

# **Guidance for HE admissions tutors and partners on implementing new arrangements for the selection of students to social work degree courses**

## **Foreword**

The Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) has agreed a set of recommendations on the best ways to select the right candidates onto the social work degree. These recommendations which were developed in consultation with many stakeholders<sup>1</sup> are now available for higher education institutions (HEIs) to use and adapt to their own procedures. They have been passed to the College and are outlined on the College website<sup>2</sup>.

This guidance provides detailed advice on each of the recommendations in the broader context of higher education (HE) remits and responsibilities, the Health Professions Council (HPC) standards on admissions procedures<sup>3</sup>, and equalities duties.

This guidance was written by Cath Holmstrom, University of Sussex, with assistance from members of the SWRB 'Calibre of Entrants' work stream and reference group and was funded by the Higher Education Academy's Subject Centre for Social Policy and Social Work, University of Southampton.

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<sup>1</sup> Drawing upon the experiences of those involved in admissions and selection including HEIs, employers, service users and carers, students, the Joint Social Work Unit (JSWU), HPC, BASW, The College of Social Work and Universities UK.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.collegeofsocialwork.org/>

<sup>3</sup> HPC Standards of education and training guidance:

[http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10002C0DSETsguidance\(finalversion\).pdf](http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10002C0DSETsguidance(finalversion).pdf)

## Contents

<b>1: Introduction</b>	<b>p.4</b>
1.1 The SWRB Proposals	
1.2 Purpose of this guidance document	
1.3 Scope of this document	
1.4 Contextual information	
1.5 How the guidance has been developed	
<b>2: Legislative and Policy Context</b>	<b>p.9</b>
2.1 Introductory comments	
2.2. Equalities legislation	
2.3 Data handling and processing	
2.4 Quality assurance	
2.5 Wider policy context	
<b>3: Key Principles in Selecting Social Work Students</b>	<b>p.12</b>
3.1 Transparency: in line with Supporting Professionalism in Admissions ( SPA) good practice guides and the Schwartz report	
3.2 Consistency and minimum standards	
3.3. Assessment of academic and personal suitability for entry to social work programmes should take place in a holistic manner	
3.4 Design of selection processes and actual selection of students to take place in partnership with service users and carers and employers.	
3.5 Quality of 'output' is critical and the role of the selection process must be to select those most likely to become effective and safe practitioners	
3.6 Encouraging diversity whilst maintaining a high degree of competence.	
3.7 Compliance with university and other requirements.	
<b>4: Partnership Working in the Selection of Social Work Students</b>	<b>p.17</b>
4.1 Involvement of service users and carers and employers	
4.2 Responsibility for decisions by HEI	
4.3 Supportive relationship with admissions team	
<b>5: Assessing the Academic Suitability and Readiness of Social Work Applicants</b>	<b>p.18</b>
5.1 Introductory comments	
5.2 Academic entry requirements	
5.3 Basic skills qualifications	
5.4 English language qualifications	
5.5 Advanced standing and accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)	
5.6 AP(E)L in respect of practice learning.	
5.7 Academically unqualified applicants	
5.8 Use of 'clearing' in selection	

**6: Issues in the Selection of Personal and Professional Suitability of Social Work Applicants** **p.23**

- 6.1 Introductory comments
- 6.2 Selection by skills and abilities
- 6.3 Fair and transparent process
- 6.4 Avoiding discrimination
- 6.5 Recommended personal skills and attributes
- 6.6 CRB disclosures
- 6.7 Health checks

**7: Modes of Assessment** **p.31**

- 7.1 Introductory comments
- 7.2 Selection tools
- 7.3 Questions and scenarios used in the test
- 7.4 The UCAS application form
- 7.5 References provided for applications
- 7.6 Pre-interviewing screening
- 7.7 Mandatory individual interview
- 7.8 Written tests
- 7.9 Group tasks and activities
- 7.10 Postgraduate or 'M' level programmes
- 7.11 Applicants with disability
- 7.12 Evaluation of selection processes

**8: Particular Issues affecting Seconded/Sponsored Students** **p.40**

- 8.1 Retained places for work-based students
- 8.2 Separate consideration during decision-making
- 8.3 Appropriate APL policies
- 8.4 Complaints and appeals.

**9: Appendices And Exemplar Proformas** **p.41**

**Appendix 1:** The professional capabilities framework (PCF) at entry to education and training level

**Appendix 2:** Key legislative requirements and summary of Equality Act 2012

**Appendix 3:** Models of service user and carer participation in selection

**Appendix 4:** Self Declaration form for English, Maths and IT

**Appendix 5:** Exemplars of interview questions and other tools

- a) BA interview schedule and scoring sheet
- b) MA interview schedule and scoring sheet
- c) BA/MA group exercise scoring sheet.
- d) BA group exercise
- e) MA group exercise

**Appendix 6:** Criminal convictions and suitability declarations exemplars

**Appendix 7:** Cross referencing admission requirements to modes of assessment

**Appendix 8:** a) Sample pre-interview and interviewing screening tools

- a) Supplementary Application Form

**Appendix 9:** Checklist for design and review of selection process

**10: References/Bibliography/Websites** **p.75**

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The SWRB Proposals

**Strengthening the calibre of entrants accepted on to social work degree courses.** Full details at <http://www.collegeofsocialwork.org/practice/educators/>

#### 1. Clear information for applicants

HEIs should clearly indicate that the social work degree is a professional course leading to eligibility to register as a social worker, list their criteria for admission, state what selection processes will be used and the need for enhanced CRB and health checks.

#### 2. The Criteria for selection of applicants for social work training is based on statements at entry level of the professional capabilities framework

These have been mapped against HPC standards and the outcome standards for qualification and will be subject to alignment through the SCIE PCF project group (and available in October 2011)

#### 3. Written Test

All candidates should complete a written test, regardless of previous qualification or educational background. This should measure the applicant's ability to write clearly and coherently in the English language. HEI procedures should verify authorship. Some HEIs may wish to use the written test to evaluate the potential to develop reflective, analytical and conceptual thinking. Others will test this in different ways, e.g. through interview.

#### 4. Interviews

All candidates selected for the social work degree should have performed well in an individual interview to test their communication skills, motivation and commitment, understanding of social work and evaluation of their life and work experience. This includes interviewing of international applicants using equivalent interviewing methods, such as web cams or other video link facilities

#### 5. Group activities

It is recommended that HEIs consider the use of observed group activities/exercises as part of their selection process

#### 6. Thresholds for entry

A minimum UCAS points threshold of 240<sup>4</sup> or equivalents should be applied where applicants come with tariff bearing awards. For those entering via ACCESS routes, HEIs are encouraged to work with colleges to begin to determine equivalence with UCAS points<sup>5</sup>. HEIs should monitor and analyse their progression and achievement rates against candidate selection and should be required to publish these<sup>6</sup>. For those applying for Masters level courses who already have a degree, a minimum 2.1 degree classification should normally be required.

#### 7. Basic skills requirements

<sup>4</sup> Based on the 2009 average across SW providers for qualifying undergraduate programmes

<sup>5</sup> ACCESS courses are now graded, and Distinction/Merit grades are available to distinguish desirable levels of achievement.

<sup>6</sup> In line with recommendations in the Browne review for more transparent information to inform student choice.

All applicants must have GSCE grade C or above in English and Maths or certificated equivalences, regardless of previous educational qualifications.<sup>7</sup> All applicants must show an ability to use basic IT facilities, including word processing, internet browsing and use of email

### **8. Competence in written and spoken English**

Successful applicants must meet communicating and comprehension skills to International English Language Testing Systems (IELTS) at level 7.<sup>8</sup>

### **9. Involvement of employers and service users and carers in selection processes**

The SWRB and EWG strongly endorsed a proposal that employers and service users are always involved in selection and interview processes.<sup>9</sup> DH is asked to ensure that grants to HEIs to support this inclusion are maintained.

**NB. Pre-requisite for life/work experience:** Following a thorough debate, it is recommended that there should be no **formal** pre-requisite of length of time or nature of life-work experience. However candidates should be asked to demonstrate how life/work experience has helped to prepare them for social work training and to demonstrate their learning from their experiences at the appropriate life stage

## **1.2 Purpose of this guidance document**

This document aims to provide relevant parties with guidance on best practice in relation to the Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) recommendations for the selection of social work students as outlined above. The document provides explanation and further detail helpful to those implementing the proposals. Exemplars and proforma are available in Appendices. This guidance seeks to support those involved in the operational aspects of the selection process. A summary guide for other stakeholders including careers officers and potential applicants is available on The College web-site.

## **1.3 Scope of this document**

This guidance is limited to the selection of social work students in England, and should be read in conjunction with other guidelines and products agreed by the SWRB e.g. on the new curriculum framework and practice learning arrangements to ensure a 'joined up' approach to planning and developing social work programmes.<sup>10</sup>

## **1.4 Contextual information**

This document is written at a time of significant change and some uncertainty within Higher Education and within the social work profession. The changes within HE in respect of changing fee and funding structures and a move towards deregulation are as significant as are changes within the social work profession following the work of the Social Work Task Force and, more

<sup>7</sup> HEIs should no longer run their own equivalence tests for those who cannot provide this evidence.

<sup>8</sup> [www.ielts.org.uk](http://www.ielts.org.uk) This is already required for lawyers, teachers, nurses, and other health staff

<sup>9</sup> This is something which in the future could be arranged through the proposed partnerships

<sup>10</sup> [www.collegeofsocialwork.org](http://www.collegeofsocialwork.org)

recently, the Social Work Reform Board. Together with the transfer of regulatory functions from the General Social Care Council (GSCC) to the Health Professions Council<sup>11</sup> (HPC) currently planned to take place by July 2012, these changes require updated guidance on the complex and challenging process of the selection of social work students.

Following transfer of regulatory functions to HPC, HEIs will need to demonstrate that their processes for selection and admission to social work programmes meet the requirements of HPC's Standards of Education and Training (SET)<sup>12</sup> as follows:

### **HPC Programme Admissions – Summary**

#### **SET 2.1**

Clear information to be provided to applicants regarding costs, programme content and the fact that successful completion of the programme results in eligibility to apply for registration with HPC rather than guaranteeing registration.

Costs associated with practice learning, health and CRB checks should be clarified to all applicants.

Information sought from applicants should be 'fit for purpose' and should be used to enable sound admissions decisions to be made.

#### **SET 2.2**

The admissions procedures must apply the requirement for good command of English in terms of reading, writing and spoken English. International English Language Testing System (IELTS) scores required for those applicants for whom English is not their first language should be clearly identified.

This SET specifies that the level set at the start of the programme in respect of use of English must be such that by the end of the programme students will be able to meet the relevant Standard of Proficiency (SOP) for Social Work.

#### **SET 2.3**

Criminal convictions checks (via CRB Enhanced Disclosure or equivalent) should be completed in respect of all applicants being considered for a place on the programme.

Programme providers should ensure that they have mechanisms in place to deal with declared convictions and that these mechanisms include consideration of HPC Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics<sup>13</sup> and consultation with placement providers.

#### **SET 2.4**

<sup>11</sup> To be renamed as the Health and Care Professions Council once proposed legislation is passed.

<sup>12</sup> HPC Standards of education and training guidance:  
[http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10002C0DSETsguidance\(finalversion\).pdf](http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10002C0DSETsguidance(finalversion).pdf)

<sup>13</sup> HPC Standards of conduct, performance and ethics:  
<http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10002367FINALcopyofSCPEJuly2008.pdf>

Any health requirements should be appropriate to the programme and how it is delivered (including placements) and information to applicants should be clear.

It is the programme provider's responsibility to make sure they have taken all reasonable steps to keep to any health requirements and made all reasonable adjustments in line with equality and diversity law

#### SET 2.5

The appropriate academic and professional entry standards must be applied in the admissions processes. For social work, this will relate to the entry level of the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and a draft summary of this is located at Appendix 1 of this Guidance.

#### SET 2.6

Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning AP(E)L and advance standing routes should be explained to applicants and students and must ensure that prior learning is mapped against learning outcomes on the programme concerned in order to evidence ability to meet the SOP for social work upon graduation.

#### SET 2.7

Programme providers must have equality and diversity policies in respect of applicants and students and must monitor these.

In addition to the regulatory and programme approval role of HPC, **The College of Social Work ('The College')** will endorse programmes that demonstrate their adherence to good practice and professional standards of education and training that are in excess of the minimum standards required by HPC.

### 1.5 How the guidance has been developed

This document has been developed through a process of consultation with a range of organisations and individuals involved in, or with an interest in, the selection of social work students. The Reform Board's recommendations were taken as the starting point of this document and each of those recommendations was then explored in more detail in order to make proposals about how these could be operationalised. Drawing upon the experiences of those involved in admissions and selection from a Higher Education perspective (from different types of institutions), from a service user and carer perspective, and from the perspective of employers, a reference group has read and contributed to earlier drafts of this document. In addition, contributions have been made by regulatory bodies (including GSCC, The Joint Social Work Unit [JSWU] and HPC) and by The College of Social Work and Universities UK.

**The Reform Board proposals in summary:**

- ❖ Clear information to applicants and transparency regarding the selection process and the professional nature of the programme is required (*Proposal 1A*)
- ❖ Mandatory written test to be introduced (*Proposal 1B*)
- ❖ Individual interviews to be mandatory with group and other activities highly recommended (*Proposal 1C*)
- ❖ For postgraduate programmes, a minimum of a 2:1 will normally be required as an entry requirement (*Proposal 1D*)
- ❖ For undergraduate programmes, a minimum of 240 UCAS tariff points or equivalent should be obtained prior to entry where the applicant is taking or has taken tariff bearing awards (*Proposal 1D*)
- ❖ English and Mathematics at Grade C or above or equivalent required prior to enrolment on the programme and basic IT skills should be obtained prior to the start of the programme (*Proposal 1E*)
- ❖ IELTS score of 7 required where previous language of instruction is not English (*Proposal 1F*)
- ❖ Employer and service user and carer involvement in the selection process is essential (*Proposal 1G*).

## 2. Legislative and policy context relevant to the admission and selection of students

### 2.1 Introductory comments

The main legislative requirements that impact upon the design and implementation of selection processes is summarised with references to sources of further information where this is likely to be helpful. This is not an exhaustive account of legislative and policy matters, but is intended to provide an indication of issues to be considered in a rapidly changing environment.

### 2.2 Equalities legislation

2.2.1 The Equality Act 2010 replaces and consolidates previous legislation in respect of discrimination. The Act has important implications for Higher Education and for selection and recruitment practices. The Act reinforces the previous requirements for reasonable adjustments in relation to disabled students and applicants as well as detailing 'prohibited acts' and defining additional 'protected characteristics'. Further details are summarised in Appendix 2. Given the recent implementation of this legislation, lack of case law and delay in publication of guidance documentation, i.e. The Equality Act 2010 Code of Practice for Further and Higher Education

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/equality-act/equality-act-codes-of-practice/>, programme providers will wish to ensure that their practices are compliant with their HEI requirements, such as those under the **Public Sector Equality Duty**, but may also wish to consult guidance provided by Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) and the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), available at: <http://www.spa.ac.uk/good-practice/equality-impact.html>; and <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-in-admissions->

2.2.2 Newly identified protected characteristics of pregnancy and maternity and age are likely to have particular implications for admissions decisions and processes. In particular, age limits (lower and upper) previously set for certain professional training programmes will not be legal under the newer legislation where these do not relate directly to professional competencies or capabilities.

2.2.3 Discriminatory practice can largely be avoided in the selection processes by adhering to the good practice included in this documentation. In particular, programme providers will wish to ensure that the criteria identified as being required for admission are valid and transparent and that the implementation of these does not result in discriminatory practices. Modes of assessment should be adjusted where this is reasonable and where the applicant has a disability, in order to ensure that the applicant is not unfairly disadvantaged by the selected mode of assessment. Competence standards themselves are exempt from the requirement to make adjustments under Schedule 13, paragraph 4(2) of the Equality Act (2010).

## **2.3 Data handling and processing**

- 2.3.1 The Data Protection Act (DPA) 1988 places requirements and restrictions upon HEIs (and other organisations) in relation to personal and sensitive data they collect and the way in which this is processed.
- 2.3.2 Programme providers should ensure that their HEI is registered with the Information Commissioner as required by the Act in relation to information used in social work admissions. The Act requires that data is processed (used) only in accordance with the purpose for which it was submitted, is kept for only a reasonable period and for no longer than needed, is accurate and up to date and is kept securely. The programme provider will usually have been given consent to process the individual's data and where this is not the case, this must be because of the need to fulfil more onerous obligations (such as information sharing with a regulatory body or to protect the interests of the individual concerned). The requirements become more onerous in relation to the processing and sharing of 'sensitive' personal data such as that relating to health and CRB checks where a lack of explicit consent on the part of the individual concerned can only be justified in very particular circumstances. See [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk) for further guidance.

## **2.4 Quality Assurance**

- 2.4.1 The Quality Assurance Authority (QAA) guidance in relation to disability and disabled students is available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk) . Whilst this guidance will usually inform the HEI's overall approach to working with disabled students, programmes will wish to ensure that their own selection policies and procedures comply with the good practice included within the QAA guidance.

- 2.4.2 QAA guidance relating to admissions processes and the selection of students can be found at:  
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section10/RecruitmentandAdmissions.pdf>

The precepts identified within that guidance are reflected within this guidance document and related here explicitly to social work selection processes. This is reflected in the emphasis placed upon the provision of clear information about selection processes and the need for those selecting social work students to be appropriately trained and supported. Transparency of requirements is highlighted as being critical and promotional materials should be up to date. The need to identify processes for providing feedback to applicants is identified as is the need to ensure that complaints and appeals processes are clear.

- 2.4.3 Although most HEIs do not allow appeals against academic or professional judgment in respect of admissions decisions (as with the marking of academic work), most will allow appeals in relation to procedural irregularities. Usually the test set is whether the

programme's/HEI's own procedures have been followed and whether these follow relevant professional body or other guidance.

## **2.5 The wider policy context**

Recent changes to university funding and fee levels following the publication of the Browne report<sup>14</sup> contribute to the changing context in which social work selection operates. The charging of higher fees for programmes is accompanied by more stringent bursary and scholarship requirements, as well as potential changes in DH student bursaries for social work students.<sup>15</sup> Programme providers will wish to ensure that applicants have access to full information regarding fees and any hidden costs (such as travel to placement) and any financial support provided from within the HEI in order that applicants can make fully informed decisions.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/docs/s/10-1208-securing-sustainable-higher-education-browne-report.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> DH will be consulting on these during 2011-12

### 3. Key principles in selecting social work students

**In summary:**

- a) Quality of 'output' is critical and the role of the selection process should be to select those who are most likely to become effective and safe practitioners who are able to uphold a positive image of the social work profession;
- b) Assessment of academic and personal suitability for entry to social work programmes should take place in a holistic manner;
- c) Transparency is critical throughout the selection process;
- d) The minimum standards set by the SWRB and HPC should be applied consistently;
- e) Design of selection processes and the actual selection of students should take place in partnership with service users and carers and employers;
- f) Diversity of applicants is welcomed;
- g) Programme providers should ensure necessary compliance with relevant legislation;
- h) The process of selection should be carried out in a way which reflects the values that underpin social work as a profession.

#### 3.1 Transparency: in line with Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) good practice guides<sup>16</sup> and the Schwartz<sup>17</sup> reports:

- 3.1.1 The importance of reviewing publicity materials on a regular basis to ensure appropriateness of information to potential applicants regarding what is assessed/required and the modes of assessment to be used cannot be over stated.
- 3.1.2 Publicity used to promote social work programmes should ensure that the rigorous selection process is explicit and that the professional nature of the social work role is clearly articulated. Such publicity should ensure that the need for appropriate intellectual and personal skills and abilities is clear in materials used to promote social work programmes in order to enable informed decision making.
- 3.1.3 Publicity materials should highlight the fact that the rigour of the selection process applies to academic qualifications and abilities, but also personal and professional suitability. Applicants should be informed of the need for health and CRB checks and any cost associated with these

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.spa.ac.uk/schwartz-review/schwartz-report-review08.html>

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.spa.ac.uk/documents/Schwartz\\_Report\\_Review\\_Report\\_3\\_Final10.12.08.pdf](http://www.spa.ac.uk/documents/Schwartz_Report_Review_Report_3_Final10.12.08.pdf)

processes in a timely manner (see also HPC guidance<sup>18</sup>). Applicants should also be advised that the existence of prior convictions or health or disability is not necessarily a barrier to entry to the profession.

- 3.1.4 In line with the Schwartz recommendations and Supporting Professionals in Admissions (SPA) good practice guides (see earlier references), all those taking part in interviews and other selection tests should be adequately trained and supported and all selection mechanisms clearly articulated in relevant materials.

### **3.2 Consistency and minimum standards**

- 3.2.1 The concerns highlighted in the Task Force report regarding the lack of consistency in entry standards and quality need to be addressed by operationalising the Reform Board recommendations. At the same time it is recognised that universities and colleges must be able to adapt these general requirements to suit local and/or changing needs. This is also reflected in the wording of HPC SETs referenced earlier in this document. Any requirements in this Guidance document are therefore stated in terms of the minimum thresholds usually expected. The College endorsement criteria will include the requirement to demonstrate how the HEI is implementing the recommendations and, where appropriate, going beyond them.
- 3.2.2 Any application to allow deviation from minimum thresholds must not have increasing student numbers as the primary driver. This reduces the risk of universities placing pressure on social work programmes to recruit for purely financial reasons at the expense of quality of intake.

### **3.3 Assessment of academic and personal suitability for entry to social work programmes should take place in a holistic manner**

- 3.3.1 The unique blend of intellectual capability and personal attributes, attitudes and abilities needed to demonstrate readiness to enter professional training is best assessed using a holistic approach.
- 3.3.2 This approach recognises that any single method of assessing applicants is unlikely to allow for a fair approach to selecting from a diverse applicant pool.
- 3.3.3 This approach also recognises that applicants demonstrating less strength in one area may show significant strength in another. Research findings regarding the validity of various selection mechanisms (such as interviews), show that the use of a range of selection mechanisms allows for 'triangulation' and decision making based upon the maximum amount of information of different kinds.
- 3.3.4 Applicants for social work programmes should be assessed against the

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<sup>18</sup> HPC Guidance on health and character: <http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10002D1AGuidanceonhealthandcharacter.pdf>

relevant elements of the Professional Capability Framework (PCF) for Social Workers specified for admission to social work training. The PCF sets out the profession's expectations of what a social worker should be able to do at each stage of their career and professional development from entry to training to principal social worker. *By the point of entry to SW qualifying programmes*, prospective students/candidates should demonstrate awareness of social context for social work practice, awareness of self, ability to develop rapport and potential to develop relevant knowledge, skills and values through professional training. See Appendix One for details.

### **3.4 Design of selection processes and actual selection of students to take place in partnership with service users and carers, and employers.**

- 3.4.1 It is important that social work programme providers ensure that employers and service users and carers are fully involved both in the design and review of selection processes and also in the operationalisation of these processes.
- 3.4.2 Programmes should evidence in their approval documentation how partners are involved in the design and implementation of selection processes. Given the real impact of meaningful participation in interview panels upon the process, programme providers should ensure that such participation is prioritised. During the consultation process there was unequivocal support for extending good practice in this aspect of admissions work: involving those who have expertise arising from their use of social work services and their carers is critical in ensuring the need to work in partnership is clear from the very start of our relationships with students and brings added value to the selection process. Good practice examples of the way in which service users and carers have been involved in different ways at different HEIs is located at Appendix 3 of this document.

### **3.5 Quality of 'output' is critical and the role of the selection process must be to select those most likely to become effective and safe practitioners.**

- 3.5.1 The selection of social work students requires an element of risk taking and prediction, given the absence of indicators of direct correlations between pre-entry characteristics and performance on the programme – and possibly more importantly, performance post-qualification. The purpose of the selection process should be to select fairly from a diverse pool of applicants in order to select students who are broadly representative of the diverse communities they will serve. Additionally there is a need to ensure that those students selected are most likely to complete the rigours of professional training, and become effective and safe practitioners who are able to uphold a positive image of the social work profession.
- 3.5.2 At times, the academic qualifications required as the minimum for entry to social work programmes and/or the additional assessments of suitability required will place social work programmes at odds with the wider university/college in which they are located. In some instances the social

work programmes will have higher entry requirements and in many cases will have more involved selection processes that require additional investment of personnel and time compared to those of other programmes within the HEI. Programmes will need to work proactively to ensure that the wider university is able to support this important work and to make a commitment to this effect.

- 3.5.3 The assessment of potential rather than proven track record will be most significant when assessing the suitability of those changing careers or those with less work experience or less 'traditional' academic qualifications than others. In such cases, the reference made above to weighing up the evidence obtained regarding a range of strengths and weaknesses will be particularly important. This highlights the need for robust selection processes that allow for the consideration of the qualities and abilities of individual applicants within a more holistic context.

### **3.6 Encouraging diversity while maintaining a high degree of competence**

- 3.6.1 Social work has historically demonstrated a commitment to social justice and to widening access to higher education. There are concerns that this historical commitment will be undermined by a focus upon 'higher calibre' entrants and that selection practice will become more risk averse. Programme providers will need to balance these possible tensions and to demonstrate a real commitment to maintaining a diverse student body whilst striving to recruit those students most likely to become confident and highly competent social work practitioners.
- 3.6.2 It is important that selectors and programme providers appreciate that widening access alone is not sufficient to widen participation. Indeed, many programmes have developed creative and excellent means of providing extended induction and orientation to professional study processes to assist with the transition to degree level study on professional programmes.
- 3.6.3 It is important that programme design includes the creation of appropriate exit points for those who, following admission, are unable to meet the requirements of the programme or wish to pursue other educational or employment routes.
- 3.6.4 Careful monitoring and evaluation will be needed in order to identify groups at risk of poorer progression rates and develop appropriate support mechanisms pre-programme as well as within the programme where needed.

### **3.7 Compliance with university and other requirements**

- 3.7.1 The processes devised and implemented by programme providers must be compliant with internal university policies and procedures, or formally approved as being different from those procedures. This is important given the need for transparency and is most likely to be relevant in relation to appeal and complaint processes.

3.7.2 In addition, the processes that programmes devise and implement should comply with the following:

- Data Protection requirements (see: [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk))
- Equalities legislation (this now includes age and pregnancy and maternity as protected characteristics)<sup>19</sup>
- HPC requirements after July 2012
- Quality Assurance Agency requirements and good practice
- Supporting Professionalism in Admissions good practice guidance.

3.7.3 Programmes will need to ensure that whilst the threshold set as the minimum in respect of entry requirements cannot be adjusted, the process of assessing this must be adjusted in line with disability legislation where this is required. For example, whilst minimum standards must be met in respect of written work, this may be assessed via an adjusted process such as allowing additional time in test situations where appropriate. Disabilities that impact upon speech and performance in group situations will need careful consideration given the stated minimum standards to be evidenced in respect of spoken English, but the legal requirement to make reasonable adjustments to the assessment processes is likely to apply to such requirements.

### **3.8 Reflecting social work values in how selection is conducted.**

Admissions tutors should ensure that everyone involved in selection procedures (academic colleagues, support staff, practitioners, service users and carers) are aware of the need to manage selection in a way that models a professional social work approach (e.g. respect, maintaining probity and integrity, preventing unjustifiable discrimination, working inclusively). The selection process needs to convey the right messages to applicants about the kind of profession they hope to join.

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<sup>19</sup> See Appendix 2 and Section 2 of this document for further details.

## **4. Partnership working in the recruitment/selection of social work students**

### **4.1 Involvement of service users and carers, and employers**

The existing regulations for social work education require the involvement of service users and carers, and employers in the design and implementation of all elements of social work programmes including admissions processes. HEIs should consult with employers in their partnership and with service users and carers to agree on the methods, process and staffing of all stages of the admissions process. This may entail some preparation and support for all parties, and funding for service users. Ideally, a core group drawn from the HEI, employers and service users groups should working together throughout the process to ensure continuity. For suggestions about possible methods of involving service users please see Appendix 3. This practice should be continued and developed further to ensure full and meaningful participation, as stated at 3.4 earlier in this document.

### **4.2 Responsibility for decisions by HEI**

When working in partnership with employers, and service users and carers, during the admissions process, the final decision to offer or not will rest with the HEI as it is the HEI that is accountable and is contracting with the student. This does not detract from the importance of shared decision making involving employers, service users and carers, but the HEI will need to take responsibility for the decision made.

### **4.3 Supportive relationship with admissions team**

Programme providers will need to work, at times creatively, with central admissions and registry colleagues. The different nature of social work admissions processes and requirements will be apparent within many HEIs. For many social work admissions tutors, having a strong and supportive relationship with the central admissions team provides an invaluable source of guidance and support in working to a range of requirements.

## 5. Assessing the academic suitability and readiness of social work applicants

### In summary:

- The complex and challenging nature of social work requires a particular combination of personal qualities and intellectual ability.
- Whilst a wide range of academic qualifications are welcomed, intellectual capacity is a crucial requirement for effective social work practice.
- Applicants offering recent A levels or equivalent qualifications should achieve a minimum of 240 UCAS tariff points from 3 A levels (or courses equivalent to 3 A levels).
- Where applicants offer non-tariff bearing academic qualifications, admissions tutors will need to liaise with their central admissions team to set an appropriate minimum standard.
- Where qualifications offered by applicants are 'old' or lower than the usual standard required, programmes will need to assess current academic performance of such applicants.
- Applicants for M level programmes should normally have obtained a 2:1 in their undergraduate degree.
- In addition to level three entry requirements, all applicants must have GCSE mathematics and English language at grade C or above (or certified equivalent) prior to the start of their programme.
- All applicants must possess appropriate basic IT skills prior to the start of their programme.
- IELTS 7 (overall score) must be achieved prior to the start of the programme by applicants for whom their previous language of instruction has not been English.
- In line with the wider HE practice, programmes should develop their own AP(E)L procedures in line with HPC requirements.

### 5.1 Introductory comments:

5.1.1 Social work is a complex and demanding profession that requires a particular combination of intellectual ability, analytical skills, and personal qualities such as emotional resilience, empathy and the ability and willingness to use role-based authority when needed. In addition, whilst social justice considerations are significant, it is important that we select students who are most likely to complete the programmes and enter the workforce as competent and confident professionals. This

means that admissions and selection decisions cannot be divorced from the wider programme design processes. It is important not to set up students to fail who are not ready or not suitable to successfully undertake the programme.

- 5.1.2 Academic/intellectual ability is one of several strands to be taken into account when assessing applicants, albeit one about which significant specific concern was expressed during the Task Force process. The personal skills, qualities and attributes outlined later in this document are equally important.
- 5.1.3 The complexity of this process should not be underestimated: academically able students may go on to fail social work academic or placement work. Equally, those with few or no academic qualifications may demonstrate significant development within the particular mode of learning on a social work programme. For this reason, academic criteria alone will not be sufficient indication of professional capability. At the same time however, academic, or more accurately intellectual capacity, evidenced through academic certification, is deemed necessary for the demands of modern social work practice.
- 5.1.4 The variety of routes through which applicants come to social work training is a clear strength and this rich variety contributes to the dynamic learning groups on professional degree programmes.

## 5.2 Academic entry requirements

- 5.2.1 The fact that across the country relatively few undergraduate applicants arrive on social work degree programmes with 'standard qualifications' (such as A-levels and equivalent qualifications) should not prevent universities from making robust statements regarding the usual/standard entry requirements for those with such qualifications. Whilst some universities express offers in terms of tariff points, others refer to grades, and so it is important that each programme works with the relevant admissions office to interpret the Reform Board's recommendations appropriately. The most significant of these are as follows:
- 5.2.2 The **standard offer for those offering A-levels or equivalent** (and where they are applying from school or college or have only recently completed) should be no lower than 240 tariff points. This is equivalent to CCC where three A-levels are taken. Best practice will require that programme providers ensure that applicants' 240 points come from level 3 qualifications rather than being made up from a compilation of non-academic qualifications (such as practical music examinations). Details of the tariff points awarded to various qualifications can be found at: [http://www.ucas.com/he\\_staff/quals/ucas\\_tariff/tariff](http://www.ucas.com/he_staff/quals/ucas_tariff/tariff).
- 5.2.3 Where applicants offer only two A-levels (or equivalent), HEIs must satisfy themselves that an appropriate explanation is provided for this and that the grades required are adapted accordingly to compensate for the lack of breadth in the studies.

- 5.2.4 Where applicants offer A-levels (or equivalent qualifications) but **there has been a significant gap** since these were obtained, programmes should follow their institution's usual practice, but are advised that the usual standard (if above CCC) applied to those who have recently obtained their qualifications does not always need to be adhered to strictly for a range of reasons. However, programmes are strongly advised to set additional written work, such as an essay, in such cases, specifically in order to ascertain current academic writing ability where qualifications are more than 5 years old and/or fall below the CCC/240 points threshold. This 'equivalency' testing should be in addition to the written test referred to elsewhere in this document.
- 5.2.5 Where applicants offer **non-UCAS tariff bearing qualifications**, then programmes should work with their admissions office to agree the most appropriate equivalent standard offer and the extent to which this can be varied in the light of particular sets of circumstances (such as widening participation criteria), without lowering expectations in respect of intellectual potential. The most usual example of such an award is identified below.
- 5.2.6 Many social work students on undergraduate programmes have completed **Access Diplomas** and these are welcomed as providing routes into Higher Education for those who may otherwise not have the opportunity to obtain the required qualifications. However, the way in which the grading of these courses varies from A-levels and other equivalent qualifications means that programmes should ensure that their offer levels reflect this in a way that ensures a degree of parity with A-level grades required and yet recognise the different nature of these courses and the reasons students are taking them (such as working long hours whilst studying, etc) as well as the 'exit velocity' associated with these courses.
- 5.2.7 For postgraduate programmes the standard offer should normally require a minimum of a 2:1 upon entry. This reflects the fact that the more intensive masters level programmes require students to arrive ready to move rapidly through academic learning and also to enter placement sooner than on undergraduate programmes. There is currently no evidence to suggest that particular first degrees provide a more appropriate basis than others for postgraduate social work training, although many programme providers currently require social science disciplines to have been studied at higher education level.

### 5.3 Basic skills qualifications

In addition to the academic entry requirements detailed above, all applicants to both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes must demonstrate prior to enrolment that they have obtained the following basic skills qualifications:

- 5.3.1 A basic ability to **use IT effectively**. As a minimum, programmes should satisfy themselves that applicants are able to use email, the internet,

word processing tools and have an understanding of the issues of data storage and protection. This does not need to be evidenced through certification as this may result in indirect discrimination or provide a further barrier to access, but programmes should ensure that students enrolling have sufficient IT ability and awareness. The most likely way to implement this is to ask applicants to confirm that they have these skills prior to interview/offer decision making and to ask them to specify how skills have been obtained. A sample self-declaration form is located at Appendix 4.

5.3.2 **Maths at GCSE grade C** or above (or certificated equivalent).

5.3.3 **English Language at GCSE grade C** or above (or certificated equivalent). [See 5.4 for details of additional English Language requirements for applicants for whom English is not the language of previous educational instruction].

A full directory of recognised qualifications and their levels within the national framework can be found at: <http://register.ofqual.gov.uk/>.

5.3.4 It is important to note that these qualifications are required **prior to enrolment** on the social work programme. If an applicant does not hold these qualifications at the time of interview, any subsequent offer of a place must be conditional upon obtaining these qualifications prior to the start of the programme.

5.3.5 Universities should **no longer be testing for equivalence** of key skills in Mathematics and English. This is to ensure that assessment of key skills is based upon accredited and certificated examination rather than more disparate and potentially less valid or reliable assessments.

5.3.6 In addition, even applicants with degrees or other post-GCSE qualifications must obtain the Maths and English qualifications as specified. It is not sufficient that an applicant with a first degree can be 'assumed' to meet the required literacy thresholds.

## 5.4 English language qualifications

English language qualifications for applicants where English is not their first language should be required at the level of an IELTS (International English Language Testing System) score of at least 7 overall with no less than 6.5 in any one section of the test. (See <http://www.ielts.org/default.aspx> for further details of this testing system.) This is important given the concerns that international students themselves have expressed in relation to the level of qualification they feel is needed (after being admitted with a lower score), as well as recognising the concerns of employers. The requirement to obtain a score of 7 brings social work in line with the requirements of professions such as law and medicine.

Social work requires an appreciation of the subtleties of communication and language in a way that is not required to the same extent in other areas of academic study.

## **5.5 Advance Standing and Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)**

Many universities and colleges have procedures for allowing admission with advance standing linked to prior academic achievement. The existing regulations require universities to have these in place as do the HPC SETs (2.6). Programme providers must clarify in their approval documentation the extent to which APL is possible on that programme and how it is assessed. In particular, careful attention must be paid to the currency of learning and the level of learning and assessment that is being allowed to carry forward credit into the degree. This is particularly so where the relevant area of learning is one of those specified as being mandatory in the social work curriculum.

## **5.6 AP(E)L in respect of practice learning**

HPC allows for AP(E)L in respect of practice learning. Further guidance will be issued on this given the previous bar in respect of APEL in respect of the practice learning components of social work programmes. It will be important to ensure that the practice being recognised in this way is of the appropriate nature and level and up to a maximum threshold, so that the majority of the students' practice learning still takes place within the context of them being social work students.

## **5.7 Academically unqualified applicants**

Academically unqualified applicants are accepted by some universities through the use of set essays or portfolio assessment. This relates specifically to means of assessing academic ability where students lack (for reasons associated with lack of opportunity) formal academic qualifications, but where there are grounds to assess the academic capacity through alternative means. Where programmes wish to use such approaches in order to comply with wider institutional widening access policies, they should still ensure that all applicants have the English, Maths and IT requirements referred to above. In addition, when using a portfolio assessment, this should be used to assess academic ability rather than, for example, short work based reports alone. HEI's will need to be confident that their modes of assessment are rigorous and assess the ability to write extended pieces of work without support at the appropriate level and careful monitoring will be required.

## **5.8 Use of 'clearing' in selection**

Use of 'clearing' often creates difficulties for social work programmes given the need to interview applicants prior to making offers of places and the requirement to assess motivation and commitment. Programmes are advised to avoid the need to enter clearing so far as possible given the difficulties associated with carrying out a full assessment of readiness and suitability to enter professional training within clearing time scales. However, where clearing is used, programmes should ensure that they apply the same standards used earlier in the application cycle and must carry out individual interviews prior to making offers.

## 6. Issues in the assessment of personal and professional suitability of social work applicants

### In summary:

- Although important for a range of reasons, academic qualifications are not in themselves sufficient for entry to social work training.
- Programmes must ensure that appropriate information about the criteria they select against is available to applicants.
- No personal characteristic or attribute should be deemed essential if doing so results in direct or indirect unlawful discrimination.
- All applicants must take part in an individual interview prior to being made an offer of a place on a social work degree.
- Successful applicants will be required to have satisfactorily completed the appropriate and relevant CRB checks, (normally at enhancement level) prior to enrolment on the course. (HPC SET 2.3)
- The admissions process must include compliance with health requirements as detailed in HPC SET 2.4
- HEI's must ensure that they have in place fair and robust processes for dealing with the evaluation of sensitive information on CRB and health disclosures, and processes for making decisions regarding suitability with reference to and in line with HPC Guidance on Conduct and ethics for students and Guidance on Health and Character.

### 6.1 Introductory comments

It is unclear whether social work students will be 'registered' by the regulatory body following transfer of functions from GSCC to HPC. If this is the case there will be no separate assessment of suitability for registration prior to completing the programme and the need for robust assessment prior to entry becomes important on two additional counts. Firstly, programmes need to minimise as far as possible the likelihood of students being selected who cannot then be found placements for reasons related to their personal suitability, as highlighted in HPC requirements. Similarly, as far as possible, programmes will wish to minimise the risk of taking students who will then not obtain registration with HPC upon completion of their programme. Universities are advised to indemnify themselves against any claims in respect of this by the use of suitably worded disclaimers in correspondence with applicants and/or in relevant programme documentation. HPC SETS and Health and Character guidance state that programme providers should assess suitability to enter the programme and that the HPC carry out an assessment of suitability to join the register upon graduation. Most importantly, whilst as a profession a belief in the possibility of people changing (attitudes, values, etc.) is critical, our

students have access to people at vulnerable times in their lives. Our responsibilities to ensure the safety of those who receive services from social workers must take priority where a potential conflict exists.

## **6.2 Selection by skills and abilities**

Given the references made above to academic or intellectual abilities being necessary, but not in themselves sufficient, in the selection of social work students, care must be taken to design and implement selection processes that assess the personal and pre-professional skills, abilities, characteristics and attributes that are most likely to lead to successful outcomes on the programme and in practice. The assessment of these issues is both crucial and yet a very sensitive task. Without great care, skill and transparency, this can become a highly contested aspect of the selection process and lead to discriminatory practices. The PCF at entry level provides the basis for these criteria.

## **6.3 Fair and transparent processes**

In order to design a fair process, programmes will need to ensure that they are clear about the required characteristics and skills and/or what is not acceptable. It is important that what is sought and any grounds for rejection can be clearly articulated in order that it can be assessed fairly and transparently and to allow programmes to make clear and confident decisions without risking challenges relating to the fairness of the processes.

## **6.4 Avoiding discrimination**

Personal skills and attributes must not be identified as 'required' if they risk discriminating unfairly (rather than being demonstrably required at the initial stages of social work training) against particular groups of applicants. The impact of any requirement that may result in indirect discrimination must be considered with appropriate care and attention. This means that direct discrimination in relation to age or any of the 9 protected characteristics included in the Equality Act 2010<sup>20</sup> must be avoided, as must any requirement that may have an indirectly discriminatory impact upon a particular group of applicants, whether this relates to the proposed timing of lectures or specified criteria for entry. In addition, whilst competency requirements are fixed, the **mode of assessment** of required personal qualities, as with the academic criteria detailed above, must be adjusted where disability needs require this.

## **6.5 Recommended personal skills and attributes**

Personal skills and attributes recommended for inclusion in a list of those required for entry, have been mapped against the Professional Capability Framework (see Appendix 1) and were drawn from extensive consultation with representatives of all stakeholder groups. These include:

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<sup>20</sup> See Appendix 2 and section 2 of this document for further information

- An ability to demonstrate motivation and commitment to enter the social work profession (this will require an initial understanding of what social work is)
- Self awareness and an initial understanding of the importance of personal resilience in social work
- An ability to identify strengths and weaknesses that they bring to the social work role
- An appreciation of the impact of their own values and attitudes upon others
- An awareness of social work values
- An understanding of the importance of seeking views of service users and carers
- A recognition of the need to deal with conflict and to use the authority that is invested in their professional role
- Being open and responsive to the views of others
- An understanding of difference and diversity and the relevance of this for social work practice
- Showing an initial awareness of the potential conflicts in social work practice when rights and responsibilities conflict
- Demonstrating how own learning (whether formal or informal) helps understand the social work role
- Showing an initial ability to reflect upon own experience in an analytical way
- Communicating clearly in a range of modes
- Showing a capacity to form relationships
- An understanding of oppression and discrimination
- A commitment to an evidence based approach to social work practice
- Self awareness
- A commitment to relationship based practice.

## **6.6 CRB disclosures**

In addition to the above, all applicants must obtain satisfactory Enhanced CRB disclosures. Whilst good practice is to only process CRB applications once applicants have accepted offers of places so that they are not required to do one for each programme applied to, it is important that these are completed in as timely a way as possible. See HPC SETs referenced earlier in this document for HPC requirements.

- 6.6.1 The HEI should ensure that no student is sent out onto a placement where they may be left unsupervised with service users or carers, or have access to sensitive data, until a satisfactory check has been received.
- 6.6.2 In the undesirable event that a student is due to commence placement before a disclosure has been received, full agreement must be made with the placement provider about the need to ensure that the student does not commence lone working prior to receipt of the disclosure and an appropriate risk assessment must be carried out. Indeed, universities may wish to take the additional precaution of only allowing students to

enrol with *provisional* registration status on the programme until such a time as the check is completed.

- 6.6.3 The meaning of 'satisfactory' here is open to interpretation and this will vary in time and location. However, the consistent factor is the requirement that programmes develop, in conjunction with stakeholders, an agreed way of assessing whether or not a disclosure is satisfactory. It is recommended here that this process relates to an assessment of self declared issues (see below) rather than simply those confirmed by a CRB disclosure.
- 6.6.4 An unsatisfactory CRB is likely to be one in which there is different (and more concerning) information than that disclosed by the applicant at the interview stage and/or one in which details of a particularly worrying matter are confirmed, whether or not this was previously disclosed. Subject to agreed processes, programmes are advised to withdraw the offer from such applicants where the difference between what had been disclosed and what is evident in the CRB disclosure is material and for which no satisfactory explanation is provided.
- 6.6.5 The processes developed will require a careful balance between the need not to admit students that the HEI has good reason to believe will not obtain placements given the financial loss that such students may experience, and the need to not discriminate against those with criminal records. Three examples of different approaches to managing criminal record issues are provided at 6.7.11. Whichever process each HEI designs, it must be agreed with local placement providers (or their HR colleagues), be transparent, and must be explained to applicants so that it is clear that a criminal record is not an automatic bar to training. HEI's are advised to ensure that any offer of a place following consultation is made subject to a standard disclaimer that recognises the shifting nature of views about the significance of a particular offence or other history and the fact that placement provider views may change over time. Thus it is advisable to ensure that all offers are made subject to the receipt of express confirmation from the applicant that they agree that the HEI will not be held liable for any failure to provide a placement if:
- a) proper processes have been followed to consult with placement providers prior to an offer being made
  - b) proper processes are followed to seek a placement for the students
  - c) the failure to secure a placement relates directly to the issue of concern (criminal or other record).
- 6.6.6 Where rejected as not yet suitable, then ideally HEI's should give feedback as to how the applicant can improve their situation in the future, if this does not relate to an issue likely to result in permanent barring from the profession.
- 6.6.7 For international applicants, or those who have lived overseas for periods of 6 months or more in the previous 5 years, appropriate checks

should be made in respect of police or other relevant records, in addition to CRB checks being undertaken. For example, an international student never having lived in the UK and not resident in a country with whom we have reciprocal arrangements, will require checks to be carried out in respect of their home country and depending upon the nature of those checks, additional steps such as the gathering of character references may be required. Once resident in the UK, and prior to placement, a CRB disclosure should be conducted in addition to the previous checks, given the reluctance on the part of placement providers to accept alternative assessments of suitability on the grounds of past contact with the police and criminal justice system.

- 6.6.8 It is important to note that as Enhanced CRB disclosures may also report information other than cautions, reprimands and convictions, programmes must ensure that they have processes in place for responding appropriately to such information. Where this relates to the reporting of a crime (without prosecution), particular care should be taken to ensure that the applicant has the opportunity to explain the matter rather than this being interpreted negatively without further investigation. Indeed, the relevance of the issue recorded may be minimal where there is no other history of cautions or convictions, but this needs to be balanced against the knowledge that certain crimes (such as domestic abuse) may be serious and relevant, and yet may frequently result in a lack of prosecution. In such cases, as when evaluating criminal records themselves, programme providers should adopt an approach to assessing suitability that considers these matters holistically and gives appropriate weight to applicant accounts of the matters, rather than focusing entirely upon past 'evidence'.
- 6.6.9 For the above reasons, programme providers should ensure that, a pre-offer declaration of suitability that covers criminal convictions, warnings, cautions and reprimands as well as declarations as to whether any children in their households have been subject to child protection plans and any disciplinary matters (see Appendix 6 for sample proformas).
- 6.6.10 Applicants should always have the opportunity to expand upon information disclosed in this way, prior to a decision being made, if the circumstances may be material to the final outcome. This is an important component of any fair assessment of suitability prior to admission, or during a course of study. The professional judgment about such matters should also take place after the usual processes have been followed to assess academic and personal suitability through interviews and other means. The decision to offer of a place must separate out the assessment of academic suitability and readiness from the possible unsuitability arising from any declared matters as clearly as possible.
- 6.6.11 Programmes should agree with local placement providers, ideally taking advice from service users and carers too, how such assessments of suitability will be made and the relationship between such assessments and the likelihood of placement opportunities being available to particular applicants. In some programme-placement partnerships, the

preference may be to consult partner agencies in respect of each individual (anonymous) applicant situation. In others, the process agreed may be that if the applicant is deemed acceptable by the employer representative on the selection panel then no further consultation will be needed. A middle approach may require the programme to agree a risk assessment schedule with partners similar to that appended to the GSCC Suitability document (2007)<sup>21</sup> whereby certain offences and other matters are only consulted upon in agreed sets of circumstances, whereas other lower risk issues are agreed upon through the production of the agreed risk assessment tool and the identification of high and low risk scenarios. In such situations it is important that any assessment of suitability includes applicant accounts of the matters disclosed and their reflections upon these in relation to the offence or other issue concerned and their suitability for social work training at the point of assessment, rather than a merely technical assessment based upon the nature of the offence and the time elapsed since the offence.

6.6.12 Clearly, where an applicant has been barred from working with children or vulnerable adults, their unsuitability is evident given the generic nature of the training of social workers. However, where not barred, but offences are of a highly relevant nature (such as child cruelty or neglect), consultation regarding the likelihood of placements being available will be significant.

6.6.13 In addition, where discretionary information has been included on the disclosure, it is important to ascertain the fact that this has been shared with the applicant and programmes must ensure that they are able to adequately assess suitability, particularly where this relates to the applicant's children being subject to protection plans and similar scenarios. Such processes must be devised in partnership with placement providers. In addition, not necessarily at the point of selection, but prior to placement, all students should be asked to disclose any services where it would be inappropriate to place them without further discussion, given their past or present use of those services. This is not to unfairly disadvantage those who have experience of using services, but to protect them from any difficulties and conflict of interests that may occur.

6.6.14 Programme information and publicity material should make it clear that having previous convictions or offending history is not an automatic bar to entering social work, and that every applicant is considered on an individual basis, but that equally no offence is regarded as 'spent' for the purposes of our assessment process.

6.6.15 The 'currency' of CRB disclosures is a contested issue. Although not initially 'portable' from one employment setting to another, students would normally only be expected to obtain one disclosure to cover the three years of a full time degree programme at the very least, as their

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<http://www.gsc.org.uk/cmsFiles/Education%20and%20Training/Suitability%20for%20social%20work%20reportsml.pdf>

employment has not changed as such by moving from one placement to another. However, it is recognised that increasingly placement providers are requiring students to complete a new application for their own purposes. In general, however, one disclosure prior to the course should only require replacing if the student takes time out of the programme or is following an extended programme of study, in which case a new disclosure should be sought every 3 years. Ensuring that the 'contract' with students commencing programmes requires that they notify GSCC (for the time being) and the programme of any subsequent criminal record issues or other suitability related matters via self-reporting as close to the event as possible should be sufficient. Where new issues are disclosed by the student, the programme must obtain a new disclosure to verify the information shared by the student.

6.6.16 Within these processes it will be important that HEI's adhere to the requirements of the CRB, including following required processes when applicants challenge information supplied on their disclosure. Further information is available at:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/agencies-public-bodies/CRB/about-the-crb/crb-code-of-practice/crb-cop>

## 6.7 Health checks

### 6.7.1

Programmes will already have their own processes for ensuring medical fitness to practice. The admissions process must include compliance with health requirements as detailed in HPC SET 2.4. Decisions about what is 'satisfactory' in relation to individual applicants should be agreed by HEIs and placement providers with reference to and in line with HPC Guidance on health and character.<sup>22</sup>

Programme providers should ensure that the checks themselves are valid, proportionate and relevant to the programme and profession and are used in an including rather than excluding manner. Helpful guidance for applicants and programme providers is contained within HPC's document 'A disabled persons guide to becoming a health professional' and their 'Managing Fitness to Practice' guidance<sup>23</sup> and in [The Equality Act 2010 Code of Practice for Further and Higher Education](#) (awaiting publication).

6.7.2 Programmes will need to specify how these checks are to be carried out. In these matters, perception is critical as for many people with long term health conditions and disabilities, the way in which the process is implemented will greatly affect their sense of inclusion or exclusion and the safety experienced in disclosing sensitive and personal information. Good practice will include the separation of clinical judgment regarding

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10002C16Guidanceonconductandethicsforstudents.pdf>  
<http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10002C17Guidanceonhealthandcharacter.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.hpc-uk.org/aboutregistration/healthanddisability/>

'fitness' to study on a professional programme from academic and other judgments. Questions asked must be sufficiently clearly linked to health and professional practice that the relevance of questions is clear.

- 6.7.3 Programmes are advised to separate the process of assessing reasonable adjustment needs from the initial health assessment as far as possible. Where the assessment form or process is used for dual purposes this must be made clear on the relevant documentation and the applicant should be informed as to the confidentiality or otherwise of their disclosures. In particular, they should be advised of the extent to which detailed information is shared with the relevant programme team and encouraged to engage or take the lead in this process.
- 6.7.4 Where the health check and assessment of disability needs and assessment of adjustments are separate processes, care should be taken to ensure a lack of repetition within these processes as far as possible to minimise the impact of multiple disclosures upon applicants.
- 6.7.5 Where health checks are carried out at a cost that is passed on to applicants, HEI's will need to ensure that students with disabilities are not treated in an unfair way through charging additional amounts for the assessing of any disclosed health or disability related matters. Where such costs arise, they should be borne by the HEI or by charging higher standard amounts for all applicants, whilst ensuring that costs do not themselves become exclusionary for applicants.

## 7. Modes of assessment

### In summary:

- HEI's should develop holistic approaches to the design and implementation of selection processes for social work programmes.
- Tests and selection tools must be fair and valid and should not unfairly advantage or disadvantage particular groups within society, particularly applicants with protected characteristics.
- Selection materials and test materials should be updated and revised on a regular basis to prevent plagiarism and collusion.
- The design of the selection process as a whole should be reviewed regularly, based on applicant and selector feedback.
- References should be checked for authenticity and be evaluated with care.
- **All** candidates selected for the social work degree should have performed well in an individual interview. Programme providers should ensure that the interview process is designed to be as reliable and valid as possible by ensuring that interviewers are trained and supported.
- **All** candidates should complete a written test, regardless of previous qualification or educational background. This should measure the applicant's ability to write clearly and coherently in the English language
- Programme providers are encouraged to consider the use of additional selection tools such as the use of group exercises or the completion of other tasks where this adds to the information already available and where the task is relevant.
- The modes of assessment should be adjusted for disabled students where not doing so could lead to the applicant experiencing substantial disadvantage.
- Programme providers will need to be able to articulate clearly the nature of the assessment process and identify the appeals and complaint routes open to applicants in respect of procedural irregularity.

## 7.1 Introductory comments

It is important that a holistic approach is taken to assessing the suitability and readiness of an applicant to enter professional social work training. Assessment of their academic ability and potential forms one element of that process, whilst an assessment of their personal readiness and suitability forms another. In order to assess such different elements robustly, it is important that programme providers use a range of methods that assess required elements in different ways. This allows applicants who come from different backgrounds and experiences a range of opportunities to demonstrate their strengths. Good practice also involves inter-linking the different elements of the assessment process. For example, applicants might demonstrate their initial reflective ability by being asked in their individual interview to reflect on their role in the group task (where held) or some other element of the selection process. Such multi-dimensional approaches also allow selectors the opportunity to triangulate information obtained in different ways as well as indirectly assessing the validity of different tests used. Programmes may wish to use a chart such as the one included at Appendix 7 to demonstrate how each criterion is assessed and by which test or activity.

## 7.2 Selection tools

It is important to ensure that any selection tools and tests are fair and valid. In line with guidance from Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Programmes (SPA) and following the Schwartz recommendations, if a 'test' of any kind is not reasonably certain to be valid, then it should not be used. Therefore additional tests should be introduced only where these are required to test a professional competence standard or are a fair and valid way of assessing a set of criteria or requirements. SPA states the following in relation to the use of admissions 'tests':

"SPA believes admissions tests should:

- Have rigorous validation and reliability testing
- Be supported by statistical and research evidence
- Ensure the minimum of bias in the test questions so the test is valid for applicants from all backgrounds in a UK context
- Be readily available and accessible to those with evidence of specific requirements in a timely way
- Provide exemplar materials and tests with answers
- Be fairly and professionally administered
- Be able to demonstrate they are fit for purpose and add value as part of holistic decision-making
- Be approved for use through the institution's relevant structures and processes. Additionally, institutions should ensure their appeal and complaint mechanisms cover queries about admissions tests." <sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.spa.ac.uk/admission-tests/what-admissions-test.html>

### **7.3 Questions and scenarios used in the test**

It is also important, given the proliferation of student 'chat rooms' that questions and scenarios used in any tests are updated on a regular basis in the interests of fairness and equity and to prevent plagiarism and collusion.

### **7.4 The UCAS application form**

This form is the first 'screening point' for applications. In many HEIs, it is this application form alone that results in the decision to invite the applicant to interview or to reject at this stage.

7.4.1 Many Admissions Tutors report finding the standard UCAS form difficult to use for this purpose in a fair way and this is for a range of reasons. Many applicants receive substantial coaching by schools and colleges regarding the content and style of their application and this can work against them in some cases where those advising know little about social work programmes. In addition, in some cases where the applicant has been well advised, it is then hard to compare their form with one written by an applicant not currently in education and not receiving such guidance. This is particularly the case within social work given the diverse routes through which our applicants come.

7.4.2 In order to manage this difficulty, programme providers may wish to consider sending out supplementary application forms to those not rejected at the initial stage, but prior to decisions about invitation to interview. This has the advantage of ensuring all applicants respond to the same instructions and questions and so are more easily comparable. Such tools should only be used where the questions are fair and the rationale for using them clear.

7.4.3 In addition, HEIs opting to use such tools (see Appendix 8 for examples), are advised that such approaches may reduce 'no shows' at interview, as those who complete the additional task will by definition be the most motivated applicants. However, the use of such additional stages builds delay into the selection process and so programme providers will need to consider ways to mitigate this.

### **7.5 References provided for applications**

References provided on UCAS applications are open references and so are visible to the applicant. This may affect the level and nature of information provided and therefore the reliability, sufficiency and validity of this information.

7.5.1 Programme providers are advised to conduct checks upon a sample of application forms to verify that the named referee actually wrote the reference supplied. This is particularly important where personal characteristics and attributes are critical in a profession such as social work.

- 7.5.2 In addition, programme providers should bear in mind that in terms of equality and fairness, in some cases applicants have no choice who is named as their referee whereas in others it is completely within their choice (and as such they are unlikely to name someone who will not give a positive reference). This applies particularly to those at school and college where they are usually required to name a particular member of staff as their referee. This may result in it being more likely to contain references to 'occasional lateness' or academic work 'still being under development' in a way that is less likely for those not at school and college.
- 7.5.3 Alternatively, referees from educational establishments may feel the need to inflate grade predictions and the likelihood of securing offers for a range of reasons.
- 7.5.4 In order to work towards greater equity in decision making, programme providers may wish to require an additional reference to complement the one provided on the UCAS application form. It may be helpful to specify that the UCAS reference is an academic reference, then the second reference must be personal or employment related. Where no educational reference is available, HEIs will need to be clear about what is acceptable instead. If requiring additional references, this should be made clear in recruitment literature and should take place before a decision to interview.

## **7.6 Pre-interview screening**

Pre-interview screening after assessment of the UCAS application is used by some HEIs (as mentioned in 7.4.2) to provide an additional opportunity for applicants to demonstrate their readiness and suitability for social work training by completing tasks such as biographical questionnaires or focused extended personal statements with questions relevant to social work included in these documents.

- 7.6.1 An advantage of such tools is that they can be more easily compared than UCAS forms. However, these tools must also be subjected to scrutiny for fairness before being used. Questions such as those referring to life experience or other factors indirectly associated with age or any other protected characteristic in equalities legislation will require particular care and attention.
- 7.6.2 It is important that the purpose of this additional 'layer' of the application process is clear to applicants in order to meet the requirement for transparency.
- 7.6.3 Such tasks were the subject of some concern during the consultation phase of the Reform Board proposals. Some felt that such tasks could be problematic if they prioritise one skill over another, such as writing, and because of not doing well in this the applicant did not progress to the interview. However, carefully designed tools that are accompanied by clear guidance regarding their purpose and use may present an

additional opportunity for applicants to demonstrate their motivation and commitment.

## 7.7 Mandatory individual interview

Programmes should ensure that all students have been assessed as suitable for entry through participation in a selection day that includes an **individual interview**. The Reform Board proposals include a recommendation that no applicant should be offered a place on a social work degree, at undergraduate or postgraduate level, without having performed well in an individual interview.

- 7.7.1 Whilst evidence regarding the efficacy of interviews is rather mixed, most selectors for social work programmes (and all service users and carers and employers consulted) argue that an interview is essential for social work selection. Frequently there is a noticeable difference between the apparent strength of an applicant on paper and how they are assessed by an interview panel. Indeed, assessing appropriate personal qualities is challenging without conducting interviews. Service users and carers have expressed particularly strong views about the need to include an interview as part of the assessment process.
- 7.7.2 It is recognised that interviews are time-consuming and costly to run and administer. This may be particularly the case where HEIs have previously only conducted group interviews. In such cases, the introduction of the mandatory individual interview will require careful planning. Programme providers are encouraged to consider how they might validly and fairly limit the numbers invited to interview using pre-interview screening tools referred to above. This also ensures that interview resources are directed at the most motivated applicants.
- 7.7.3 The content and focus of the interview will vary according to the range of other selection tools used in any one context. However, it will be important to clarify what the interview seeks to assess, both in the interests of transparency and fairness, but also to enable fair and equitable assessments and comparisons.
- 7.7.4 The Reform Board proposals refer to the interview being used to assess communication skills, motivation, understanding of social work and to show an initial level of reflective ability when evaluating any relevant life experiences that may help or hinder their development as professionals. In respect of the last point, it will be important that no group of applicant is disadvantaged by such questions. For example, many younger applicants may feel they have no relevant experience when compared with other applicants they have met. Indeed, at face value, interviewers may agree. In such cases, it will be important to work with a broad definition of 'life experience' and for this to include working with others in sports or academic settings and personal challenges faced during a range of experiences rather than being more narrowly defined.
- 7.7.5 In line with HE sector good practice guides produced by SPA, all selectors involved in interviews and any element of the selection

process should receive appropriate training for their role. The training should include, at a minimum the following issues:

- i) The application process to HE programmes
- ii) Key equalities issues
- iii) Accountability
- iv) Decision making processes
- v) Data storage, recording and confidentiality
- vi) Relevant regulatory and institutional requirements.

7.7.6 The validity and equity of interview processes can be improved by the following guidance:

- i) Design questions with fairness in mind. Test whether any particular group of applicants may be unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged by the content of the question or the way in which it is asked and what is sought in response.
- ii) Ensure that all applicants are questioned about equivalent matters.
- iii) When prompting or probing, ensure that this is taken into consideration when answers are compared with each other.
- iv) Descriptively anchored rating scales are less open to interpretation and variation from one assessor to another. Programme providers should consider whether they wish to use such approaches to increase inter-assessor consistency (although training may also help with this).
- v) Interviewers work on different days in different combinations so that some moderation takes place over time. In addition, many programme providers make use of discussions between different panels to ensure greater consistency.
- vi) Ensuring that only one person, the Admissions Tutor, or where needed, a small number of people make the final decisions regarding offers based upon panel feedback will also ensure consistency as well as helping to keep track of numbers of offers being made.

7.7.7 The requirement to perform well in an individual interview applies to international as well as 'home' applicants. International applicants should be invited to attend an in person interview. Where this would be impossible for visa or severe financial reasons, interviewing via web camera or Skype will be acceptable and any limitation of these methods (such as time delay) will need to be carefully factored in to any assessment of the applicant's performance. Interviews via telephone and email are not sufficient to meet this criterion.

## **7.8 Written tests**

These are regarded as being important so that applicants' ability to write clearly and logically is tested at the application stage. These factors are not uniformly evident from the more generically designed UCAS form and so additional testing is required given the serious levels of concern expressed by employers, service users and carers and some HEIs. The written test may be

used to assess other required skills or elements of the initial stage of the Professional Capabilities Framework, depending upon the configuration of assessment tools used by any particular programme. Where used to assess additional skills and capabilities, applicants should be informed of the purpose of the test.

- 7.8.1 Written tests should be completed prior to offers being made, regardless of prior qualifications that applicants have and regardless of whether they are applying for undergraduate or postgraduate social work training.
- 7.8.2 The level and nature of the writing required should be carefully considered prior to test design. If, in addition to assessing the applicant's ability to write clearly and logically, the test is used by HEI's to assess reflective capacity or particular knowledge as well as technical skills in writing correctly in English, this must be set at an appropriate level for this point in the student life cycle. Here it is potential that is being assessed in relation to things that form part of social work training, rather than students being required to commence their studies already able to write highly reflective pieces of work or be able to produce writing in court report format. Conversely, applicants should not be commencing their training where significant inabilities to write correctly are discovered and where these do not relate to a known disability.
- 7.8.3 Written tests may be set on the day of the interview or may involve the student completing a set task prior to interview. Where the latter option is selected by programme providers, they must ensure authenticity of authorship through appropriate means such as including detailed questions about the task or its preparation within the interview.
- 7.8.4 Whilst consideration was given to the setting of national tests, this was not pursued at the time for resource reasons and also because of the expressed wish by many HEIs to retain flexibility in how they design the assessment tools used so that these 'fit' more appropriately with other tools and tests used. This is also appropriate in order to ensure that applicants are not then subjected to multiple tests that may appear to be similar but serve different purposes. Where local programme providers wish to pool resources and to offer shared assessments to applicants applying to any one or more HEI in that region it will be important that each member HEI retains responsibility for the final decision making and that applicants to all participating HEIs receive the same information regarding the testing.

## **7.9 Group tasks and activities**

The inclusion of group tasks and activities that allow for additional opportunities for applicants to demonstrate relevant skills and abilities is encouraged within the design of the overall selection strategy where the inclusion of such 'tests' offers added value to the process. Such activities should not merely replicate the opportunities provided elsewhere, but include opportunities for required characteristics or abilities to be assessed and demonstrated.

- 7.9.1 Examples of group and other activities that HEIs have recently included as part of their selection process are included in the appendices to this document.
- 7.9.2 Where group activities are used to assess interpersonal skills, attitudes and personal characteristics in addition to content factors and communication skills, this should be made clear to applicants prior to the selection day. In addition, those evaluating performance will need to control for factors such as only one group member being male/female or from a particular demographic group or where the behaviour of one group member adversely affects the ability of others to participate.
- 7.9.3 Good practice includes an element of cross reference from one element of the selection process to another, such as asking in an interview how someone perceived their own behaviour in the group task as this tests initial reflective abilities and self awareness and also allows for comments relating to any inhibiting factors to be elicited.

## **7.10 Postgraduate or 'M' level programmes**

Whilst sharing many of the features of undergraduate programmes, postgraduate or 'M' level programmes have different requirements in relation to the level of academic study and also the speed with which students must demonstrate their readiness to enter practice learning. For this reason, programme providers may wish to differentiate between not just academic capability and potential at the two different levels of study, but also in respect of the personal attributes and characteristics that are required for practice learning and for which more time may be allowed in terms of development on an undergraduate programme.

## **7.11 Applicants with disabilities**

In respect of disabled applicants, the process of assessment during any stage of the selection process should be adjusted in line with legislative requirements to ensure that such applicants do not experience direct or indirect discrimination. Where a disability may adversely affect performance in any element of the process, HEIs will need to consider how the mode of assessment may be adjusted, rather than the level of attainment itself requiring adjustment as noted earlier in this document.

- 7.11.1 Additional time may need to be allowed for written tests where applicants have a disability which makes this appropriate, such as dyslexia related difficulties or conditions causing chronic pain, when breaks as well as additional time may be required. Disabilities may require adjustments, such as the ability to word process rather than handwrite responses to written tests, the use of a scribe in some cases, or the provision of information on paper of a particular colour or typed in particular fonts.
- 7.11.2 In addition to the need to make adjustments in relation to disabilities disclosed on the original UCAS application form, applicants invited to

attend interviews and other tests should be encouraged to disclose any disabilities in a supportive manner that explains that this then enables adjustments to be made to the assessment process.

7.11.3 Furthermore, HEIs are also required to anticipate adjustments to tests and assessment processes and so are advised to have strategies in place, possibly after consultation with their own disability advisers, as to appropriate adjustments that may benefit all applicants and also address the needs of many of the applicants with the more frequently disclosed disabilities such as dyslexia. This is not to say that the HEIs should not then, in addition, consider the individual's particular needs and wishes, but that anticipatory adjustments are important.

7.11.4 For example, all information about tests and elements of the selection paper could usefully be printed in Arial size 14 font on pale pastel coloured paper. This is a standard recommended adjustment for many of the Specific Learning Disabilities such as dyslexia.

7.11.5 Where interviews or group exercises are assessing the ability to communicate in spoken English, this may give rise to concerns where an applicant has a disability affecting speech. The competence standard here is the ability to communicate effectively orally. The process by which this occurs and is assessed could include assessing the ability to communicate via an interpreter or through computer mediated software for example.

7.11.6 Where the disclosed disability relates to anxiety related difficulties, the provision of timely information about the assessment process and some contact prior to the selection day may be sufficient to limit the disadvantage that the applicant may otherwise experience, but this will need to be considered further on an individual basis.

## **7.12 Evaluation of selection processes**

Programmes should evaluate their selection processes on a regular basis and should seek and respond to applicant feedback, in line with SPA good practice guidance and HPC requirements.

## **8. Particular issues affecting seconded or sponsored students**

### **8.1 Retained places for work-based students**

Where applicants apply outside of UCAS for a work-based or similar route, the number of places retained for such applicants should be made clear in publicity materials so that other applicants have an accurate sense of how many places are available through the UCAS and other routes.

### **8.2 Separate consideration during decision-making**

Where sponsored students are considered, the programme team should ensure that decisions about offers of places and offers of secondment, although related, are appropriately separated during decision making processes. This is so that sponsored students do not have additional or fewer 'hurdles' to pass than non sponsored students. It is recommended that decisions about whether applicants meet the standard entry requirements are made first (i.e. could they be made an offer in the same way as any other applicant) and the question of secondment or sponsorship by the employer is considered after this.

### **8.3 Appropriate APL policies**

HEI's will need to ensure that they have in place appropriate Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) policies and procedures and this may be particularly important for this group of applicants.

### **8.4 Complaints and appeals**

HEI's and employers will need to be clear about complaint and appeals routes for seconded students. Where the decision being challenged relates to a refusal to offer a place on the programme, it is most likely that the HEI will be held responsible. In addition, where the challenge relates to the overall selection process for a place on the programme, liability will rest with the HEI.

## 9. Appendices and Exemplar Proformas

### Appendix 1: The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) at entry to education and training level

These statements identify the expected framework of capability for applicants to be assessed against when applying for entry to social work initial qualifying training. These may evolve in the light of use and experience.

#### Introduction

The statements are based on the assumption that, whilst assessment for entry should focus on **potential** for successful completion of qualifying training, there are certain qualities, skills, knowledge and values which should be present at the point of entry which make it likely that the student will be able to reach the required outcomes on completion of the course. This statement has been aligned with other elements of the PCF by the SCIE project group

Outcomes are applicable to both post-graduate and under-graduate courses on the understanding that the capabilities framework provides a standardised set of professional outcomes. Academic criteria will be different.

PCF Heading	Capability statements at entry level	Criteria agreed by the SWRB
<b>Professionalism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates an initial understanding of the role of the social worker</li> <li>• Demonstrates motivation and commitment to qualify and practice as a social worker</li> <li>• Identifies own potential strengths and weaknesses in relation to the role of social worker</li> <li>• Demonstrates an initial understanding of the importance of personal resilience and adaptability in social work.</li> <li>• Demonstrates the ability to take responsibility for own learning and development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial awareness of what social work is</li> <li>• Self- awareness</li> <li>• Emotional resilience</li> <li>• Motivation and commitment to qualify and practice as a social worker</li> </ul>
<b>Values and ethics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognises the impact their own values and attitudes can have on relationships with others</li> <li>• Understands the importance of seeking the perspectives and views of service users and carers</li> <li>• Recognises that social workers will need to deal with conflict and use the authority invested in their role.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self awareness</li> <li>• Understanding of the nature and need to use professional authority in social work'</li> <li>• Initial awareness of what social work is.</li> <li>• Demonstrates what they have learnt from own experiences.</li> <li>• Respect for others.</li> </ul>
<b>Diversity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates an initial understanding of difference and diversity within society and the implications of this for social work practice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Openness to the views of others .</li> <li>• Demonstrates what they have learnt from own experiences</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is receptive to the views of others.</li> </ul>	<p>(broadly defined)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability/ willingness to change views</li> </ul>
<b>Rights Justice and Economic well-being</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognises the contribution of social work to promoting social justice, inclusion and equality</li> <li>• Is receptive to the idea that there may be conflicts in the social work role between promoting rights and enforcing responsibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial awareness of what social work is</li> <li>• Potential to think analytically and critically</li> <li>• Demonstrate what they have learnt from their own experiences.</li> </ul>
<b>Knowledge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify how own learning (formal, informal and experiential) contributes to understanding the social work role.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential to think critically and recognise some of the knowledge base of social work</li> </ul>
<b>Critical reflection and analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates an ability to reflect on and analyse own experience ( educational, personal, formal and informal</li> <li>• Demonstrates curiosity and critical thinking about social issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates what they have learnt from own experiences</li> <li>• Self awareness</li> <li>• Reflective capacity</li> <li>• Ability to think critically , intellectual ability and curiosity</li> </ul>
<b>Intervention and Skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicates clearly, accurately and appropriately to the level of training applied for, in verbal and written forms</li> <li>• Demonstrates an ability to engage with people with empathy')</li> <li>• Recognises that different forms of communication are needed for practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication skills</li> <li>• Ability to write clearly</li> </ul>
<b>Contexts and organisations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates understanding of importance of working as a member of a team and an organisation</li> </ul>	
<b>Professional Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognises how own learning, behaviour and ideas can influence and benefit others</li> </ul>	Motivation and commitment

## **Appendix 2: Key legislative requirements - summary of Equality Act (2010) requirements**

The Equality Act 2010 consolidates and extends a raft of previous equalities legislation. The Act will be particularly important for HEIs to consider when planning and reviewing admissions and selection processes given the significant impact that decisions made in these processes have upon applicants and given the commitment of social work education to widening access to Higher Education.

The Equality Act identifies a wider range of protected characteristics than were previously protected in discrimination legislation and also identifies prohibited acts as well as new duties and obligations.

**'Protected characteristics'** now include:

- Age
- Sex
- Race/ethnicity
- Belief/religion
- Disability
- Gender re-assignment
- Marriage or civil partnership
- Sexuality
- Pregnancy/maternity

**'Prohibited acts'** include:

- Direct discrimination
- Indirect discrimination
- Victimisation
- Harassment
- Discrimination arising from disability
- Discrimination by association
- Discrimination based on perception
- Failure to make reasonable adjustments

At the time of drafting this guidance document most parts of the EA have been implemented, although statutory guidance remains in draft form. Excellent summaries of the legislation and the relevance for HEIs when designing and reviewing selection processes can be found at the Equality Challenge Unit's (ECU) website at:

[www.ecu.ac.uk](http://www.ecu.ac.uk)

The ECU website states:

**Section 91** of the Act prohibits the governing body of a HEI from discriminating against a person/student in the following ways:

- in the arrangements it makes for deciding who is offered admission as a student
- in the terms on which it offers to admit the person as a student
- by not admitting the person as a student
- in the way it provides education for the student

October 2011

- in the way it affords the student access to a benefit, facility or service
- by not providing education for the student
- by not affording the student access to a benefit, facility or service
- by excluding the student
- by subjecting the student to any other detriment” (from:  
<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/equality-act-2010-briefing.pdf/view>)

The duty to make ‘**reasonable adjustments**’ (see section 19 of Act) for disabled applicants is confirmed in subsection 91(9). However, as per Schedule 13 paragraph 4(2), competence standards are exempt from this duty. Thus the process of assessment of an applicant or student may require adjustment in certain cases, but the competence standard itself will not.

The Equality Act introduces a new **Public Sector Equality Duty** (PSED). This covers all protected characteristics except for marriage and civil partnership and requires all public bodies including HEIs to:

Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act

- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it
- foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it
- To advance equality of opportunity, HEIs will need to have due regard, in particular, to the need to:
  - remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic
  - take steps to meet the needs of people who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it
  - encourage people who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such people is disproportionately low

“In fostering good relations, HEIs should look, in particular, to the need to tackle prejudice, and promote understanding.” (From:  
<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/equality-act-2010-briefing.pdf/view>)

**Table of protected characteristics and the issues that are covered by in the Equality Act 2010**

Protected characteristic	Age	Disability	Gender reassignment	Marriage and civil partnership	Pregnancy and maternity	Race	Religion or belief	Sex	Sexual orientation
Issue covered by the Equality Act									
Discrimination in employment	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Discrimination in provision of services	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Discrimination in the delivery of higher education	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
The general statutory duty to promote equality	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
The work of general qualifications bodies	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Positive action provisions of the act	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Dual discrimination	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
Discrimination or harassment linked to perceived characteristic	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
Discrimination or harassment by association	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
Duty to make adjustments for disabled people	n/a	yes	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Table from: <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/equality-act-2010-briefing.doc/view>

Further information and guidance regarding the Equality Act can be found at: <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/managing-reasonable-adjustments-in-higher-education>

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/equality-act/equality-act-codes-of-practice/>

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/new-equality-act-guidance/>

[http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded\\_files/EqualityAct/fehe\\_nsg\\_2.doc](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/EqualityAct/fehe_nsg_2.doc)

**Age discrimination:** It is important to note in this document the guidance already in existence relating to age discrimination and admissions to the professions. The useful document available at: <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/age-limits-medical-healthcare-social> summarises guidance following an examination of concerns relating to medical training and the possible age discrimination claims that may arise from declining admission to very young or older applicants. The document states that:

“20. The duties of care owed by teaching institutions under common law and under legislation intended to safeguard vulnerable people, both to social work students and to clients, are likely to justify institutions in refusing to accept applications from very young students or applicants who, for whatever reason, could present a risk to themselves or others. However, a blanket refusal for applicants of particular ages will run the risk of being in breach of anti-discrimination law – the maturity, vulnerability etc. of each individual applicant should be taken into account.”

The ECU guidance document acknowledges that despite the commitment to diversity, ‘caution’ had been exercised in respect of admitting older applicants to medical degrees. Arguments in favour of a more exclusive practice have varied:

“Some have focused on the arduousness of the training and its length, and suggested that older students with family and other responsibilities would find it hard to complete their courses in these circumstances. Other institutions have pointed to the fact that the NHS would not have the benefit of the services of mature entrants for very long, and questioned whether the substantial cost to the public purse of training mature entrants is a sensible use of public money.”

It would seem that such approaches within HEIs are likely to be unlawful in the light of equalities duties, as well as being factually problematic. Within social work, mature applicants have traditionally been valued. However, it is worth noting here that the age discrimination legislation applies equally of course to younger applicants. The ECU guidance clarifies that:

“ Institutions are advised that a minimum age of entry would be unlawful unless institutions are able to justify this age-based approach. However, an institution’s duty of care to students is likely to justify their refusing to accept students much younger than 17½ or 18.”

### **Appendix 3: Models of service user and carer participation in selection decisions**

Different models of participation in the arena of student selection exist and this summary cannot replicate all possible variations. However, two main models form the basis for variants of those that might be considered best practice and represent a move away from a more tokenistic or minimal involvement whereby stakeholders participate only in the design of the process or in the setting of interview questions. Both offer distinct advantages and potential disadvantages.

#### ***Model one:***

In this model used by a range of HEIs, service users and carers are involved in all stages of the selection process, taking an equal place on interview panels alongside employers and academic colleagues. All members of the panels ask questions of applicants in an agreed and planned way and the decision reached at the end of the selection day will be a shared decision unless it is impossible to reach an agreement, in which case the Admissions tutor will adjudicate.

In this model, all stakeholders are represented at all stages of the selection day. This means that where there is a welcome meeting and group exercise and then individual interviews, participation is in all elements of the day.

Informal feedback suggests that this model is particularly valued by applicants and represents the nature of partnerships and participation on the degree programme itself in many cases. The model is costly to deliver effectively given the need for proper payment for time and skill and for training in preparation for involvement, and so in many cases is only possibly due to the existence of funding at the present time to enable such extensive participation.

#### ***Model two:***

An alternative model used by a range of HEIs, often where the pool of service user and carer partners is either relatively small or includes a range of new members, or where groups have opted to work in this way, is to have separately run components within a selection day.

This model often involves service users and carers meeting with applicants, in groups or individually, and running an activity designed to assess particular elements of the applicants' suitability or readiness for professional training. This assessment complements that conducted by HEI staff and employers in interviews and feedback is used in making a final judgment. In many HEIs, satisfactory performance in both elements of the selection day is required in order to secure an offer.

This model offers the advantage of giving control of one aspect of the selection day to service users and carers and this may result in more 'real' and authentic decision making in some cases. However, the less positive element is that it could be seen to limit participation and partnership working to that one element and may be perceived in this way by applicants.

**Appendix 4: Self declaration form for English, Maths and IT qualifications and competence**

**BA/MA SOCIAL WORK**

As you may be aware, candidates entering social work training must satisfy selectors for the course that they possess English and Maths at GCSE grade C or above or certificated equivalents. In many cases, this is apparent from the initial application form, but not in all cases.

We would not wish to reject applications simply because a candidate does not already have those qualifications. However, we will be required to satisfy ourselves that either those qualifications have already been obtained or that they will be acquired prior to enrolment onto the course.

For those candidates with no formal English or Maths qualification at the required level, evidence of your plans to obtain this will be required before an offer can be made. Please confirm below the qualifications you have and/or your plans to obtain the required qualifications below:

NAME .....

The Maths qualification I have is:

Maths GCSE grade .....

Other (please specify).....

I will be obtaining ..... (insert name of qualification and place of study ) by ..... (insert date)

The English Language qualification I have is

English (Language) GCSE grade .....

Other (please specify).....

I will be obtaining ..... (insert name of qualification and place of study ) by ..... (insert date)

Please state your current IT competence by selecting the most applicable statement below:

I hold an IT qualification at Level 2 or above YES/NO

I do not hold an IT qualification but regard myself as competent and confident in using the following tools, or recognize that I require further support with this as detailed

October 2011

below. (please note that qualifications in IT are not required prior to entry but given the nature of the work involved in social work education and practice, any areas in which you are not confident at this stage may be highlighted as recommended areas for further learning prior to commencing the course and certainly prior to your first placement:

Competent

not yet competent

Word processing

Emails

Use of the internet  
(searching etc)

Use of spreadsheets

Use of databases

**Appendix 5: Examples of interview and other tools used in the selection process**

(Please note that these have been anonymised and may represent composite documents)

**Appendix 5a: BA Interview and grading schedule**

**BA (Hons) SOCIAL WORK**

**Date:** .....

**Interviewers:** .....

**Candidate's Name:** .....

**Total score:**

Please score the candidate's performance on the following scale; adding comments (as explicit as possible) below any of the items where you think these might be helpful.

<b>High</b>		<b>Average</b>		<b>Low</b>	<b>Very poor</b>
5	4	3	2	1	0

---

**1. Awareness of motivation and commitment:**

5 4 3 2 1 0

Can you tell us something about how you've come to the decision to apply for a place on the social work course now?

*[Note to interviewers - prompt re timing and subject choice if needed]*

**2. Teamwork**

5 4 3 2 1 0

a) What do you contribute to a team/group? Also, what do you find difficult about working in teams or groups?

b) How does that compare with your experience earlier this morning in the group exercise?

*[i.e. tests reflection on the morning process observed by the interviewers]*

**3. Understanding of, and commitment to, Anti-Oppressive and Anti-discriminatory practice**

5 4 3 2 1 0

Tell us about an experience you have had of **either** being discriminated against yourself or witnessing discriminatory behaviour (whether intentional or not). What were your reactions to this and how might this affect your work with others?

*[i.e. tests appreciation of the significance of discrimination but also tests how they see themselves in relation to wider movements in society]*

#### 4. Academic ability and potential

5 4 3 2 1 0

Think about some reading you have done that has helped you to prepare to train to be a social worker. Tell us a little about what you found interesting, why and what questions this reading raised.

*[NB – although the reading will ideally be relevant for social work and ideally will correspond to the example of work they had submitted, this will not always be possible as some will be studying for other exams at the moment – main focus here is assessing academic potential and intellectual curiosity.]*

#### 5. Communicator – articulate speaker and good listener

5 4 3 2 1 0

*[Based on your overall impression during the interview of communication skills]*

### CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS:

#### This must be asked of all applicants:

'I notice from the self declaration form that you have completed that you have/have not (as appropriate) declared that you have previous convictions, cautions or formal warnings or disciplinary issues. We need to use this time at the end of your interview to check that you have declared everything (including spent convictions and cautions/reprimands and warnings and even very old disciplinary issues) as any offer of a place is likely to be withdrawn should further information come to light later on. Is there anything else you'd like to add to your earlier declaration at all?'

Where applicants have declared something, please ask them to explain the circumstances around their offence/disciplinary background and record significant points and your reactions to their reflections upon it below or on the reverse of this form.

#### **Interviewer comments**

Please explain your rating – especially important if you have recommended the candidate as highly recommended or unsuitable. Reasons for unsuitability must be fully explained to give the Admissions Tutor grounds for an informed decision. **Please remember when writing comments that these notes may be shown to applicants if they request access to their files.**

NB - Candidates scoring less than 17 would usually not be offered a place on the course.

Taking all factors into account, do you assess the candidate overall to be: (please circle)

- A Highly recommended:** Strong candidate and should definitely be offered a place
- B Recommended:** Suitable candidate for a place
- C Unsuitable:** Not suitable for social work training  
(please give reasons and any suggestions to guide applicant with possible future applications below)

October 2011

Appendix 5B

BA/MA Group Exercise Scoring Sheet

Selection date:

Selectors:

Page ..... of .....

<b>Applicant name</b>	<b>Spoken English</b>	<b>Ability to express own views</b>	<b>Openness to views of others and ability to respond appropriately to views of others.</b>	<b>General ability to work cooperatively with others</b>	<b>Demonstrates appropriate intellectual/academic ability/curiosity in discussions</b>	<b>Total score /25</b>
	Score:	Score:	Score:	Score:	Score:	
	Score:	Score:	Score:	Score:	Score:	
	Score:	Score:	Score:	Score:	Score:	
	Score:	Score:	Score:	Score:	Score:	

**Any comments about significant whole group factors (such as external disturbances or group composition issues):**  
**NB – scoring guide available in interviewers' handbook.**

**Appendix 5C MA social work- interview schedule**

**Date:** ..... **Interviewers:** .....

**Candidate's Name:** ..... **Total score:** .....

Please score the candidate's performance on the following scale; adding comments (as explicit as possible) below any of the items where you think these might be helpful.

<b>High</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Very poor</b>
5	4    3	2    1	0

---

**1. Awareness of own strengths and limitations**

5    4    3    2    1    0

Why do you think you will make a good social worker? What challenges do you think you may face and why? Use examples from your personal and practice experiences.

*[Note to interviewers - probe re emotional and intellectual challenges if not addressed in answer given]*

**2. Academic/Intellectual readiness and capacity**

5    4    3    2    1    0

How has any aspect of your undergraduate studies or any reading you have done in preparation for your application helped you understand the Social Work role and task?

*[Note to interviewers - can explore and ask applicant to expand upon reading referred to in extended personal statement if this is necessary/ helpful]*

**3. Understanding of, and Commitment to, AOP/ADP**

5    4    3    2    1    0

Tell us about an experience you have had of **either** being discriminated against yourself or witnessing discriminatory behaviour (whether intentional or not). What were your reactions to this and how might this affect your work with others?

**4. Follow up question in relation to extended personal statement material**

5    4    3    2    1    0

To be based upon applicant's motivation for professional training and any relevant personal factors that may help or hinder this process.

**5. Communicator – articulate speaker and good listener**

5    4    3    2    1    0

*(Based on your overall impression during the interview of communication skills)*

## Appendix 5D: BA Social Work: Group Exercise

### Applicants' Guidance and task details

Where do we draw the boundary between personal and professional relationships? How should social workers present themselves to service users? Can you answer *always* or *never* to the questions below? If your answer to a question is that it depends, what does it depend on?

**The task:** After introductions, the interviewers observing your group will divide you into subgroups and allocate a section of this exercise for you to discuss.

You will have **5 minutes** to read that section through individually and to consider your own responses and initial thoughts. You will discuss your views and compare with others in your subgroup for **15 minutes**. The following **15 minutes** will be spent with each subgroup feeding back the nature of their discussions to the whole group.

**Every group member will identify during this process something they have reconsidered or thought about more as a result of somebody else's contribution.**

The interviewers will maintain time boundaries and will draw discussions together at the end of the session, but will otherwise remain as silent observers of your work.

#### Areas for discussion:

##### 1. Reciprocation:

Do service users use your title in speaking to you – e.g. address you as Mr.... or Miss...or Ms...?

Do you use titles in speaking to service users?

Would you accept a service from a service user (such as advise you on what is wrong with your laptop computer; would you employ them – possibly as a gardener or to redecorate your house; would you buy items from them such as Avon or other home shopping products)?

##### 2. Interview culture:

On a home visit would you accept:

- A hot drink?
- A snack - such as a sandwich?
- A loan of dry clothing –if yours had been soaked in the rain?

##### 3. Self-disclosure:

Do you compare life experiences with service users:

- Let them know how you feel about their circumstances?
- Let them know what sort of a day you've had?
- Talk about your work with other service users?

Do you share personal information with service users:

- Would you give your personal mobile phone number, email or Facebook address if you have one?

October 2011

**4. Social contact:**

Would you accept any of the following from a service user with whom you have been working:

- A lift?
- A request for you to attend the funeral of a relation of a service user?
- An invitation to a social outing at the end of your contact?
- Would you avoid going to a place (such as a café or a pub) where you knew a service user socialized?

## **Appendix 5E: MA Social Work: Group Exercise**

### **Applicants' guidance and task details to be given on selection days**

This exercise will assess your ability to work effectively in groups in recognition of the importance of this aspect of professional work and also on the MA degree!

**The task:** After introductions, the interviewers observing your group will observe your work as a group.

Remember that we are interested in the *WAY* in which you work here as much as the *WHAT* you contribute and your academic and analytical skills.

You may want to begin by introducing yourselves so that you know who you all are at the start of this exercise.

The interviewers will maintain time boundaries and will draw discussions together at the end of the session, but will otherwise remain as silent observers of your work.

At the end you will be asked to reflect and comment on your own conduct in and contribution to the exercise and on the discussion overall.

### **Question for discussion:**

**If you were selecting students for this programme today what attributes and capabilities would you be looking for in a candidate and secondly what might lead you to have reservations about a candidate? Please ensure you discuss both aspects of the question.**

## **Appendix 6: Criminal convictions and suitability declaration form examples**

### **6A: 1<sup>st</sup> Example of Self-declaration for criminal convictions and suitability**

#### **BA/MA in Social Work**

#### **CONFIDENTIAL**

Please complete this form and return it with your stage two documents. Your reply will be treated in the strictest confidence by those required to have access to it. You will be asked to complete a more detailed suitability declaration form that refers to other issues in addition to those mentioned here if you are invited to attend interview.

#### **EXPLANATORY NOTES**

1. For some time, Local authorities in England and Wales have been required to check with the Police as to the existence and content of any criminal record before appointing staff who will have substantial access to children. This requirement has also applied to students taken on practice placements. Students have been required to give their consent for checks to be made and for the information to be shared with those responsible for placements and with course staff as necessary.
2. By virtue of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975. Section 4(2) of the 1974 Act does not apply to the questions below. You are therefore not entitled to withhold information about a previous conviction on the grounds that it is, for other purposes, a spent conviction under the Act.
3. Since 2002, the 'Police Check' has been replaced with a check carried out by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). This process involves a more detailed check (at the required 'enhanced' level of disclosure) than the previous 'police check' system. The CRB check will result in information about all convictions (spent or otherwise), cautions, warnings and reprimands being disclosed. CRB disclosures also include information from the Departments of Health and Education about people deemed to be unsuitable for work with children and/or vulnerable adults.
4. You will have time at your interview to discuss any disclosures you have to make in relation to these matters. Whilst the fact that an applicant has a criminal record may not in itself automatically prevent someone being accepted onto the programme, it does need to be explored and the withholding of relevant information will be taken very seriously and is likely to lead to the withdrawal of any offer of a place or to termination of training once the course has started.

**BA (HONS) in Social Work**

Name	Date of Birth	Address
	UCAS Number	

**Please answer the following two questions and sign the declaration at the bottom of the form.**

1. Have you ever been convicted or found guilty by any Court of any offence, received any cautions, warnings or reprimands?

Yes  No

If Yes, please give dates and full details below:

Offence/Cautions/ Warnings/Reprimands e.g. theft, careless driving	Date of Conviction/ Warning/ Reprimand	Age when convicted/ received warning or reprimand	Name of court e.g. Brighton Magistrates	Sentence e.g. fine £100, imprisonment/Youth custody 4 months	Date sentence finished/will finish	Name and contact details of probation officer (if any). Write 'none' if you do not have a probation officer

October 2011

(If you wish to provide any further information please write it on a separate sheet headed with your name, address and UCAS number and attach securely to this form.)

2. Are you aware that you have ever been deemed unsuitable for work with vulnerable clients?

Yes  No

If yes, please give details:

3. Have you ever been subject to disciplinary procedures whilst employed or as a student?

Yes  No

If yes, please give details:

**Declaration** I confirm that I have read and understood the Explanatory Notes and have answered the above questions in full. I have provided details of all offence(s) and conviction(s). I have no other convictions for which I am awaiting sentence. In providing the contact details of my probation officer I hereby agree that he/she can be approached by the University and I agree that any information given by the probation officer can be used in assessing my application. Should I be offered a place at University and be convicted of any further offence prior to my registration with the University I will provide this information to the Admissions Officer promptly and understand that the University reserves the right to review and potentially revoke any offer I have received.

Signed.....

Date.....

**Appendix 6B - 2<sup>nd</sup> Example of self-declaration of criminal convictions**

**SELECTION INFORMATION**

**RECORD OF CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS**

**DECLARATION**

I am aware that I am required to disclose any previous convictions as an element in the information process. Failure to do so may jeopardise any offer of a place on the Professional Social Work Programme or, if subsequently discovered, the withdrawal of an offer of a place on the Programme.

I therefore, declare that

1. a) I have no convictions / formal cautions
- b) I have the following convictions/formal cautions (please give details of offence, sentence, date).

(Please delete as appropriate)

2. a) Have you ever been the subject of any form of disciplinary action in a work situation?

YES	NO

(Please delete as appropriate)

- b) If yes, please provide details:

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 6C: Declaration of Suitability for Social Work**

## Declaration of Suitability for Social Work

**Name:** .....

(Please print your **full name** here)

When you have completed this form, please check the details, sign and date it and bring it with you when you attend for interview (if you are currently an applicant) or **return it to the Social Work Office xxxxxx** if you are a returning student in an envelope marked 'CONFIDENTIAL - Social Work Suitability Declaration'

As people's circumstances change, we require all registering and returning students to complete this form as well as those applying for places upon the course. However, as detailed in the Suitability Procedure in the programme handbook, please do not wait until the next formal request to complete one of these forms to notify us of any changes. It is your responsibility to ensure that the programme director and/or admissions tutor depending upon whether you are a current student or applicant are notified of any relevant changes.

## 1. Introduction

It is important that social work programme providers ensure that those who embark upon professional training are those most suitable to do so. To this effect, applicants will need to undergo the following checks:

- a) enhanced checks by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and its successors; and
- b) confirmation that any health condition they experience is not likely to impact upon their ability to practice safely.

In addition to these statutory requirements, universities may seek other relevant information to help them make a well-informed judgment about an applicant's suitability to enter social work training so long as this is done in a fair and transparent way.

This programme wishes to preserve entry to a wide range of people from diverse backgrounds and does not wish to automatically exclude students who have a criminal or disciplinary record, or have previously experienced poor health, or have had contact with social service departments. We recognise that in many instances, there is no simple criterion of suitability and thus, each case will be assessed individually. You will be informed if your declaration is thought to require further consideration, and in the event that this results in your offer being withdrawn, you will be informed of the general reason (subject to any restrictions on passing on confidential information contained within the Data Protection Act 1998).

Please read and complete the following sections carefully. If you are unsure how to proceed or have any queries, contact the Programme Director who will advise you. The information that you provide will be treated as confidential within the organisational boundaries of the BA and MA Social Work programmes.

Please note; if you refuse to provide additional relevant information or otherwise assist in this process, the offer of a place on the programme may be withdrawn.

Failure to disclose relevant information which is subsequently discovered could lead to a suitability investigation and your exclusion from training. While the University is making a prospective judgment as to your suitability to train as a social worker on its programme, **the Health and Care Professions Council ultimately makes the decision whether you are suitable for entry on the register upon application at the end of your studies.**

## 2. Criminal convictions and legal records

Social work is exempted from certain provisions of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, and information about all previous convictions must be provided. A conviction does not automatically debar a student and the programme will seek further information about the circumstances to make an informed and considered judgment about a candidate's suitability in such instances. You can make further representations in writing and you may be invited to discuss your application directly with the admissions tutor or the programme director.

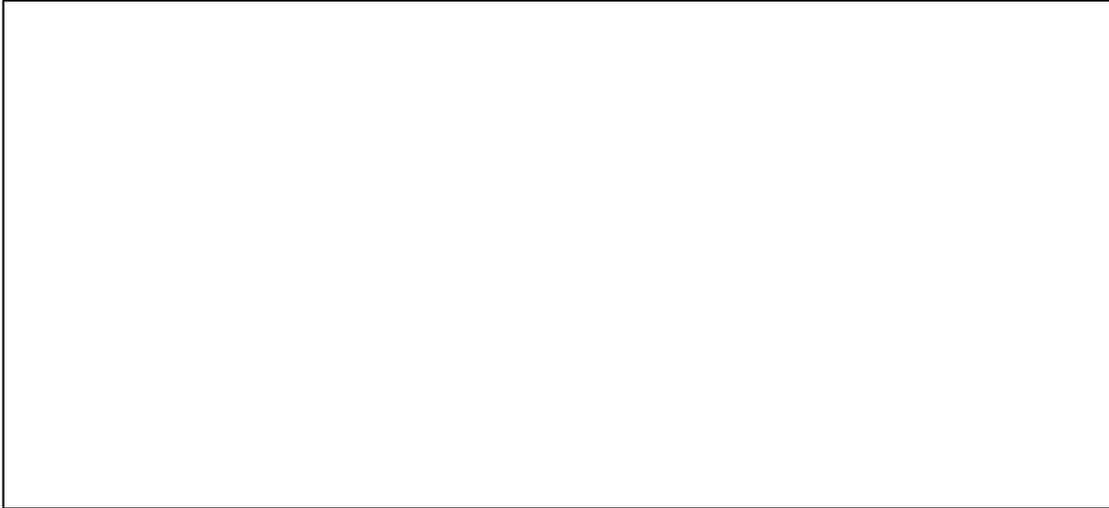
Please tick yes or no for each question

Have you ever been convicted of any offence by any court?	YES	NO
Have you ever been cautioned?	YES	NO
Have you ever been reprimanded?	YES	NO
Have you ever been bound over?	YES	NO
Have you ever received a final warning?	YES	NO

October 2011

Do you have any prosecutions pending? YES NO  
Have you ever been disqualified from working with children by an  
order under the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act (2000)? YES NO

*If you have answered 'yes' to any of these questions, please give full details (date, court, offence, sentence, outcome, charge, etc). Continue overleaf if necessary.*

A large empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the respondent to provide full details of any prosecutions or disqualifications if they answered 'yes' to the questions above.

### 3. Disciplinary record, unprofessional conduct, and notifiable listings

Social service agencies and members of the public who receive services are entitled to expect the highest standards of reliability and integrity from social workers and it is imperative that the qualifying award is held only by those whose personal and professional conduct merits this trust. The BA and MA social work programmes require that you make a declaration in this regard.

Please answer the following questions carefully. If you answer 'YES' to any of the questions, you will be contacted by the Programme Director who will seek further information about your circumstances and may make other relevant inquiries to colleges and former employers to enable an informed decision to be made about your application. At this stage, you can make further representations in writing and you may be invited to discuss your application directly with the admissions tutor or the programme director.

*Please tick yes or no for each question*

- |  |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| <input type="radio"/> Are you currently the subject of any disciplinary investigation?   | YES | NO |
| <input type="radio"/> Have you ever had a disciplinary finding against you?  | YES | NO |
| <input type="radio"/> Have you ever had your employment terminated for unprofessional behaviour or misconduct?   | YES | NO |
| <input type="radio"/> Have you ever been suspended or disqualified from any professional training programme?   | YES | NO |
| <input type="radio"/> Have you ever been suspended or deregistered for professional misconduct by any other professional register?   | YES | NO |
| <input type="radio"/> Have you ever been listed upon the Protection of Vulnerable Adults (POVA) register, the Protection of Children Act list (POCA) or Section 142 of the Education Act (2000), (formerly List 99)? | YES | NO |
| <input type="radio"/> Have you previously enrolled on a social work training programme?  | YES | NO |
| <input type="radio"/> Have any child/ren in your care, or the household in which you live/d, been placed upon a child protection register/subject to a child protection plan or placed in care?                      | YES | NO |

*If you have answered 'yes' to any of these questions, please give full details (outcome, date, employer, course, college, reason for non-completion, etc.)*

(Continue overleaf if necessary)

#### 4. Personal health and circumstances

In line with legal principles regarding equality and proportionality, we do not require applicants or students to disclose details of any short or long term health difficulties. However, social work is a demanding and sometimes stressful occupation and the practice of social work is often undertaken with people who are vulnerable, at risk, or whose capacity to manage their own affairs is temporarily or permanently impaired. Accordingly, the programme seeks to ensure that all students are willing and able to identify and manage their own needs in a way that avoids any risk to the safety of service users, or to themselves.

If you answer 'NO' to any of the questions, you will be contacted by the Programme Director who will seek further information about your circumstances, and may make other inquiries to enable an informed decision to be made about your application. At this stage, you can make further representations in writing, and you may be invited to discuss your application directly with the admissions tutor or the programme director. In the case of medical conditions, with your consent, further information may be sought from your doctor, or a medical consultant but this will not be done by academic members of staff. As mentioned above, this will be managed by Occupational Health service colleagues.

*Please tick yes or no for each question*

Do you undertake to seek guidance for any new or worsening of an existing medical difficulty? YES NO

Do you agree to only undertake practice or placements when you are sufficiently well to do so? YES NO

*If you have answered 'no' to any of these questions, we will contact you for further information and/or may re-refer you to occupational health services.*

(Continue overleaf if necessary)

## 5. Disability

Disability need not be a barrier to training and qualification and in accordance with the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) and the Equality Act 2010 the University will make 'reasonable adjustments' to meet your personal requirements. *Please note* that for the purposes of this declaration you do not need to make any statement about your disability. The university believes that you should have a choice about when, and whether, you wish to declare a disability. If you do wish to discuss what adjustments might be required, you may do this informally prior to interview, or may wait until after the results of your interview have been communicated to you. Once you have been offered a place we will meet with you to discuss your requirements, and will formally record what adjustments and arrangements will be made. The needs of students with disabilities will be prioritised in the allocation of practice learning placements. If you have any further enquiries or concerns in regard to disability please contact the Programme Director directly or the Student Support Unit.

## 6. Your declaration

I understand that the information that I have provided will be checked against my Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau or successor body's disclosures and that my signature affirms that this is full and accurate declaration.

I understand that if I refuse to provide additional relevant information or otherwise assist in this suitability process that the provisional offer of a place on the programme may be withdrawn.

I also understand that failure to disclose relevant information is regarded as a serious matter and that if it is discovered after I have been accepted upon the programme, it could result in a suitability investigation which may lead to exclusion from training.

I agree that the information that I give may be used to assess my suitability for social work training.

.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date:

Seen and approved on behalf of the programme by:  
Date:

## Appendix 7: Cross-referencing admission requirements to modes of assessment – an example

Requirement/mode of assessment as appropriate to this level of study and stage in process	UCAS form	Pre-inter view screening tool	Individual interview	Group exercise	Written test	Other/comments
Maths GCSE/equivalent	x					X self declaration
English GCSE/equivalent	x					X as above
IT competence	x					X as above
Ability to write clearly and accurately in English	x	x			x	
Spoken English			x	x		
Appropriate academic qualifications	x					
Intellectual potential/curiosity	x		x		x	
Motivation and commitment	x	x	x			
Understanding of social work role	x		x			
Self awareness – strengths and weaknesses		x	x			
Self-awareness – impact of own views on others		x	x	x		
Awareness of key SW values			x	x	x	
Appreciation of seeking views of service users and carers			x		x	
Recognition of need to deal with conflict			x			
Open to views of others		x	x	x		
Awareness of diversity issues			x	x		
Conflicts inherent in SW re rights and responsibilities			x			
Ability to reflect upon own		x	x	x		

October 2011

<b>learning</b>						
<b>Capacity to build relationships</b>		<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>		
<b>Communicates clearly</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	
<b>Understanding of importance of team work</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>		
<b>Understands importance of working within an organisation/accountability</b>	<b>x</b>		<b>x</b>			
<b>Takes responsibility for own learning</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>			

## **Appendix 8: Sample pre-interview and interview screening tools**

### **Appendix 8A : extended personal statement proforma**

## **BA Social Work**

### **Stage two: extended personal statement proforma**

**This part of the selection process requires you to provide us with some additional written information about yourself in relation to social work. We recognise that some of the questions ask for personal information, but we feel that within social work, we must be aware of the impact we have on others and that we must be willing within social work training to think about the impact of our own experiences.**

**Please complete each section as carefully as you can making sure that you base your response on specific examples rather than just general statements. Please note that you are asked to respond to each question in UP TO 150 words.**

**This information will be used to decide whether to invite you for the final stage in the selection process - the interview day and may be referred to during your interview.**

**If you require this proforma in a different format or electronically because of any disability related needs, please do let us know.**

#### **1. Motivation and commitment to social work training and studying on demanding professional course**

a) Please write about an aspect of social work that particularly interests you and tell us how you have explored this?

b) What have you **read** and how has this helped you explore your area of particular interest?

#### **2. Demonstrating tenacity and ability to deal with the unexpected.**

Social work does not always happen in the way in which it was planned and sometimes unexpected difficulties and barriers can affect the progress of your work. Please tell us about times in your life when you have demonstrated 'staying power' or determination to see something through.

#### **3. Stress**

Social work can be demanding and stressful. Tell us about a time when you have felt stressed – how did you know you were experiencing stress and what did you do to manage it?

#### **4. Impact of relationships**

Social work practice is about relationships that we have with others. Our experience of relationships can affect how we relate to others now and in the future. Then tell us about a relationship that has given you strength, and one in which you have struggled. What have you learned about **yourself** from thinking about these relationships?

#### **5. The helping relationship**

Tell us as openly as you can what you think you have gained from helping people (friends/ family/ in work setting) and also what you have found difficult or frustrating about being in a helping role:

#### **6. Preparedness for study at this level**

Embarking upon this course will require a 'step up' in terms of level of study. Please tell us how you have managed this transition before and what strategies you have in place for managing this if you obtain a place on this course.

## Appendix 8 B: Supplementary Application Form

### BA (Hons) Social Work Supplementary Application Form

All applications to the BA (Hons) Social Work must be made via UCAS initially. However, the UCAS form does not give us enough information to assess your suitability as a candidate for the course. This Supplementary Application Form is designed to give you the opportunity to tell us a bit more about yourself and your reasons for wanting to embark on a social work career. Please note, however, that completion of this form is not a guarantee you will be offered an interview. If you have any questions about this form please feel free to contact ....

#### 1. Name (please use block capitals)

Surname ..... Forenames .....  
Date of Birth .....

#### 2. UCAS Number: ...

.....

#### 3. Short Courses or other training/academic achievements not mentioned on your UCAS form

Course Title	Organised by	Date
--------------	--------------	------

#### 4. Fitness for Practice

The BA (Hons) Social Work course entails a professional qualification. In addition to your academic abilities, we are also concerned about your ability to undertake the practice element of the course. In order to make a judgement about this, we require further information about your thoughts and experiences. **It is important that you answer all of the following questions as honestly and as fully as you can.** Your answers should also help you decide whether social work is the correct profession for you.

- a) Please tell us what you have learnt from your experiences e.g. a work place, placements, volunteering or other personal experiences that may help you in your desire to practice as a social worker. Please include full details of any additional experience not included on your UCAS form
- b) What is your understanding of discrimination?
- c) What experiences of discrimination have you witnessed? What have you learnt from this?

#### 5. Preparation for Interview

We expect all candidates to prepare for interview. Please research **one** topic only from the following list; this will form the basis of a **discussion at interview.**

1. Individual Budgets
2. Domestic Abuse
3. Issues Facing Older People
4. Asylum and Immigration
5. Disability
6. Mental Health Issues
7. 'Looked After' Children
8. Carers
9. Substance Abuse

October 2011

6. There may be supplementary questions asked at interview to provide the opportunity for you to demonstrate your readiness for the programme

### 7. Convictions

**(This section must be completed and signed whether or not you have any convictions)**

The degree programme includes periods of placement. As such all students must agree to undergo enhanced criminal records bureau checks and health checks to ensure their suitability. The terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 do not permit you to withhold information about past offences. **You must disclose all convictions, bindovers and cautions, and any judgments or investigations pending on this form.** Any information that you provide will not automatically lead to a rejection of your application; however withholding relevant information will. All information will be treated in the strictest confidence, and if you are called for interview you will have a chance to discuss any information that you give here. **If in doubt, please include it.**

#### DECLARATION (delete as appropriate)

- I **DO NOT** have any Court convictions/bind-overs/cautions nor any judgments or investigations pending
- I **HAVE** Court convictions/bindovers/cautions or judgments or investigations pending. (Please give a complete list below and continue on a separate sheet if necessary). Failing to provide a complete list at this stage will result in any application or offer being withdrawn. All applications providing complete information will be considered.

Signed ..... Date .....

### 8. References

We require both a **professional** and an **academic** reference. In each case the referee should, as far as possible, comment on your suitability for social work. Normally the referee given on your UCAS form provides an **academic** reference. If so, the referee given below must, therefore, be someone who can comment on your **professional** aptitude and/or ability. Alternatively, if your UCAS reference is employment based, this referee must be someone who can comment on your **academic** ability. If you have any queries about this please contact the Admissions Office in the first instance.

Name: Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms/Dr.....  
Position .....  
Organisation/Company .....  
Address .....  
..... Postcode .....  
Telephone Number .....

### 9. Equal Opportunities

You are asked to complete the enclosed Equal Opportunities monitoring form. No name is requested on this form.

### 10. Declaration

I hereby declare that, to the best of my knowledge, the information given by me in this application is true.

Signed ..... Date .....

**Please return this Application Form by the requested date to:**

**Appendix 9: Admissions tutor checklist for design and review of selection process**

<b>Requirement</b>	<b>Comments and confirmations</b>
Mandatory individual interviews	
Minimum entry requirements (240 tariff points where relevant and 2:1 usually for PG)	
Clarity of information to applicants and prospective applicants	
Assessment against first level of PCF and mapping to chosen selection tools	
Ensure compliance with equalities legislation	
Inclusion of employers in selection	
Inclusion of service users and carers in selection	
Written test	
Maths and English at grade C GCSE or certified equivalence	
Minimum of 7 overall in IELTS	
Pre-course assessment of personal/professional suitability including criminal convictions and health checks	
Consideration given to use of holistic assessment of applicants using range of methods/tools	

October 2011

## 10. References/Bibliography/websites

*Please note, this is not a comprehensive list of all available reading in this growing field of research, but an indicative list of a range of sources to which the interested reader may refer in addition to references provided within the main document.*

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