provided details of the process by which reasonable adjustments are put in place. Students are invited to declare any relevant conditions or disabilities during application to the course, and on an ongoing basis where applicable

should anything change once on the course. Any students who disclose a need for reasonable adjustments are then referred (with permission) to the disability and inclusion team who in turn complete an assessment and prepare a reasonable adjustments plan. This information was triangulated at inspection, and support services staff were able to provide further detail. The university has produced and uses a bank of reasonable adjustment examples, and are currently in the process of developing an equivalent specifically for placement settings. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.5

90. Review of the documentary evidence confirmed that clear information is provided in the programme handbook and module handbook regarding the course content, placements, and assessments. Information within the module guide includes Social Work England registration requirements, and is clear that this is not an automatic entitlement. At inspection, students demonstrated clear awareness of the professional standards and reported that they had been provided with relevant information and advice from the university regarding registration. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met for the MSc.

91. It was noted that reference is made to the HCPC rather than Social Work England within the Step Up admissions FAQ document for applicants, and the inspectors determined that a condition is required to ensure this is updated to reflect the current regulator. Consideration was given to whether the findings identified would mean that the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it was deemed that a condition is appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standard. The inspection team is confident that once this standard is met, a further inspection of the course would not be required. Full details of the conditions, monitoring and approval can be found in the [proposed outcomes](#) sections of this report.

Standard 5.6

92. Information regarding compulsory aspects of the courses is provided in the programme specifications and the programme handbooks. The handbooks identify the attendance requirements clearly in relation to both academic course content and placement, make it clear that all attendance is compulsory, and module specifications outline the contact time for each module. At inspection, details were provided of the attendance monitoring system, which requires students to register their attendance at all course content, and triggers a series of interventions if attendance falls below a set threshold. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met.

Standard 5.7

93. As discussed within standard 4.10, the module handbooks and specifications for each course provided information on timescales for providing students with feedback on

assessments, and the academic regulations policy outlines relevant the university-wide policy. A diverse range of assessment methods are used across the programme, including case studies, role plays, and written assessments. An external examiner system provides independent quality assurance for the reliability and robustness of the programme's assessment feedback. At inspection, students raised no concerns around timeliness or quality of feedback. Discussion with course staff on inspection demonstrated how the assessment methods are sequenced to match students' progression through the programme. Practice educators confirmed that the university ensures quality of feedback through PEPS training and orientation, and that the structure of the feedback form also provides context and guidance. The inspection team were satisfied that this standard was met.

Standard 5.8

94. Review of the evidence provided prior to inspection confirmed there is a university-wide academic appeals process in place, as well as a complaints procedure. The inspection team agreed that the standard was met based on the documentary evidence.

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

Standard 6.1

95. As the qualifying courses are a Step Up to Social Work PGDip and MSc Social Work, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Proposed outcome

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

Conditions

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

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

	Standard not currently met	Condition	Date for submission of evidence	Link
1	Standard 1.6	MSc The course provider will evidence that comprehensive information regarding the financial implications of the programme is provided to applicants prior to accepting a place.	1 st December 2023	Paragraph 34
2	Standard 2.3	MSc The course provider will evidence that all practice educators have sufficient support to provide appropriate induction, supervision, and support to students.	1 st December 2023	Paragraph 41
3	Standard 2.6	MSc and Step-Up The course provider will evidence that they have developed a robust process of ensuring oversight of all practice educators': 1. Registration 2. Qualifications 3. Currency of knowledge and skills	1 st December 2023	Paragraph 47

4	Standard 3.3	MSc and Step-Up The course provider will evidence robust oversight of placement providers' underpinning support systems for students.	1st December 2023	Paragraph 52
5	Standards 3.4, 3.5, 4.2	MSc The course provider will evidence introduction of consistent formal processes for employer involvement in the design, development, and review of the course.	1st December 2023	Paragraph 55 Paragraph 58 Paragraph 70
6	Standard 3.6	MSc The course provider will evidence development of a clear strategy for determining student numbers on the course, including more robust consideration of local placement capacity.	1st December 2023	Paragraph 60
7	Standard 3.9	MSc and Step-Up The course provider will evidence proportionate action is being taken at course level to address concerns around the attainment gap for Black and ethnic minority students.	1st December 2023	Paragraph 65
8	Standard 3.10	MSc and Step-Up The course provider will evidence steps taken to ensure educators have the time and resources to maintain their knowledge of professional practice.	1st December 2023	Paragraph 67
9	Standard 5.5	Step-Up The course provider will evidence that the Admissions FAQ document reflects the current regulatory body rather than the HCPC.	1st December 2023	Paragraph 90

Recommendations

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

	Standard	Detail	Link
1	Standard 1.5	MSc and Step-Up The inspectors are recommending that the university consider requiring all interview panel members to have regular training in EDI and/or unconscious bias.	Paragraph 30
2	Standard 1.6	Step-Up The inspectors are recommending that the university consider increasing emphasis on the intensiveness of the course earlier in the recruitment cycle (i.e. prior to induction).	Paragraph 33
3	Standard 3.1	MSc and Step-Up The inspectors are recommending that the university consider strengthening communication between course-level and school-level governance structures following the introduction of the Placement Hub.	Paragraph 50
4	Standards 3.4, 3.5, 4.2	Step-Up The inspectors are recommending that the university consider formalising and documenting existing employer engagement routes.	Paragraph 55 Paragraph 58 Paragraph 70
5	Standard 4.4	MSc and Step-Up The inspectors are recommending that the university consider formalising and documenting the process of updating course content and materials.	Paragraph 73
6	Standard 4.6	MSc and Step-Up The inspectors are recommending that the university consider providing multidisciplinary	Paragraph 76

		working opportunities with students from other professions within the school.	
7	Standard 4.13	MSc and Step-Up The inspectors are recommending that the university consider providing more opportunities for students to engage in research.	Paragraph 84

Annex 1: Education and training standards summary (MSc)

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.	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
1.5 Ensure that there are equality and diversity policies in relation to applicants and that they are implemented and monitored.	☐	☐	☒
1.6 Ensure that the admissions process gives applicants the information they require to make an informed choice about whether to take up an offer of a place on a course. This will include 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	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
they are safe to carry out practice learning in a service delivery setting.			
2.6 Ensure that practice educators are on the register and that they have the relevant and current knowledge, skills and experience to support safe and effective learning.	☐	☒	☐
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	☐	☒	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
limited to the management and monitoring of courses and the allocation of practice education.			
3.5 Ensure that regular and effective monitoring, evaluation and improvement systems are in place, and that these involve 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	Recommendation 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 necessary to meet the professional standards.	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Not Met – condition applied	Recommendation given
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	☒	☐	☐
5.2 Ensure that students have access to resources to support their academic	☒	☐	☐

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

Annex 2: Education and training standards summary (Step-Up)

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: v. have the potential to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the professional standards vi. can demonstrate that they have a good command of English vii. have the capability to meet academic standards; and viii. have the capability to use information and communication technology (ICT) methods and techniques to achieve course outcomes.	☒	☐	☐
1.2 Ensure that applicants' prior relevant experience is considered as part of the admissions processes.	☒	☐	☐
1.3 Ensure that employers, placement providers and people with lived experience of social work are involved in admissions processes.	☒	☐	☐
1.4 Ensure that the admissions processes assess the suitability of applicants, including in relation to their conduct, health and character. This includes criminal conviction checks.	☒	☐	☐
1.5 Ensure that there are equality and diversity policies in relation to applicants and that they are implemented and monitored.	☐	☐	☒
1.6 Ensure that the admissions process gives applicants the information they require to make an informed choice about whether to take up an offer of a place on a course. This will include	☐	☐	☒

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

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

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

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

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

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

Regulator decision

Approved with conditions.

Annex 2: Meeting of conditions

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

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

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

	Standard not met	Condition	Recommendation
1	1.6	MSc The course provider will evidence that comprehensive information regarding the financial implications of the programme is provided to applicants prior to accepting a place.	Met
2	2.3	MSc The course provider will evidence that all practice educators have sufficient support to provide appropriate induction, supervision, and support to students.	Met
3	2.6	MSc and Step-Up The course provider will evidence that they have developed a robust process of ensuring oversight of all practice educators': 1. Registration 2. Qualifications 3. Currency of knowledge and skills	Met
4	3.3	MSc and Step-Up The course provider will evidence robust oversight of placement providers' underpinning support systems for students.	Met
5	3.4, 3.5, 4.2	MSc	Met

		The course provider will evidence introduction of consistent formal processes for employer involvement in the design, development, and review of the course.	
6	3.6	MSc The course provider will evidence development of a clear strategy for determining student numbers on the course, including more robust consideration of local placement capacity.	Met
7	3.9	MSc and Step-Up The course provider will evidence proportionate action is being taken at course level to address concerns around the attainment gap for Black and ethnic minority students.	Met
8	3.10	MSc and Step-Up The course provider will evidence steps taken to ensure educators have the time and resources to maintain their knowledge of professional practice.	Met
9	5.5	Step-Up The course provider will evidence that the Admissions FAQ document reflects the current regulatory body rather than the HCPC.	Met

Findings

Standard 1.6 – The course provider provided updated website information which clearly set out the expected costs and fees for students, and clear information about how they could request further information if needed. The inspectors’ recommendation is that this condition is now met.

Standard 2.3 – The university provided documentary and narrative evidence to show that a process is now in place to ensure a mentor assessor is allocated to every PEPS student within two weeks of them being allocated a student. The inspectors sought confirmation

that this meant a mentor assessor would be in place prior to the student's PLA meeting, and this was confirmed. The inspectors' recommendation is that this condition is now met.

Standard 2.6 – The university provided narrative and documentary evidence to show that they now conduct checks of PEs' registration, qualifications, and currency using a PE Audit Form. This information is gathered by the placement team and collated in a spreadsheet, and the placement lead checks the register to ensure all PEs have current registration. The inspectors' recommendation is that this condition is now met.

Standard 3.3 – The course provider developed and provided a revised Placement Learning Agreement document which provides the opportunity to record the information needed to identify support needs. It was also confirmed that placements are audited annually, which includes checking whether they have the underpinning support structures needed. The inspectors' recommendation is that this condition is now met.

Standards 3.4, 3.5, 4.2 – The university provided evidence to show in addition to less formal 6-weekly meetings held with employers, employer partners are invited to attend Programme Committee meetings where the programmes are reviewed with stakeholder input. Meeting notes were provided evidencing examples of employer input and actions taken in response to this. The inspectors' recommendation is that this condition is now met.

Standard 3.6 – The university evidenced that the practice lead has six-weekly meetings with employer partner representatives, which include discussions of placement capacity and student numbers. The majority of placements are obtained through pairing of PEPS candidates, therefore communication is ongoing with employer partners to ensure the number of PEPS candidates aligns with the numbers of students on the university's social work programmes. The inspectors' recommendation is that this condition is now met.

Standard 3.9 – The course provider evidenced that research has been funded to explore the experience of international students on social work placements, and that the Programme Leaders Forum has a standing agenda item for all departments' progress on reducing the attainment gap.

Standard 3.10 – The course provider provided a copy of a Workforce Planner and information on the Workload Allocation System, including the allocation of hours for Research and Enterprise time. There is also a requirement for all lecturers to use some of the allocated Research and Enterprise hours to participate in the Bucks Health and Social Care Academy.

Standard 5.5 – The university provided an updated copy of the relevant document evidencing that this now references the current regulatory body, however the amended copy used the phrasing "eligible to register" with Social Work England. The inspectors requested that this be amended to "eligible to apply to register", and this correction was made. The inspectors' recommendation is that this condition is now met.

Regulator decision

Conditions met.