



Qualifying education and training standards guidance (2019)

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Introduction

This document provides guidance on Social Work England's 2019 qualifying education and training standards. These are the standards against which we will assess and approve social work education and training courses. The aim is to ensure that students who successfully complete a social work course can meet our professional standards and can apply to be registered with us.

This guidance explains the purpose for each standard, provides further explanation and definitions, and in some cases, suggests how you could show that you meet the standard. The education and training standards apply to all social work qualifying routes, including:

- Undergraduate and postgraduate courses
- Full and part-time courses
- The social work degree apprenticeship
- Alternative training routes and courses.

This guidance document is written for education providers who are delivering approved social work education and training courses, or who are preparing to apply for approval of a new social work qualifying course. The guidance will also be useful for practice education providers and others who work with and alongside education providers.

Language

In the context of this guidance, 'people with lived experience of social work' includes carers. Throughout the document 'we', 'us' and 'our' refers to Social Work England and 'you' refers to the education and training provider (including those involved in leading or managing the course).

We have used the term 'student' throughout this document. We use this to mean anyone learning, studying or training on a course that will lead to them being eligible to apply to join our register. The term includes trainees, apprentices, and practitioners and includes those in training or work based learning.

We have also used the term 'educator' throughout this document. We use this to mean an individual who is involved in teaching, assessing or aiding learning. This can include people who are permanently employed and others who help to deliver the course such as sessional

or visiting lecturers and practice educators.

The term 'staff' is used more broadly to refer to anyone involved in delivering the course. This could include educators as well as those involved in other areas, such as managing or administering the course.

Many statements contained in the guidance sections of this document use verbs such as 'should', 'may' or 'could'. This is because the guidance is not meant to set additional requirements to those set out in the standards.

We use words such as 'should', 'may' or 'could' in the guidance to indicate something which is recommended but not an absolute requirement, or in areas where we would expect you to consider how you meet the standards.

Structure of this document

We have divided the main text of this document into six sections, to reflect the six areas of the standards, and have provided detailed guidance against each individual standard.

The six standard areas are:

- **Standard 1:** Level of qualification for entry to the register
- **Standard 2:** Admissions
- **Standard 3:** Course governance, management and leadership
- **Standard 4:** Course design and delivery
- **Standard 5:** Practice based learning
- **Standard 6:** Assessment

Standard 1: Level of qualification for entry to the register

1.1: The threshold entry route to the register will be bachelor's degree with honours.

The threshold entry route for new entrants to our register is normally a bachelor's degree with honours in social work. This standard contains the word 'normally'. This is to show that you may be able to design a course that leads to a different qualification, but which meets these standards and the professional standards, and so can still be approved by us.

By law, we could not refuse to approve a course just based on the form of award. For people who qualified through different routes in the past, other qualifications may be accepted for entry onto our register.

Standard 2: Admissions

2.1: The admissions process will give both the applicant and the education provider the information they require to make an informed choice about whether to take up or make an offer of a place on a course

You should provide, as a minimum, the following information to applicants:

- The role of a social worker and the types of tasks/responsibilities that a social worker has
- The costs of the course, including accommodation and other associated costs where relevant, and any options for funding
- The structure, content and delivery of the course, including placements and methods of assessment
- That completing the course successfully is not a guarantee that they'll be able to register with Social Work England
- Information about Social Work England registration requirements
- The role of Social Work England and professional regulation
- That the social work qualification is generic and prepares them for practice in all social work contexts
- The research interests of staff who teach on the course and any opportunities for students to undertake or be involved in research projects

2.2: The selection and entry criteria will include appropriate academic and professional entry standards

It's important to make sure the academic and professional entry criteria for your course are appropriate for the level and content of the programme. You should assess applicants' knowledge of the social work profession as well as relevant policies and legislation and test for the values and behaviours expected of social workers in accordance with the professional standards.

You may want to assess how they've demonstrated a particular value (such as compassion, empathy, integrity or working collaboratively) in their personal or working life.

2.3: The admissions process will ensure that applicants have a good command of English

It's important to make sure social work courses recruit students who have a good working knowledge of the English language. We expect that any English language requirements you set at the point of admission are appropriate for the level and content of the programme. These requirements should take into account the fact that once the programme is completed, all students must have the necessary level of English to practise as a social worker in England.

Entry requirements for applicants who are native English speakers may be different to the requirements for those whose first language is not English. You need to consider this in your process and establish how you will assess a good command of the English language. Your process should also make sure that reasonable adjustments are made to allow disabled applicants (for example, deaf applicants) to demonstrate their English language and communication skills.

2.4: The admissions process will assess the suitability of applicants, including criminal conviction checks

You should have a process for assessing whether an applicant's conduct and character are suitable for them to train as a social worker. You should carry out an 'enhanced' criminal record check with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) as part of your admissions process. It's important that your entry requirements for criminal record checks are appropriate and safe for students entering a social work course.

If a student already holds an enhanced level DBS check with their employer (for example for social work apprenticeships and other employment-based routes) and you decide this check is satisfactory, you may not need to carry out an additional check during the admissions process. You must, however, be able to demonstrate that you have a robust and documented process for making sure such a DBS check exists, that it is valid, and that it meets your requirements.

It can be beneficial to involve employers when deciding what your requirements for criminal record checks should be. This is so that successful applicants are less likely to encounter any issues regarding their criminal record check when they go on placements or start practising as a social worker. This is necessary as some placement providers may run their own checks which may have different requirements to yours.

When you're making an admission decision about someone who has a criminal record, you should consider whether it might affect their suitability to work with people with lived experience of social work and/or affect the public's confidence in the profession.

2.5: The admissions process will ensure that applicants are aware of and comply with any health requirements

When you're recruiting students on to social work courses, it's important to make sure they're aware of and comply with any health requirements. You should encourage applicants to provide information about any health conditions that may affect how they learn on the course as well as if it could impact the way they interact with people with lived experience of social work.

It's your responsibility to make sure you've made all reasonable adjustments for applicants

and students in line with equality and diversity laws. In line with legislation, students should not be required to disclose any short or long term physical or mental health conditions. However, it's reasonable to expect students to declare that they're willing and able to identify and manage their own needs in a way that avoids any risk to people with lived experience of social work or themselves.

You should make students aware of the consequences of not declaring something that may affect their suitability for social work or their ability to meet the requirements of the course. For example, if a student chooses not to declare an issue relating to conduct which later comes to light, they may then find themselves subject to your institution's fitness to practise process.

If a student does not declare a health condition, they may not receive the reasonable adjustments necessary to support them in meeting academic or placement requirements. If you have any relevant additional guidance in place, you should make applicants aware of this during the admissions process.

2.6: There will be an appropriate and effective process for assessing applicants' prior learning and experience

Your admissions process should include the consideration of an applicant's prior relevant experience and you should be able to demonstrate how this has affected your admission decision. Prior experience could include, for example, working with children, families or adults within social care or other relevant settings.

It may also include completion of relevant qualifications. Applicants should demonstrate that their prior experience has helped them develop the relevant knowledge and skills that will help them meet the professional standards by the time they complete your course.

2.7: The education provider will ensure that there are equality and diversity policies in relation to applicants and that they are implemented and monitored

It's important to make sure your admissions processes are in line with equality, diversity and inclusion principles. When you're designing and administering your admissions process, you may wish to consider the following:

- How prepared are admissions staff to answer questions from applicants or prospective applicants with health conditions or impairments?
- How clear it is to applicants and prospective applicants that talking about their health condition or impairment in personal statements, written exercises, observed group work or interviews will not affect whether or not they're offered a place on the course?
- How accessible is the assessment and reasonable adjustments process for applicants?
- Is equality, diversity and inclusion training provided to staff involved in the admissions process?

Standard 3: Course governance, management and leadership

3.1: The course will be sustainable and fit for purpose

It's important to make sure the course is sustainable and fit for purpose. The course must meet the needs of the student and make sure they're prepared for practice and able to meet the professional standards. Stakeholders should be committed to providing enough resources for delivery of the course and have the necessary support of senior managers.

3.2: The course will be effectively managed

To make sure the course is effectively managed, there should be a course management structure with clearly outlined roles and responsibilities. It's important that people have the skills, motivation and expertise to manage the programme.

If you have a partnership arrangement in place with another organisation for delivering some of the programme, you should oversee the management systems and structures within that organisation. This is to make sure everyone has a clear understanding of their responsibilities and how partnership issues or concerns might be dealt with.

3.3: The education provider will ensure that the person holding overall professional responsibility for the course is appropriately qualified and experienced and on the register

It's important that the person taking overall professional responsibility for the course and the development and delivery of the curriculum is appropriately qualified and experienced. This person should have a recognised social work qualification and be a registered social worker.

We understand there may be circumstances where it's appropriate for a programme to be led by someone who is not registered as a social worker. If this is the case, you must be able to provide evidence about how you make sure they're appropriate for the role and that they can access the necessary information and resources relevant to the social work profession.

Note: Our 2021 education and training standards will require that there is a lead social worker in place to hold overall professional responsibility for the course. This person must be appropriately qualified and experienced and on the Social Work England register.

3.4: The course will have regular and effective monitoring and evaluation systems in place

It's important you can demonstrate the systems you have in place to monitor and evaluate your course's quality and effectiveness. This includes processes that allow you to continuously gather information on the quality and effectiveness as well as respond to any identified risks, challenges or changes. If relevant, you should also use this information as a way of continuously improving your course.

The processes you use should be appropriate to the course and may include the following:

- Carrying out internal and external quality audits
- Regularly carrying out critical reviews of your course
- Regularly collecting and analysing feedback from students, educators and people with lived experience of social work
- Analysing complaints from students

- Analysing concerns raised by students, educators and others (for example, about the safety or wellbeing of people with lived experience of social work)
- Carrying out quality audits of placements
- Carrying out monitoring and evaluation with placement providers

3.5: There will be regular and effective collaboration between the education provider and placement providers

It's important that there's regular and effective collaboration between the education provider (you) and placement providers to maintain the quality and effectiveness of the placement. This collaboration could be in the form of a meeting, asking for feedback, or other methods of communication, but be most appropriate for continually improving the course.

3.6: There will be an effective process in place to ensure the availability and capacity of practice based learning for all students

It's important to have a process in place to guarantee the availability and capacity for practice based learning for all students. You should consider both the students currently on your programme as well as forward planning for future cohorts.

If the practice based learning is provided separately to the rest of the course, we expect this process to be included in your regular communication and involvement with the practice education providers. When making decisions about practice based learning and what is available, you should consider how your decisions might affect other courses.

3.7: People with lived experience of social work will be involved in the course

It's important that people with lived experience of social work are involved in and contribute to the course. This can include the following:

- Admissions and selection (for example, as part of the interviewing panel or by contributing to the formulation of interview questions and other aspects of the admissions and selection process)
- Developing teaching approaches and materials
- Planning and developing the course (for example, by giving their perspective and feedback on the content of curricula and the methods of teaching, which could include formal membership of curriculum development and governance groups)
- Teaching and learning activities (for example, by giving presentations, facilitating seminars, contributing to small group work with students and mentoring students)
- Feedback and assessment (for example, by providing feedback directly after interactions with students during placements or contributing to the development of feedback and assessment processes which could include formal membership of assessment development and governance groups)
- Quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation (for example, by being part of provider quality management visits to placement providers or committee membership)

You should make sure there is support available for service users and carers, including payment where appropriate, so they're able to be appropriately involved.

3.8: Students will be involved in the course

Students could be involved, either as individuals or working in groups, in the design, delivery and/or review of their programme. This is to help maintain the quality and effectiveness of the course. They can be involved in a number of different ways, for example:

- Feedback through surveys
- Partnership working between student and educators

- Staff and student liaison committees
- Students being represented on committees and working groups
- You should have processes in place that encourage student involvement and to assess how their involvement has contributed to the quality and effectiveness of the course.

3.9: There will be an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff in place to deliver an effective course

The number of staff you need will depend on the cohort size of your course. You should be able to justify the number of staff you have and the proportion of their time that they spend working on the course in relation to the practical requirements of the course, the number of students, their needs, and the learning outcomes to be achieved.

We do not set staff-to-student ratios. Instead, we consider the staffing within the overall context of the education you provide. You should also have arrangements in place to review the number of staff involved in the programme and to deal with situations such as staff absences.

Qualifications and experience of staff should be appropriate to the course. We may want to look at what teaching and learning methods educators are involved in as well as what other courses or course activity they're involved in within social work.

3.10: Subject areas will be delivered by educators with relevant specialist knowledge and expertise

You must have a process in place to make sure educators are suitable and well equipped to take part in teaching and to support learning in social work. By 'educators', we mean individuals who are involved in teaching, tutoring or assessing.

Your processes should allow you to regularly review their knowledge and expertise as students' needs and current practice in social work also change on a regular basis.

3.11: An effective programme will be in place to ensure the continuing professional and academic development of educators, appropriate to their role in the course

It's important that you support educators to maintain up-to-date knowledge and understanding in professional practice. You could consider the following approaches to supporting educators:

- Supporting academic staff to spend time back in practice
- Staff development strategies
- Training
- Mentoring schemes
- Professional development portfolios

3.12: The resources to support learning in all settings will be effective and appropriate to the delivery of the course and will be accessible to all students and educators

You must make sure course resources are available to students and educators and that they are used effectively to support the learning and teaching of the course. Resources should be available to support both theory and practice based learning and should be available in all settings.

You should be able to assess the use of resources, whether they are effective, and how accessible they are for students and educators. You should consider how up to date they are and the cost of replacing resources when needed.

3.13: There will be effective and accessible arrangements in place to support the wellbeing and learning needs of students in all settings

It's important that students can access resources to support their academic development. You should have processes in place to make sure students have access to regular feedback on their academic progress, such as a personal tutor system.

These processes should also support students who need additional help with particular aspects of their course. These processes should be in place for all students, but in particular you may want to consider how to support:

- mature students
- disabled students
- students who must take periods of planned or unplanned leave from the course
- students with caring responsibilities
- students with financial difficulties
- As above, support should be available to support theory and practice based learning and should be available in all settings.

3.14: The course will implement and monitor equality and diversity policies in relation to students

You must make sure your course provides an impartial, fair and supportive environment to allow people to learn. Your equality and diversity policies and your monitoring processes must apply throughout the programme. If part of the course (for example, practice-based learning) is delivered at or by a separate organisation, you must have a process to make sure that equality and diversity policies are in place and followed and that these policies are applied to all students on every parts of the course.

Courses may have their own equality and diversity policies and education providers may have separate policies that apply. Students should know how to access these policies and what to do if they feel that they have been discriminated against.

3.15: There will be a thorough and effective process in place for receiving and responding to student complaints

It's important you have a process in place to manage and respond to complaints from students. There should be evidence of any complaints as well as evidence of how complaints contribute to the overall way the course is governed and identifying where improvements could be made.

Complaints could be about:

- the quality of teaching and learning opportunities
- the appropriateness or fairness of course policies and procedures
- how these policies and procedures have been put into practice
- allegations of harassment or discrimination
- Complaints are different from 'academic appeals', which only support the request for a review of a decision about progression or assessment, though the processes may be similar or linked.

The process for receiving and dealing with student complaints must apply to all parts of the education provider and the course, including practice based learning.

3.16: There will be thorough and effective processes in place for ensuring the ongoing suitability of students' conduct, character and health

As students progress through their course, it's important to check that their conduct, character and health remains suitable for the practice of social work. You should also make sure they can still interact safely with people with lived experience of social work and others. You should have processes in place to continually reassess students' suitability and deal with any concerns. This includes expecting students to provide information (such as a self-declaration) about any issues relating to their character or health.

When you're assessing this information, you should consider whether the conduct, character or health related issue could affect a student's ability to meet the professional standards or to practise safely and effectively once they are qualified.

Concerns about a student could be raised by anyone involved in the course, such as practice educators, other students or people with lived experience of social work (for example, if a student has acted in a way that does not meet the professional values and behaviours that we expect).

The processes you have in place should be fair and supportive. They should be focused on helping and supporting students to deal with concerns raised about their conduct, health or character where appropriate. However, they should also be effective and allow for an appropriate range of outcomes. For example, concerns about a student's conduct may show that they need extra support or, in serious cases, that they're not suitable to continue the course.

If such information comes to light near the end of a course, an appropriate outcome could be to give an award that does not allow the student to apply to the register. We do not see having a health condition or impairment as a barrier to becoming a social worker. However, if you believe that a student will not be able to cope with a career in social work due to a physical or mental health condition, the relevant staff members should talk to the student about the concerns.

You should also seek independent medical advice about the student's condition and make reasonable adjustments for the student (if it's possible and if it could help the student). If these steps do not resolve the concern, you should consider using fitness to practise processes to decide about the student's suitability to remain on the course.

Each higher education institution (HEI) will have its own fitness to practise procedure. This procedure may be applicable to students enrolled on courses that lead to qualification in several different professions.

3.17: There will be an effective process in place to support and enable students to raise concerns about the safety and wellbeing of people with lived experience of social work

You must have a process in place to:

- help students to recognise situations where people with lived experience of social work may be at risk
- support them in raising any concerns
- make sure action is taken in response to those concerns
- Students may encounter situations that concern them during practice based learning or other ways during the course. Processes should cover all parts of the course, making sure students understand their responsibilities regarding raising concerns.

You must support students in raising concerns. Students should be told who to report their concerns to and how, and how these concerns will be considered and acted on. You could deliver this information by having:

- training on raising concerns and the importance of being open when things go wrong
- dedicated reporting or communication methods for learners to raise concerns
- advice from members of staff when situations arise that may be cause for concern

Your policies must be designed to make sure that students are not penalised for raising concerns. Your process should make sure that the concern will be forwarded to any other appropriate people or organisations, such as us, if required.

3.18: The education provider will ensure students, educators and others are aware that only successful completion of an approved course leads to eligibility for admission to the register

It's important to make sure there is no confusion about which courses we approve and which we do not. Students, educators and the public must understand which courses meet our standards for registration and which do not.

Students who are not eligible to apply for registration should not be given an award that refers to a protected title (such as social worker).

You should make sure that course and award titles are clear. Applicants, learners, educators and the public should understand who is eligible to apply for registration with us and who is not.

Standard 4: Course design and delivery

4.1: The learning outcomes will ensure that students meet Social Work England's professional standards

It's important that students can demonstrate that they can meet the professional standards by the end of their training. Throughout a course, students must have the opportunity to learn about professional conduct and to demonstrate an understanding of which types of behaviour are appropriate for a professional and which are not. This should include learning about how context affects professional decision making.

You should have documentation that clearly shows how the content of your curriculum and the learning outcomes are mapped to the professional standards. You should also have documentation that shows when and how students have learning opportunities that allow them to develop knowledge, skills and behaviours to meet the professional standards.

Each student that completes the course should be able to meet all the professional standards regardless of any optional modules they have chosen.

4.2: The learning outcomes will ensure that students understand and are able to meet the expectations of professional behaviour

Students need to be aware of their obligations to meet the professional standards when they qualify and apply for registration as well as throughout their future professional practice.

These professional standards set out our expectations regarding a social worker's behaviour and cover their ethics, decision making, communication, and interaction with people with lived experience of social work, colleagues and others. Meeting those standards is an essential part of being fit to practise.

4.3: The course will reflect the philosophy, core values, skills and knowledge base as articulated in any relevant curriculum guidance

You must make sure that the course remains current regarding the philosophy, core values, knowledge and skills of a profession. If the course does not keep up with the most up to date curriculum guidance available, we need to understand how you can be confident that students completing your course are able to practise safely and effectively.

Curriculum guidance is often produced by professional bodies, but relevant documents are sometimes produced by other organisations such as commissioning and funding bodies or employers. You must be able to show how any guidance is reflected in the programme.

4.4: The curriculum will remain relevant to current practice

It's important to make sure your curriculum stays relevant and that you update it regularly in line with research and developments or changes in legislation, government policy and current best practice. For example, it may be useful for you to be able to show how the design of the curriculum predicts or reflects changes in practice or services, developments in the profession's research and evidence base, advances in technology, changes in the law, and changes in people with lived experience of social work's needs and expectations.

You may also want to consider how to reflect feedback on employability (from students and employers), changes in workforce development and lifelong learning, and developments in professional and regulatory practice, including research and guidance.

4.5: Integration of theory and practice will be central to the course

Theory and practice must be linked and must support each other. For example, students must have the opportunity to learn theory and understand why it is important, but also to reflect on and learn how to apply theoretical frameworks in practice. This must apply in both classroom and practice based learning.

4.6: The learning and teaching methods used will be appropriate to the effective delivery of the learning outcomes

Make sure that the methods you use to deliver the course support students to achieve the learning outcomes. Teaching methods should be relevant to the learning outcomes, both in terms of theoretical knowledge and the practical skills needed in social work practice.

Learning and teaching methods should be evidence based as a way of making sure they are effective. We do not set specific requirements for the types, number, or range of approaches your programme should include.

Where possible, your approaches should take into account individual learning styles and support achievement for all parts of the course.

4.7: The delivery of the course will support and develop autonomous and reflective thinking

It's important that you help students become independent and reflective practitioners. This is key to meeting our standards for registration. They should have the ability to practise as an autonomous professional and have the skills and knowledge to reflect on and review their practice.

The delivery of the course should encourage students to consider their own practice,

including the limits of their safe and effective practice and their responsibility, to make sure that they practise safely when they complete the course.

Teaching and assessment methods to help achieve this could include:

- self-appraisal with planning and writing action plans
- discussion groups
- workshops
- practice simulation and debriefing
- reflective diaries or logs
- personal development plans

4.8: The delivery of the course will support and develop evidence-based practice

It's important that students learn how to use evidence from research and other sources to inform and systematically evaluate their practice. They should have the ability to gather, use, analyse and evaluate evidence to inform their decision making and allow them to practise effectively.

Evidence may come from research, audit and evaluation, or feedback from people with lived experience of social work, for example. The development of evidence based practice could be achieved through student centred and independent learning, teaching and assessment strategies, as well as student led research where appropriate.

You should make sure the course encourages students to develop analytical skills and research appreciation that's relevant to the profession.

4.9: The course will ensure that students are able to learn with, and from, professionals and students in other relevant professions

It's important for students to learn how to work with and learn from colleagues in other professions. By 'other professions', we mean other health and social care professions and professions outside of health and social care, for example law or psychology.

Improving the quality of care for people with lived experience of social work should be the key factor in deciding which other professions or occupational groups are relevant to students on a course.

You may wish to consider employing teaching staff from other professions to help deliver your course by giving lectures, leading seminars or small group work, or acting as academic tutors for students, for example.

Placements are a key opportunity for students to work with, and learn from, other professions. You may want to consider documentation that outlines when and how students will learn during placements and that identifies opportunities that allow them to work with other professions.

4.10: The course will include effective processes for obtaining appropriate consent from people with lived experience of social work and students

The course should have processes in place for respecting individuals' rights and reducing the risk of harm, while also making sure students understand what's expected of them as social work professionals.

Consent is a principle that is central to practising in a regulated profession like social work. You must make sure you have appropriate consent from people with lived experience of social work who interact with your students and your learning and teaching methods must respect their rights.

If students are directly involved in providing care, treatment or services (for example, in practice based learning), you should have a process in place that makes sure people with

lived experience of social work and carers are aware of this, and get the appropriate consent from them.

Appropriate consent will also be required from students in situations where they take part in practical teaching as people with lived experience themselves. The level of involvement of students in practical teaching will vary by course.

Do not assume that the broad consent a student gives at the beginning of the course will cover all situations. You may require explicit consent from students when they take part in a specific activity.

You should consider factors such as cultural differences and a student's physical or mental health when explaining what exactly you're asking for consent for.

4.11: The education provider will identify and communicate to students the parts of the course where attendance is mandatory and will have associated monitoring processes in place

It's important to make sure students attend the parts of the course that are essential to them meeting the professional standards by the time they qualify.

You should identify the parts of your course where attendance is mandatory and make this clear to students. Students should also be made aware of any consequences of missing mandatory parts of the course. In some cases, it may be appropriate to state that attendance on specific days or modules is mandatory, while in other cases it may be more appropriate to expect a student to achieve an average attendance throughout the course.

You must have systems in place to monitor attendance and to take appropriate action if students fail to attend the mandatory parts of the course. If a student has genuine reasons for failing to attend a mandatory part of the course, you must make arrangements for them to gain this knowledge before they complete the course.

Poor attendance can be a sign that a student is experiencing health concerns. Students should be encouraged to tell you about any health concerns that are affecting their attendance. Poor attendance can also indicate an issue with a student's character or conduct. You should consider this when investigating poor attendance and take appropriate action if a student's character or conduct concerns you.

Standard 5: Practice based learning

5.1: Practice based learning will be integral to the course

Practice based learning should be used effectively, as a key part of your programme, to prepare students for future practice. It may take place regularly throughout a course or as a separate period of time.

You may decide to provide practice based learning in a different setting or led by a different organisation. You must be able to show how practice based learning is central to your course. To do this, you need to show, for example:

- how practice based learning outcomes and progression are in line with learning outcomes for the course
- any ongoing partnership arrangements with practice education providers
- your reasons for the design of practice based learning on the course

5.2: The structure, duration and range of practice based learning will support the achievement of the learning outcomes and the professional standards

It's important to make sure the placements provide suitable learning opportunities that allow students to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to develop and meet the professional standards.

You should have documentation that outlines administrative and practical information about the placement as well as what the student should expect to do and learn during the placement.

We expect you to have clear reasons for your decisions relating to this and your decisions

must be appropriate to the design and content of the course and the learning outcomes. Professional bodies do set guidelines on practice based learning. You should reflect these where they are relevant to your course.

5.3: The education provider will maintain a thorough and effective system for approving and ensuring the quality of practice based learning

You must have a system for approving and monitoring practice based learning. This may include collecting, analysing and acting on feedback from students, people with lived experience of social work, practice placement educators and others.

You should also have processes in place to respond to any concerns, difficulties or incidents that could prevent a learner's success when providing practice based learning. These processes should also account for if there is evidence that may call into question the suitability of the practice based learning environment.

Your quality assurance of practice based learning should ensure continuous improvement of the learning environment as well as for the person with lived experience of social work. Your processes should support the needs of both students and people with lived experience.

You have overall responsibility for overseeing practice based learning even when it's provided by a separate organisation. Any policies and processes must link into the way the course as a whole is governed.

5.4: Practice based learning will take place in an environment that is safe and supportive for students and people with lived experience of social work

You must make sure practice based learning settings are suitable and support safe and effective learning. It's important that practice based learning does not cause a risk to people with lived experience of social work.

You should make sure students work within a scope of practice that is appropriate to their level of skills and experience. The level of responsibility that students have when carrying out learning opportunities will vary depending on whether they are doing their first or final placement as well as the stage they're at in that placement.

A student's responsibility should gradually increase, under appropriate supervision, as their knowledge and skills develop. The level of supervision and responsibility given to a student should be tailored to that individual and their needs.

We expect you to have safety policies and procedures in place that allow you to identify and deal with risks to the health and wellbeing of students. These policies can include:

- manual handling
- aggression from people with lived experience of social work, colleagues or others
- mental health and stress

You must be able to demonstrate how you assess and monitor the practice environment of other organisations providing practice based learning to make sure it is safe and supportive. This includes working with practice educators and practice education providers.

5.5: There will be an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff involved in practice based learning

You must be able to demonstrate there is enough support for learners to take part in safe and effective practice based learning. By 'staff' we mean practice educators as well as others

working in the practice based learning environment or setting.

We recognise that there are different models of practice based learning and supervision and that the involvement of practice educators and other staff can vary among programmes. However, you must be able to provide evidence for what you consider to be a suitable number of staff for the number of students and the level of support specific students need.

You should make sure the qualifications and experience of staff are appropriate to the specific aspects of practice based learning they are involved in, and that they are able to effectively support learning and assessment.

Some professional bodies play an active role in providing advice on staff-to-learner ratios. You should contact these professional bodies for further guidance in this area, where relevant.

5.6: Practice educators will have relevant knowledge, skills and experience to support safe and effective learning and, unless other arrangements are appropriate, will be on the register

You must have processes in place to check that practice educators have the necessary knowledge, skills and experience and are appropriately registered. They should be able to support safe and effective practice based learning in relation to the learning outcomes of the course. This also applies if another organisation provides the practice based learning.

Practice educators will usually be registered with us, however, we recognise that in some circumstances there may be other appropriate practice educators whose professional backgrounds do not match the specific profession or protected title which the course relates to.

Where this is the case, the educator must have the appropriate knowledge, skills and experience to be suited to support and develop learners in a social work environment. This could include professionals registered with a different regulator.

If you choose to use practice educators who are not registered with us, you must be able to explain your decision as well as how you make sure that they are appropriate to carry out this role. This includes how their experience, qualifications and training are relevant to the practice based learning they're involved in.

5.7: Practice educators will undertake regular training, which is appropriate to their role, students' needs and the delivery of the learning outcomes of the course

Practice educators must be appropriately prepared to support learning and assess learners effectively. All new practice educators should be trained and have regular refresher training and support.

Some of this training is likely to be generic but must also include aspects that are specific to the course, delivering the learning outcomes, and the individual needs of students.

If practice educators are involved in assessing students, they should have the appropriate training so that assessment is consistent across all practice based learning on the course.

5.8: Students and practice educators will have the information they need in a timely manner in order to be prepared for practice based learning

It's important that you set and communicate clear expectations regarding practice based learning to everyone involved. This is necessary so that everyone understands their roles and what is expected and required for the practice based learning to be safe and effective.

Information you provide to students and practice educators should include the following:

- Names and contact details of students or practice educators
- The timings and length of practice based learning
- Practical details such as location of practice based learning
- Induction resources
- The learning outcomes to be achieved

- Any relevant risks or safety issues
- Records that need to be kept
- The assessment methods and criteria, including what could happen if students fail to progress and any action that may be taken
- Lines of communication and responsibility

You should make sure students are aware of what to do if something goes wrong, if they have a concern about their practice based learning experience, or if they have a concern about providing services to people with lived experience of social work.

You should make sure information for students and practice educators is easily available, in an appropriate format, and that everyone involved has understood the information. You could, for example, provide follow up training or opportunities for discussion.

Standard 6: Assessment

6.1: The assessment strategy and design will ensure that those who successfully complete the course meet Social Work England's professional standards

It's important that your assessment strategy and design makes sure students can meet all the professional standards before completing the course. You must also make sure students who do not meet the professional standards are not allowed to complete the course. However, you may wish to consider providing opportunities for such students to receive a different award which does not qualify them to be a social worker.

Your assessment strategy should show how individual assessments and examinations contribute to overall judgements about students' performance and progression. When producing and developing your assessment strategy, you should consider including the following information:

- The rationale for your approach to assessments, ideally referencing academic literature and best practice in assessment
- When and in what format assessments take place during the course
- How assessments can be co-produced with people with lived experience
- The pass marks required for individual modules and assessments
- The assessment requirements for progression in the course (for example, which assessments must be passed before a student may progress)
- Compensation regulations

6.2: Assessment throughout the course will ensure that students demonstrate they are able to meet the expectations of professional behaviour

Students need to be able to demonstrate they understand the expectations associated with being a regulated professional by the time they complete the course. This covers assessment in both the theory and practice based parts of the course.

The 'expectations of professional behaviour' include the nature of professional regulation and the responsibilities involved in being a regulated professional.

6.3: Assessments will provide an objective, fair and reliable measure of students' progression and achievement

You must be sure that assessments are effective for deciding whether or not a student is fit to practise by the end of the programme.

Assessment requirements must be clear and realistic, and able to deliver a valid and accurate picture of a student's progression and achievement. The processes you have in place to moderate marks may be relevant here.

Assessments should provide all students with an equal opportunity to demonstrate their progression and achievement. They should also take into consideration a specific students' needs.

Assessments should be consistent and thorough enough to allow students to clearly demonstrate how far they have progressed during the course of the programme and how they have achieved the learning outcomes.

6.4: Assessment policies will clearly specify requirements for progression and achievement within the course

It's important that you make sure students understand what's expected of them at each stage of the course and that educators apply assessment criteria consistently.

Your policies should show anything that might prevent a student from progressing, and the options available to a student who is failing or at risk of not progressing or completing the programme. You should be able to show how these policies are communicated to both students and educators.

6.5: The assessment methods used will be appropriate to, and effective at, measuring the learning outcomes

It's important you have documentation to identify when and how students are summatively assessed against the learning outcomes for your course and that they are able to meet all the professional standards before completing the course. This is sometimes called an assessment blueprint.

It's not necessary for each of the professional standards to have its own individual assessment or for each to be allocated to a specific assessment. It may be that several assessments considered altogether make sure that students are able to meet one or more of the professional standards.

Different assessment methods will be appropriate to assess different learning outcomes. Your documentation should specify which methods are used to assess students against each learning outcome.

Assessment methods could include:

- presentations
- essays
- coursework

- case study analysis
- examinations
- practice portfolios
- 6.6: The education provider will ensure that at least one external examiner for the course is appropriately qualified and experienced and, unless other arrangements are appropriate, on the register

It's important there is appropriate professional input in the external review of your assessment process.

You should recruit external examiners through a transparent process using role specifications that include requirements in relation to expertise and experience in the design and delivery of assessments.

You should have processes for briefing external examiners and providing training for their role as appropriate. You should make sure your external examiners have professional experience and qualifications relevant to the course and are registered social workers.

Your external examiners should contribute to the review and development of assessment strategies, providing advice from an overarching perspective. Their role should be strategic and at the level of reviewing processes and systems, rather than the examination of individual students.

Further information

We have provided a range of guidance materials supporting the standards for education and training:

- Education and training standards guidance
- Guidance on the assessment of social work students
- Guidance on practice placements for social work students.

All our standards and guidance are available on our [website](#).