

Inspection Report

Course provider: The Open University

Course approval: Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work

Inspection dates: 24/5/2022 – 27/5/2022

Report date:	22/07/2022
Inspector recommendation:	Approved with conditions
Regulator decision:	Approved with conditions
Date of Regulator decision:	09/01/2023
Date conditions met and approved:	28/06/2023

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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 two to three-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. As a result of the COVID 19 pandemic, inspections are currently being carried out via remote virtual arrangements, and typically last three to four days.
11. The inspectors may recommend in this report that the course is approved with conditions, approved without conditions or that it does not meet the criteria for approval. Where the course has been previously approved we may also decide to withdraw approval.
12. A draft of this report is shared with the education provider, and once we have considered any comments or observations they may wish to provide, we make a final regulatory decision about the approval of the course.
13. The final decisions that we can make are as follows, that the course is approved without conditions, the course is approved with conditions or that the course does not meet the criteria for approval. The decision, and the report, are then published.
14. If the course is approved with conditions, we will write to the education provider setting out how they can demonstrate they have met the conditions, the action we will take once we decide that the conditions are met, and the action we will take if we decide the conditions are not met.

Summary of Inspection

15. The Open University was 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.

Inspection ID	TOUR2
Course provider	The Open University
Validating body (if different)	
Course inspected	Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work (PGDip)
Mode of study	Flexible
Maximum student cohort	
Date of inspection	24/5/2022 – 27/5/2022
Inspection team	John Armitage - Education Quality Assurance Officer Lainy Russell - Lay Inspector Lee Pollard - Registrant Inspector
Inspector recommendation	Approved with conditions
Approval outcome	Approved with conditions

Language

16. In this document we describe The Open University as ‘the education provider’ or ‘the university’ and we describe the Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work as ‘the course’.

Inspection

17. A remote inspection took place from 24th – 27th of May 2022. 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 students from the BA (Hons), Social Work Degree Apprenticeship and PGDip at a range of points in their courses. Discussions included experiences of placement, opportunities to learn from other professions, access to support, awareness of policy, and curriculum and assessment.

Meetings with course staff

21. Over the course of the inspection, the inspection team met with university staff members from social work course teams, student support services (such as disability support, pastoral, library and academic services), the senior management team, cluster managers and cluster coordinators.

Meeting with people with lived experience of social work

22. The inspection team met with people with lived experience of social work who have been involved in the university's Service User and Carer Group. Discussions included involvement in admissions processes and course design, opportunities to offer feedback on the course and access to training opportunities to fulfil their role.

Meetings with external stakeholders

23. The inspection team met with representatives from placement partners from local authorities including North York, York, Devon, Cornwall and Torbay and a representative from the Hestia charity.

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. Evidence provided prior to inspection outlined how the university work in conjunction with employers throughout the admissions process. The inspection team heard that many candidates go through an internal assessment process prior to being forwarded to the education providers central admissions team to ensure they meet the entry criteria. Where entry criteria are met and sponsorship is confirmed by the employer, candidates take part in an assessment and selection day which ensures candidates are equipped to meet the professional standards, assess spoken English and have the capability to meet academic standards.

26. The inspection team heard that employers who have more than two potential students, and who have been endorsed as a selector by a staff tutor within the university, are permitted to undertake the assessment and selection process in-house using selection materials provided by the education provider. Through meetings with the course team and employer partners, the inspection team heard that some employers choose to adapt interview questions to suit their needs and requirements as an organisation. The inspection team questioned the equity of experience for candidates if there are variations in experience and the oversight that the university has of the range of questions being asked. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met with a recommendation in relation to interview questions used by endorsed selectors. Full details of recommendations can be found in the [recommendation section](#) of this report.

Standard 1.2

27. The employer handbook, included within documentary evidence submitted as part of the inspection process outlines the requirement for all candidates to complete a personal statement as part of their application. This is further outlined within the application form where candidates are asked to evidence how work and personal experiences make them a good candidate for the profession. Prior relevant experience is explored further during the formal interview stages, where candidates are asked to illustrate their knowledge and understanding of social work with relevant examples from their prior experience. The inspection team agreed this standard was met.

Standard 1.3

28. The university ensures interviews receive input from employers and people with lived experience in a variety of ways. All employers are required to play an active role in selection and admissions due to the nature of the course requiring sponsorship. Employers will screen candidates and regularly sit on or lead interview panels. They are supported by local placement providers who interview collaboratively with the education provider, organisation and representation from those with lived experience of social work.

29. The inspection team met with representation from the university's people with lived experience network where it was confirmed that nearly all members of the group have experienced some involvement in recruitment and admissions. Examples were given of involvement in group discussions, formal interview and review of written tests. All members of the group confirmed that their opinions were valued in this process and that they felt equal to other areas of representation on interview panels. There has also been the addition of a formal requirement for endorsed selectors to ensure appropriate representation of people with lived experience in internal organisational interviews. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.4

30. Documentary evidence showed that there was a robust process in place to ensure that applicant suitability is assessed throughout admissions processes. The self-declaration of suitability, along with an enhanced DBS form is checked by central administration and where positive declarations are made, an academic in fitness to practice follows this up appropriately. The university requires employers to manage needs in relation to health and adjustments required but can advise on such matters if necessary, and reviews documentation to ensure the process is followed. As a result, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 1.5

31. The central admissions team conducts close monitoring of all applications to ensure that the university's equality scheme is implemented in accordance with obligations set out by the equality act. All university staff are expected to complete mandatory equality, diversity and inclusion training, which contributes to ensuring that appropriate processes are followed through representation in application and admission. Whilst the university has implemented training for staff employed by the organisation, the inspection team heard that training in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion isn't routinely provided to people with lived experience who form interview panels. The inspection team felt that the standard was met with a recommendation about extending training opportunities for all those involved in admissions processes. Full details of recommendations can be found in the [recommendation section](#) of this report.

Standard 1.6

32. The information provided to prospective students ahead of taking up a place on the course is comprehensively set out through a prospectus and the education providers public facing website. Employers are also equipped to be able to answer questions in relation to the course through the close working relationships they have with the university. During a meeting with students as part of inspection activity, it was confirmed that students felt equipped to make an informed choice about the course and understood the role of a social worker. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard two: Learning environment

Standard 2.1

33. The education provider ensures that students complete the required number of placement days through two mandatory practice-based periods, and thirty practice skills days which are a combination of online and face to face learning. Documentary evidence outlined the requirement for employers to sign up to provide contrasting placement experiences including experience of statutory social work tasks, however, inspectors questioned how the university quality assures this due to employers having more control over placement sourcing and allocation. During a meeting with the senior leadership team, it was outlined that practice tutors carry out audits and complete placement learning agreements to ensure they meet the education and training standards. Practice tutors also confirmed that they ensure mid and end point review meetings include exploration of appropriate contrast between placements one and two. If there is a conflict between employer and practice educator regarding appropriateness of placement or where contrast requires deliberation, this will be decided by the module chair. The inspection team therefore agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.2

34. Practice learning opportunities are monitored closely by the education provider to ensure they align with the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and Social Work England's Professional Standards. The range of practice learning documentation provided by the university is referenced within the practice learning guide that is provided to employers and placement providers. This documentation supports students, providers and practice educators, along with university staff, to map how their knowledge and skills will be developed throughout the duration of placement.

35. At each review, the student will be encouraged to discuss practice opportunities and link academic and practice learning with the support of their practice educator. This ongoing review feeds into the students practice assessment report at the end of placement, which is quality assured to ensure a benchmark standard has been met for each placement. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.3

36. Documentary evidence provided ahead of inspection demonstrated a robust process of induction, supervision and workload monitoring. During meetings with practice educators, it was confirmed that a joined-up approach at initial meetings by practice tutors, on-site supervisors, students and practice educators ensures that appropriate arrangements and learning opportunities are in place. Regular, planned supervision allows for issues around complex cases and capacity to be identified and supported via a holistic approach. This was supported by students who confirmed that their experience of induction and supervision was strong with there being appropriate boundaries between expectations as a substantive member of staff and as a student. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.4

37. During practice learning periods, students are assessed against their ability to meet appropriate levels of the PCF. Responsibilities are staged so that the complexity of social work tasks undertaken build during placement, alongside the level of decision-making required. This is monitored by the practice tutor allocated to students through involvement in the placement learning agreement meeting and mid-point review. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.5

38. Students on the course are required to complete a compulsory readiness for direct practice assessment which is formally assessed prior to beginning their first placement. Practice educators that met with the inspection team confirmed that their experience of students on placement from the education provider was positive, with most being well prepared for practice. The assurance that students are safe to practice is supported by enhanced DBS checks that are required to be no older than one year, prior to placement starting. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 2.6

39. Documentary evidence submitted by the provider outlined the requirement for all practice educators to meet the Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS) in order to undertake the role on behalf of the university. The university outlined their efforts to support practice educators to navigate and follow relevant processes to monitor student learning. The inspection team also heard that the education provider has worked to ensure that practice educators have access to relevant training and peer support to fulfil their role.

40. During inspection activity, it was shared that at times practice educators lack experience with many having only completed level 1 of PEPs training. This requires practice tutors to offer ongoing informal support to ensure they can meet the needs of students. Despite these efforts, some students reported that their practice educator was unprepared to

answer queries or concerns experienced in placement, leading students to feel that they are judged as unable to meet professional capabilities. Consideration was given as to whether the findings identified would mean that the course would not be suitable for approval. However, it is deemed that conditions are appropriate to ensure that the course would be able to meet the relevant standards, and we are 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 [conditions section](#) of this report.

Standard 2.7

41. The education provider confirmed that there are robust policies in place which support students to challenge unsafe behaviours in service provision or the organisation. The inspection team were able to review these policies ahead of inspection. Alongside university specific policy, there is also the requirement of the education provider that all partner agencies provide access to relevant policy through induction. Students confirmed that they were made aware of policies relating to whistleblowing and the process was discussed with them during induction. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard three: Course governance, management and quality

Standard 3.1

42. Documentary evidence provided ahead of inspection detailed how social work education sits within the School of Health, Wellbeing and Social care (HWSC), which is part of the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS). The governance plan for the school could be found within the academic structure documentation adopted by the wider university. This included reference to how other disciplines within the school work together to maintain effective delivery of courses, and share learning in relation to professional issues such as fitness to practice. During meetings with members of staff, all could articulate lines of accountability within the discipline of social care and demonstrated understanding of how the courses within the school are quality assured. The course team also provided guidance about how the wider network can filter into the student journey.

43. Within the documentation provided, there was clear guidance around the requirement for the social work team to provide annual evaluative module reports to the board of studies. This process not only maintained consistency of delivery across disciplines, but also offered a route for additional resource requests and adjustments to curriculum content. There is adequate social work representation on the board to ensure that judgements made include contribution from experienced professionals within the profession. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.2

44. The university ensures that employers are prepared to honour their responsibility to provide appropriate placement experiences through the requirement of a signed collaboration agreement. The education provider ensures there is strong engagement and adherence through regular contact and support for sponsoring employers. Student placements are agreed locally after careful consultation and negotiation with staff tutors from the university. The staff tutor's role is to ensure that the placement offers opportunity to meet the professional and education and training standards as well as ensure that appropriate processes are in place to manage difficulties or placement breakdown if this occurs. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.3

45. Staff tutors from the university are responsible for ensuring that all placement providers have the appropriate policies and procedures in place to support students' health and wellbeing. The inspection team sought clarification around how this process was audited and heard that staff tutors complete site visits with new sponsors, where checks of policy are completed. Placement providers verified that new organisations are audited by the university but questioned whether further quality assurance was needed for more established providers, who are sometimes left to manage placements without the same level of support. Each placement is audited ahead of the student commencing the placement. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.4

46. The education provider is dependent upon close employer relationships and support to ensure an effective course. The course itself was developed in response to demand, and the university has maintained a collaborative approach since its inception. The inspection team heard that employers had been consulted in relation to module changes because of covid implications and are regularly offered opportunities to meet with the education provider. There is some variety in the level of impact feedback on the course has, however the university continue to develop ways for employer partners to engage in meaningful contributions, including representation on governance groups such as the practice reference group and practice assessment panel. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.5

47. Documentary evidence provided in advance of inspection demonstrated how the education provider had systems in place to provide a continual cycle of quality assurance activity, to ensure the course remains current and includes representation of views from a range of stakeholders. Students have both formal (via module evaluation and student survey) and informal (student workshops) opportunities to feedback their views on the course and support available. Further feedback is gained from students, employers and

practice educators through evaluations of practice learning, which are completed from all perspectives and reviewed by the practice assessment panel (which includes representation of people with lived experience).

48. During the inspection, service users and carers explained how they have supported aspects of course design by influencing the teaching on some modules. There has been service user or carer representation in residential weekends, facilitated by the education provider where they have led specific teaching sessions for new students. Further to this, some representatives outlined their role in recommending literature, podcasts and websites to be used within the course. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.6

49. Through documentary evidence, the education provider highlighted that their model did not require a cap on student numbers and places could be flexible to meet employer demands. Members of the senior leadership team explained that there was a team within the organisational structure that considers projections for student numbers based on intelligence from staff tutors. Anticipated numbers are then planned for in relation to staffing and potential risks identified. If additional staffing is required, then recruitment takes place to identify appropriate lecturers. The inspection team agreed this standard was met.

Standard 3.7

50. The education provider confirmed that a professional lead is in place to assume overarching responsibility for the delivery and development of the course, whilst also maintaining adherence to regulatory functions. The job description for this post outlines the mandatory experience, qualifications and registration required for the post which are in line with the education and training standards. The inspection team were satisfied with the process in place to recruit to this role but asked for assurance that the person in role met the credentials outlined in the job description. The university provided CVs which outlined experience and qualifications which satisfied the inspection team that this standard was met.

Standard 3.8

51. The inspection team was able to view evidence in relation to organisation structures as part of the documentary review. During the inspection, the inspection team sought to clarify how the university prepares for changes in student numbers which can occur due to the online model used. The education provider explained that student numbers remain under regular review throughout the year to ensure that they are adequately staffed to be able to offer an effective course. The review of staffing includes available lecturers, as well as engaging with student support services to ensure that systems are equipped to meet demand. The university also outlined the ratios it works to when considering staffing against

student numbers. Where capacity is not available, recruitment takes place ahead of entry to the course to recruit associate lecturers to support with delivery.

52. Whilst the university was able to show evidence of appropriate consideration for staffing numbers in a range of areas, concerns remained in relation to the experience and knowledge of some practice educators used by the sponsoring agencies, as outlined in standard 2.6. The inspection team agreed that the condition applied to standard 2.6 be considered in conjunction with this standard area. Full details of the conditions, monitoring and approval can be found in the [conditions section](#) of this report.

Standard 3.9

53. The university outlined how organisational processes in relation to analysis of student data allow for scrutiny of student performance, progression and outcomes so that interventions can be developed across the programme. The education provider showed awareness of areas for improvement and demonstrated a commitment to addressing awarding gaps, and the representation of minority ethnic groups on the course. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 3.10

54. The inspection team heard about the processes in place to ensure that educators are supported to maintain their professional knowledge and understanding. The senior leadership team within the university confirmed that academic staff are expected to complete continuous professional development activities to maintain professional registration, as well as being encouraged to enhance their teaching skills by seeking fellowship or senior fellowship of advanced higher education. All university academic staff can access research and study leave to apply their research into social work practice. The university also operates peer support groups for academics to develop teaching practice, alongside colleagues within the university and those in practice which has resulted in a teaching excellence award for the university.

55. Alongside the development opportunities for academic staff, the inspection team explored the support in place for other stakeholders who contributed to the delivery of the course. The inspection team heard that practice tutors and people with lived experience receive training from the university, however feedback received during the inspection highlighted that the depth of knowledge for some practice educators required further development. With the sponsorship model of The OU social work programmes, the sponsor engages and commissions the practice educator. Whilst the university was able to show evidence of appropriate consideration for staffing numbers in a range of areas, concerns remained in relation to the experience and knowledge of some practice educators used by the sponsoring agencies. The inspection team agreed that the condition applied to standard

areas 2.6 and 3.8 be considered in conjunction with this standard area. Full details of the conditions, monitoring and approval can be found in the [conditions section](#) of this report.

Standard four: Curriculum assessment

Standard 4.1

56. Documentary evidence provided ahead of inspection outlined how the curriculum supports students to meet the professional standards in a structured manner. This is shared with students via the PGDip handbook, learning outcomes documentation, programme guides and practice learning guides in an accessible manner. Curriculum mapping is updated annually and reported to the faculty's board of studies for review.

57. The inspection team queried how the course provider ensures that students studying outside of England are supported to meet relevant professional frameworks through the curriculum as it is mapped. The course team confirmed that the structure of modules allows for students accessing the course outside of England to take part in differentiated activities which address the relevant frameworks. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.2

58. The university demonstrated a range of ways in which it involves key stakeholders in the design and review of the course. Employers are encouraged to share contributions regarding module content via regular meetings and strong relationships with practice tutors. The university also outlined how employers and people with lived experience are invited to participate as module testers and critical readers when new teaching content is reviewed. The universities commitment to involving people with lived experience in all aspects of the course was demonstrated through the decision to formally contract and pay representatives for their work. Monthly meetings between the service user and carer group are facilitated by university staff, with a focus on co-production of resources for social work education. During the inspection, representatives of the group confirmed that they felt valued for their contributions and were able to engage in meaningful conversations about social work education. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.3

59. The documentary evidence provided ahead of inspection showed there were clear policies and documentation to ensure the course design maintains a focus on equality, diversity and inclusion. The course team were able to identify current priorities around vulnerable groups and enhancing staff knowledge and understanding on matters relating to equality, diversity and inclusion. The teams within the university tasked with supporting to students to be able to access the course had an ongoing commitment to reviewing courses

and access arrangements using their inclusive curriculum tool. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.4

60. Within evidence presented in relation to standard 3.10, the university outlined the mechanisms in place to ensure that staff knowledge and understanding maintains its currency in relation to current issues and changes to legislation and policy. There is a schedule of annual review of the course to ensure staff research can be fed into course design, as well as engagement with stakeholders to capture their views and feedback. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.5

61. The education provider submitted evidence of the integrated nature of the curriculum which encourages students to combine academic and practice learning together successfully. This evidence was supported by reports provided by the external examiner which highlighted the use of real-life examples of social work practice. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.6

62. The inspection team were able to review documentary evidence which outlined how interprofessional learning is built into modules via the use of audio-visual materials and dedicated skills workshops. During meetings with students, it was confirmed that there is explicit focus on learning from other professions, however this is not currently facilitated through direct learning experiences but rather module materials and experiences on placement. The inspection team acknowledged feedback from the university that the relatively short nature of the course impacted upon the ability to incorporate direct learning opportunities in extensive detail, and that those progressing to a master's would encounter further development opportunities in this area. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met with a recommendation that some explicit interprofessional learning is more clearly outlined and built into module design. Full details of the recommendation can be found in the [recommendation section](#) of this report.

Standard 4.7

63. The PGDip handbook clearly outlined the expectations in relation to academic study through structured distance learning and tutor-led workshops. This information is shared with both students and sponsoring employers who are encouraged to factor study time into the working week to allow students to engage successfully. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.8

64. The assessment mapping provided evidenced how students are guided to fulfil learning objectives for the module, and the rationale for the assessment strategies in place. The university demonstrated how assessments support students to meet the professional standards for social workers. The assessment strategy and design was further supported in reports by the external examiner. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.9

65. The education provider submitted evidence of how assessment includes a variety of summative and formative tasks to ensure students' knowledge against module learning outcomes is appropriately measured. Assessments for each module are incremental to ensure they are suitable for the stage of learning and development for students. Further to this, students have clarity on expectations for assessments through guidance provided within documentation. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.10

66. The inspection team heard that all tutors receive explicit guidance in relation to how feedback should be provided to students to ensure it is meaningful and promotes positive progress. There is oversight of the quality of feedback through internal assessment boards and peer support from university staff. During a meeting with students, some concerns were raised in relation to the timeliness and quality of written feedback for some modules. However, on balance, the inspection team agreed that the overarching processes in place support students to receive feedback at appropriate times during the course. The inspection team concluded that this standard was met.

Standard 4.11

67. The inspection team were able to review job descriptions in place for both module and practice tutors as well as external examiners. These required sufficient prior experience, qualification and registration and the university highlighted how their commitment to ongoing professional development for course staff supported their ability to conduct meaningful assessments of student work. The inspection team were confident that this standard was met.

Standard 4.12

68. The education provider outlined how student progression is monitored at different levels including during modules, upon completion of modules and whilst on placement. The evidence provided showed that processes are in place to ensure that students have met the required learning outcomes at each stage before progressing onto the next. During direct practice, placement review meetings ensure that the team around the student contribute toward judgements of the effectiveness of their practice. Where concerns are raised about

progression, there are effective processes in place to offer support. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 4.13

69. Students accessing the PGDip are expected to develop an evidence-informed and critically analytical approach to their practice from the start of their studies. Research skills are introduced in the initial weeks of study and reinforced and developed throughout subsequent modules. This culminates with the requirement of a research proposal being submitted in the second year of study.

70. During meetings with student support services, the inspection team heard about the measures in place to offer additional intervention to students in relation to research skills. Students can access bespoke sessions through the university online system as well as workshops which focus on specific skills. Employer partners highlighted that students from the university are well prepared for professional practice because of the work they complete in relation to developing evidence-informed approaches to practice. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard five: Supporting students

Standard 5.1

71. The evidence provided by the university outlined a number of ways in which students could access support to maintain positive health and wellbeing. The education provider has worked to offer a flexible approach to support due to the remote nature of the ways in which they work, which includes dedicated phonelines to teams that operate outside of the working day.

72. All students can contact their module tutor as a first point of reference and where necessary, will be advised of other support available. All support services accessible to students are found via an online help centre. The student support team are a central source of support in relation to disability support, learning needs, mental health and counselling. Where students have long lasting impairments, they can work with support services to develop a bespoke profile which is accessible to staff in direct contact with the student. The university has also partnered with agencies to offer text services to access mental health support 24/7. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.2

73. Students are able to access academic support via allocated tutors who work closely with practice tutors when they are on placement. The help centre on the internet has readily accessible guides to develop student skills in specific areas of study, however, as outlined in standard 5.1, students can access a more bespoke service if they have an identified learning need.

74. The library service also acts as a key point of support for students who wish to develop their academic skills. The library service is always available via chat function and also facilitate workshops which focus on specific skills, such as referencing and research. Students demonstrated an awareness of the support available, and the flexibility of the university model means that it is well suited to the distance learning approach. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.3

75. The evidence provided by the university outlined the ways in which students' suitability in relation to conduct, character and health is checked at different points throughout the course. The inspection team heard that students are required to sign declarations in relation to their fitness to practice at application (where DBS checks are also required), prior to submission of readiness to practice assessments and at review points during practice placements. The expectations for this are set out in the PGDip handbook.

76. The university have made clear distinctions in relation to failure to achieve necessary competencies and issues with fitness to practice due to behaviour and conduct. There are processes in place to ensure these areas are handled separately and effectively. The university's fitness to practice policy outlines what actions should be taken if concerns arise during the course, and highlights what actions will be taken where a concern is being investigated. During meetings with students as part of inspection activity, there was appropriate awareness of procedures in this area and an understanding of where to seek further clarification. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.4

77. The inspection team were able to meet with a variety of representatives from support services within the university. During meetings, it was confirmed that there are a variety of processes which are used to ensure that students access appropriate support both with their academic studies and whilst on placement. Whilst responsibility for some reasonable adjustments remain with employers, students were able to give examples of where the university had advised on the adaptations required, for example when requesting specific software be installed on laptops. The inspection team also heard about positive experiences of receiving support to manage learning difficulties such as dyslexia from students who were able to receive modified module resources to support their study. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.5

78. Students can access information about the curriculum, placements and assessment through the PGDip handbook. The handbook is supplemented with additional information specific to placement activity in the practice learning guides and assessment requirements through module guides. There is focused advice in the final module of the PGDip, which

equips students with additional information about the transition to registered social worker and includes reference to continuous professional development requirements. The careers and employability service also act as a source of advice from the point of admission to post-qualification. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.6

79. The expectations in relation to student attendance are clearly outlined in course documentation. This is reinforced through information shared with employers ahead of students joining the programme. The inspection team sought to clarify this understanding with students who could clearly articulate which parts of the course required mandatory attendance. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.7

80. As outlined in standard 4.10, module tutors receive specific training to ensure that they can provide students with effective feedback on the course. The inspection team saw that good procedures were in place to manage this and recognised effective feedback is an essential component of the university's distance model. Whilst some instances were raised by students in relation to depth and timeliness of feedback, the inspection team believed these were isolated incidents and agreed that this standard was met.

Standard 5.8

81. The process for making academic appeals is referenced in the course handbook as well as in individual module assessment guidance. The inspection team agreed that procedures appear robust, and the understanding of the process was verified during meetings with students where they confirmed their knowledge of steps to follow should they need to. The inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

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

Standard 6.1

82. As the qualifying course is a Post Graduate Diploma in social work, the inspection team agreed that this standard was met.

Proposed outcome

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

Conditions

84. 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.

85. 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	2.6, 3.8, 3.10	The education provider will provide evidence to demonstrate that robust checks are in place to ensure practice educators are registered and are appropriately trained, with structured support in place if required, before being assigned to a student on placement.	31/01/2023	Paragraph 39 Paragraph 51 Paragraph 54

Recommendations

86. 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	1.1	The inspectors are recommending that the university consider requesting copies of questions used in interviews by endorsed selectors to ensure that they have full oversight of the admissions process for all applicants.	Paragraph 25
2	1.5	The inspectors are recommending that the university consider extending training opportunities	Paragraph 31

		in relation to EDI and admissions to the university's service user and carer group.	
3.	4.6	The inspectors are recommending that the course incorporate direct teaching or involvement from colleagues from other professions into course design.	Paragraph 62

Annex 1: Education and training standards summary

Table breakdown of standards met during preapproval and inspection.

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

Standard	Met	Met with conditions	Recommendations
information about the professional standards, research interests and placement opportunities.			
Learning environment			
2.1 Ensure that students spend at least 200 days (including up to 30 skills days) gaining different experiences and learning in practice settings. Each student will have: i) placements in at least two practice settings providing contrasting experiences; and ii) a minimum of one placement taking place within a statutory setting, providing experience of sufficient numbers of statutory social work tasks involving high risk decision making and legal interventions.	☒	☐	☐
2.2 Provide practice learning opportunities that enable students to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to develop and meet the professional standards.	☒	☐	☐
2.3 Ensure that while on placements, students have appropriate induction, supervision, support, access to resources and a realistic workload.	☒	☐	☐
2.4 Ensure that on placements, students' responsibilities are appropriate for their stage of education and training.	☒	☐	☐
2.5 Ensure that students undergo assessed preparation for direct practice to make sure they are safe to carry out practice learning in a service delivery setting.	☒	☐	☐
2.6 Ensure that practice educators are on the register and that they have the relevant and current knowledge, skills and experience to support safe and effective learning.	☐	☒	☐
2.7 Ensure that policies and processes, including for whistleblowing, are in place for students to	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Met with conditions	Recommendations
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 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	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Met with conditions	Recommendations
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, ongoing development and review of the curriculum.	☒	☐	☐
4.3 Ensure that the course is designed in accordance with equality, diversity and inclusion	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Met with conditions	Recommendations
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.	☒	☐	☐
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	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Met with conditions	Recommendations
appropriately qualified and experienced and on the register.			
4.12 Ensure that there are systems to manage students' progression, with input from a range of people, to inform decisions about their progression including via direct observation of practice.	☒	☐	☐
4.13 Ensure that the course is designed to enable students to develop an evidence-informed approach to practice, underpinned by skills, knowledge and understanding in relation to research and evaluation.	☒	☐	☐
Supporting students			
5.1 Ensure that students have access to resources to support their health and wellbeing including: I. confidential counselling services; II. careers advice and support; and III. occupational health services	☒	☐	☐
5.2 Ensure that students have access to resources to support their academic development including, for example, personal tutors.	☒	☐	☐
5.3 Ensure that there is a thorough and effective process for ensuring the ongoing suitability of students' conduct, character and health.	☒	☐	☐
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.	☒	☐	☐

Standard	Met	Met with conditions	Recommendations
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

87. 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](#).

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

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

	Standard not met	Condition	Inspector recommendation
1	2.6, 3.8, 3.10	The education provider will provide evidence to demonstrate that robust checks are in place to ensure practice educators are registered and are appropriately trained, with structured support in place if required, before being assigned to a student on placement.	

Findings

90. This conditions review was undertaken as a result of conditions set during course approval as outlined in the original inspection report above.

91. After the review of the documentary evidence, the inspection team are satisfied that the condition set against the approval of the PgDip in Social Work is met.

92. In relation to standards 2.6, 3.10 and 3.10, the course provider has provided narrative information and documentation that clearly highlights and explains new checks for practice educator registration and qualifications in place.

93. The inspectors agreed that there is clear evidence that their updated practice educator checking process is suitably thorough. The course provider enhanced their audit forms to request and record additional information from placement provider partners. There are evidenced mechanisms for about escalating issues raised with practice educator support and training needs. The training offered to practice educators has also been enhanced to ensure that current knowledge and skills needs of practice educators are being met. The inspectors agreed that condition 1 is now met.

Conclusion

The inspection team is recommending that the course is approved as the conditions have been met.

Regulator decision

Approved.