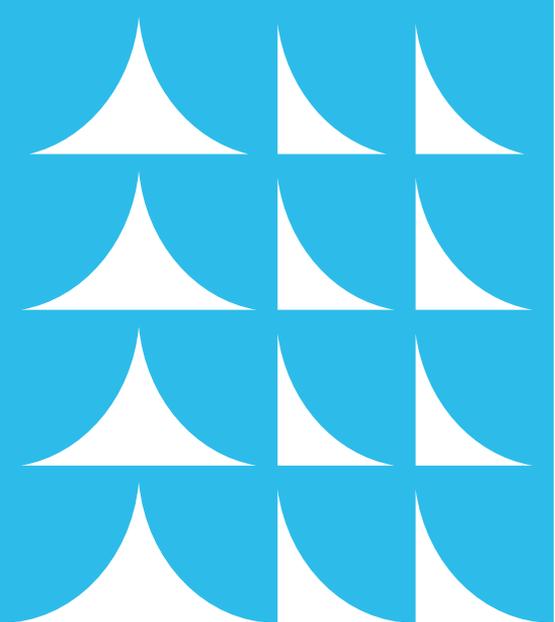


Employer Handbook

(England)

**How to implement Open University Social Work
programmes in your organisation**



Contents

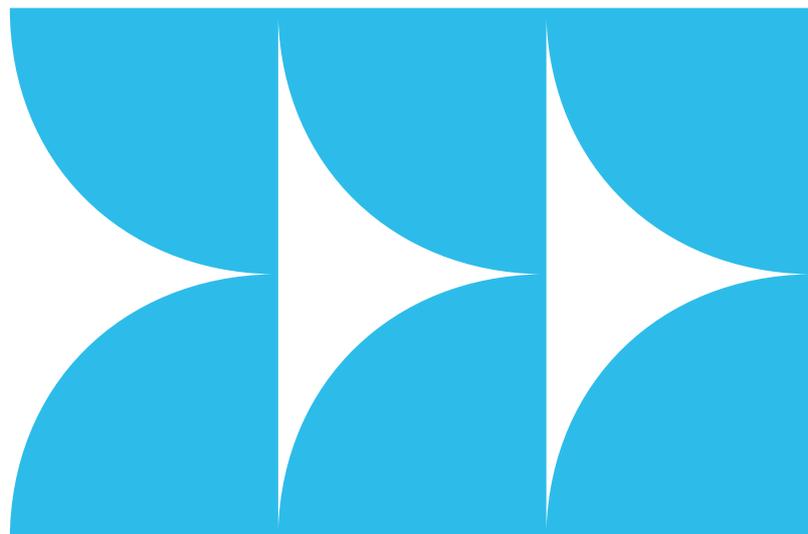
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Introduction

This booklet aims to give you guidance on implementing the BA (Hons) and postgraduate Social Work degree programmes in your organisation. The content in the handbook is not applicable to the Social Worker Degree Apprenticeship. For information on how the Apprenticeship may work for your organisation please visit our website: open.ac.uk/business/apprenticeships/programmes-england/social-worker-degree-apprenticeship. It starts with a reminder of the respective roles and responsibilities of sponsors and The Open University, followed by sections on:

- Assessment and preparation of candidates for the Social Work degree
- Administration
- Readiness for practice
- Organising practice learning in the agency
- Issues or problems arising after the programme start.



Section A

Study patterns

BA (Hons)

Practice learning modules start in January or February. Other modules at Stages 2 and 3 start in October. K102: Introducing health and social care has two start dates, February and October. Students studying part time (i.e. 60 credits per year) can choose either start date.

To complete the degree in the minimum of three years, students will need to start in October and follow the set study pattern opposite:

Module

Year 1	Introducing health and social care (K102) Start month October or February
	Foundations for social care and social work practice (K123) Start month February
Year 2	Social work law (K271) Start month October
	Applied social work practice (K216) Start month February
Year 3	Optional module (K318, K314, K323 or KE322) Start month October
	Critical social work practice (K315) Start month February

PGDIP/MA

A Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work is the qualifying award for entry to the social work register for England.

To complete the qualification, students must successfully undertake the compulsory modules shown opposite:

Developing social work practice (K832) Start month February
Advancing social work practice (K833) Start month October
Those who would like to achieve an MA in Social Work can undertake an additional module, Advancing professional practice (K805).

Section B

Main roles and responsibilities

Our programmes are work-based and offered in collaboration with Sponsors. A 'Sponsor' is an organisation putting forward a student or students to participate in the programme and undertaking the arrangement and supervision of their practice learning; this term is used whether or not the organisation is also paying the student tuition fees.

The respective roles and responsibilities of the OU and sponsors are as follows:

The Open University

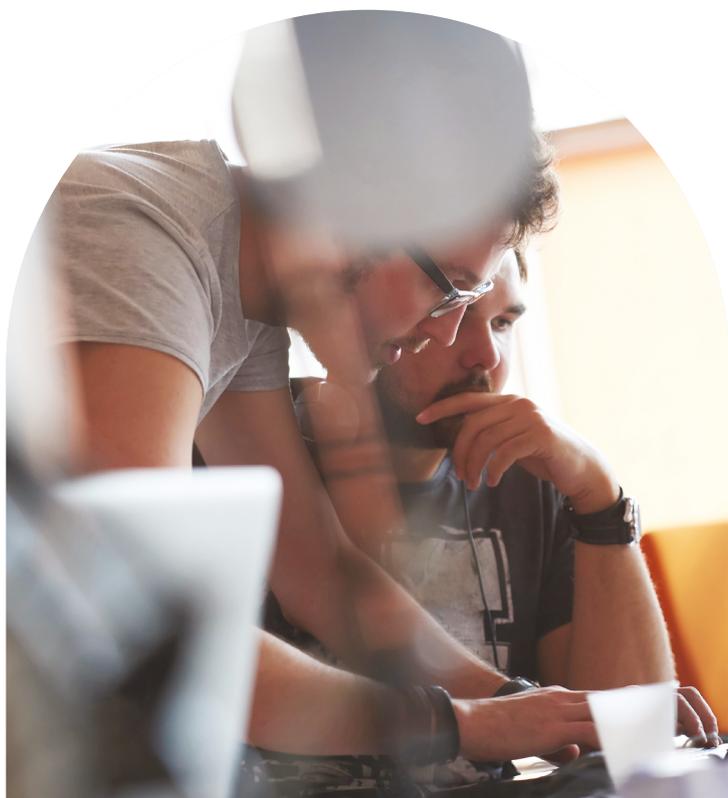
It will be the responsibility of The Open University to:

- ensure that all social work students are appropriately selected for training
- provide study materials for students, and support materials for tutors (Associate Lecturers), practice educators and workplace supervisors
- provide module tutors to teach, support and assess students through tutorials, assignments and personal contact
- provide a Practice Tutor to monitor students' progress, to monitor practice learning arrangements and liaise with agencies
- provide a staff tutor who will recommend tutors for appointment, and oversee their work
- organise and administer all the assessment and award procedures.

Sponsors

It will be the responsibility of sponsors to:

- work with the OU to select members of staff suitable for training through work-based and supported distance learning
- organise an enhanced DBS with lists check, with checks against all registers including both children and vulnerable adults
- support students by giving full-time release for the duration of the practice learning placements and release to attend practice learning workshops
- provide appropriate practice placements with suitable supervision in accordance with the requirements of the profession
- identify a member of staff to make the practice learning arrangements and liaise with the programme (the Agency Coordinator)
- appoint a practice verifier (to verify 10 days of practice learning)
- appoint practice educators (or a workplace supervisor) for each of the two practice placements.



Section C

Assessment and preparation of candidates

The following notes are intended to clarify the assessment and admissions processes required **prior to** students' registration on their chosen Social Work degree programme.

Entry requirements

All candidates must:

- complete an application pack consisting of:
 - Application form
 - Declaration of Suitability for Social Work form
 - Equal Opportunities form
- have GCSE grade 9–4/A*–C/ Functional/Key Skills Level 2 in English and mathematics, or a certified equivalent
- demonstrate IT competence through self-declaration
- achieve an International English Language Testing Systems (IELTS) score of 7 if English is not their first language
- have an enhanced DBS with lists check (i.e. checks against all registers including both children and vulnerable adults) dated within one year prior to starting the programme

- BA (Hons) applicants must meet the UCAS threshold of 96 tariff points. More information can be found at ucas.com. If their qualifications do not meet the UCAS threshold, then we will accept the successful completion of the module *An introduction to health and social care (K101)* or *Introducing health and social care (K102)* as evidence of their academic ability
- PGDip applicants must hold a first degree (BA (Hons)/BSc (Hons)) with a minimum 2:1 classification in a relevant health/social/psychology or other cognate discipline. Alternatively, they should hold a minimum 2:2-class first degree in any discipline, together with a proven record of at least 12 months' experience of engaging directly with service users in a professional setting.

Other qualifications may be acceptable. If candidates have relevant UK academic qualifications which fall outside this list it is essential to provide evidence of a certified equivalent numeracy component.



If you need further advice, contact the Admissions Team at wels-sw-enquiries@open.ac.uk.



Students who hold overseas awards will need to provide a Statement of Comparability with UK qualifications. This can be obtained from:

UK ENIC (please visit enic.org.uk). There is a charge for this service.

The Assessment process

The Open University will assess candidates via an online Assessment Event mapped against the Professional Capabilities Framework – point of entry to training.

OR

Sponsors can request to assess their own candidates using Open University Assessment materials which are mapped against the Professional Capabilities Framework – point of entry to training. A member of Open University academic staff is required to support this.

Assessment by the OU

For your candidate(s) to attend an Open University Assessment Event, please make sure you submit an Expression of Interest/Continuing Booking form by the published deadline.

Candidates should be short-listed by their sponsor initially and will be required to complete a Candidate Assessment Preparation Pack (CAPP) and submit it to the Professional Programmes Admissions Team (Admissions Team).

All candidates must bring their original educational certificates to their Assessment Event.

Assessment Events will be held online. The assessment panel will include a person with lived experience of Social Work and an academic from the Social Work programme.

Assessment by sponsors

The University has overall responsibility for ensuring that all students meet the entry criteria and are appropriately assessed.

We ask you to short-list your candidates and those that have been short-listed will need to complete a Candidate Assessment Preparation Pack (CAPP) which will need to be submitted to the Admissions Team for confirmation that the candidate meets the requirement to be assessed.

The CAPP requires completion of a personal statement, providing contact details for two referees and completion of an Equal Opportunities form.

The purpose of the personal statement is to assess applicants' ability to write clearly in English, as well as their values and qualities as potential social workers. Candidates should be advised to address such questions as: Why do you want to undertake a

professional qualification in social work? What experience do you have that is relevant to the social work qualification? What do you hope to achieve as a social worker in the future? For those applying to the PGDip programme, in addition to the above, we also require candidates to reflect on their experience, skills and values, and explain why they feel they would be a good social worker.

Sponsors will be supplied with Open University assessment materials and must be supported by an Open University member of academic staff.

Service user involvement

It is a requirement that a service user or carer should be involved in the assessment process. The Open University expectation is that people with lived experience as either a service user or carer are to be fully involved in the recruitment and assessment process. Sponsoring employers are expected to pay for the time spent on any recruitment activity. Some sponsors have invited a local service user or carer to be a member of the interview panel as part of their own involvement and inclusion strategy.

If you are unable to identify a service user or carer for any reason, The Open University can help find someone to take part in the Assessment Event. In this situation, payment in accordance with the OU's rates of pay would be made directly to the participant by the sponsoring employer. Contact jackie.king-owen@open.ac.uk for any advice about this.

If you need further advice, contact the Admissions Team at wels-sw-enquiries@open.ac.uk.

The application pack

Application form

Application forms will be forwarded to successful candidates.

Declaration of Suitability form

It is important that social work programme providers ensure that those who embark upon professional training are suitable to do so. All applicants must complete a Declaration of Suitability form to help us make a well-informed judgement about their ability to enter social work training, this process may include a review of the information you share with us.

An Enhanced with Lists check from the Disclosure and Barring Service

It is the sponsor's responsibility to provide their applicants with an original, hard copy of their Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.

The DBS check must be dated within **one year** prior to starting the programme. It is essential that you request a full disclosure so that checks are made on **all** registers (including adults and children) since students will be working with different client groups whilst undertaking their practice learning.

If the DBS check is incomplete or out of date, you must request a new check and, in the meantime, sign the Declaration of Suitability for Social Work. It is essential that sufficient time is allowed for this process which can take up to three months. Until there is evidence of a satisfactory DBS check, registration on the programme will be conditional and we reserve the right to remove students from their programme.

When the disclosure is unsatisfactory

If any offences are revealed, a risk assessment will be undertaken. The candidate should provide full details and a reflective statement on their Declaration of Suitability form. The candidate and their employer may be asked for additional information. A decision about the applicant's suitability for training will be taken and the employer will be informed whether the student can proceed to registration.

Open University registration documents

If you are paying the student's fees, registration documents will be sent to you separately by the Corporate and Partnerships Team after you have made your provisional booking. The individual registration form (signed by the student) should be enclosed with the checklist. You need to send just one sponsorship form to cover your whole group.

Please ensure that both the **individual registration form and sponsorship form are returned to the Admissions Team**. They must not be returned to any other office in The Open University.

From previous study

Existing OU credit

For those who have already completed undergraduate modules currently included in the programme, it may be possible to count them towards the Social Work degree (subject to rules about the age of prior study).

Please contact the Admissions Team to discuss this further.

Note that if students have already counted a Level 3 module towards another OU Honours degree, they will not be able to count it towards their Social Work degree as well. If students have already counted K318, K323, KE322 or K314 towards an OU qualification, they would be well advised to double-check their situation by contacting the Admissions Team.

Credit Transfer

If students already hold a qualification at higher education level, which substantially covers the social sciences (for example, a degree in sociology or social policy, a HND in a relevant subject or a nursing qualification), they may be able to gain exemption from the first module in the programme, *Introducing health and social care* (K102). Only previous study which is approximately five years old or less will be considered.

Exemption from both Stage 1 modules, *Introducing health and social care* (K102) and *Foundations for social care and social work practice* (K123), will only be considered for claimants who have completed relevant parts of the Social Work degree, or other qualifications deemed suitable at another university. References will be required.

If a student holds a relevant qualification over 5 years old or would like us to consider using an OU module which exceeds the time rule towards the degree, should contact the Admissions Team.

For those who already hold a qualifying PGDip in Social Work, they may be eligible for credit transfer to register directly on the dissertation module to 'top-up' to the Masters. Credit transfer is not available towards the PGDip programme.

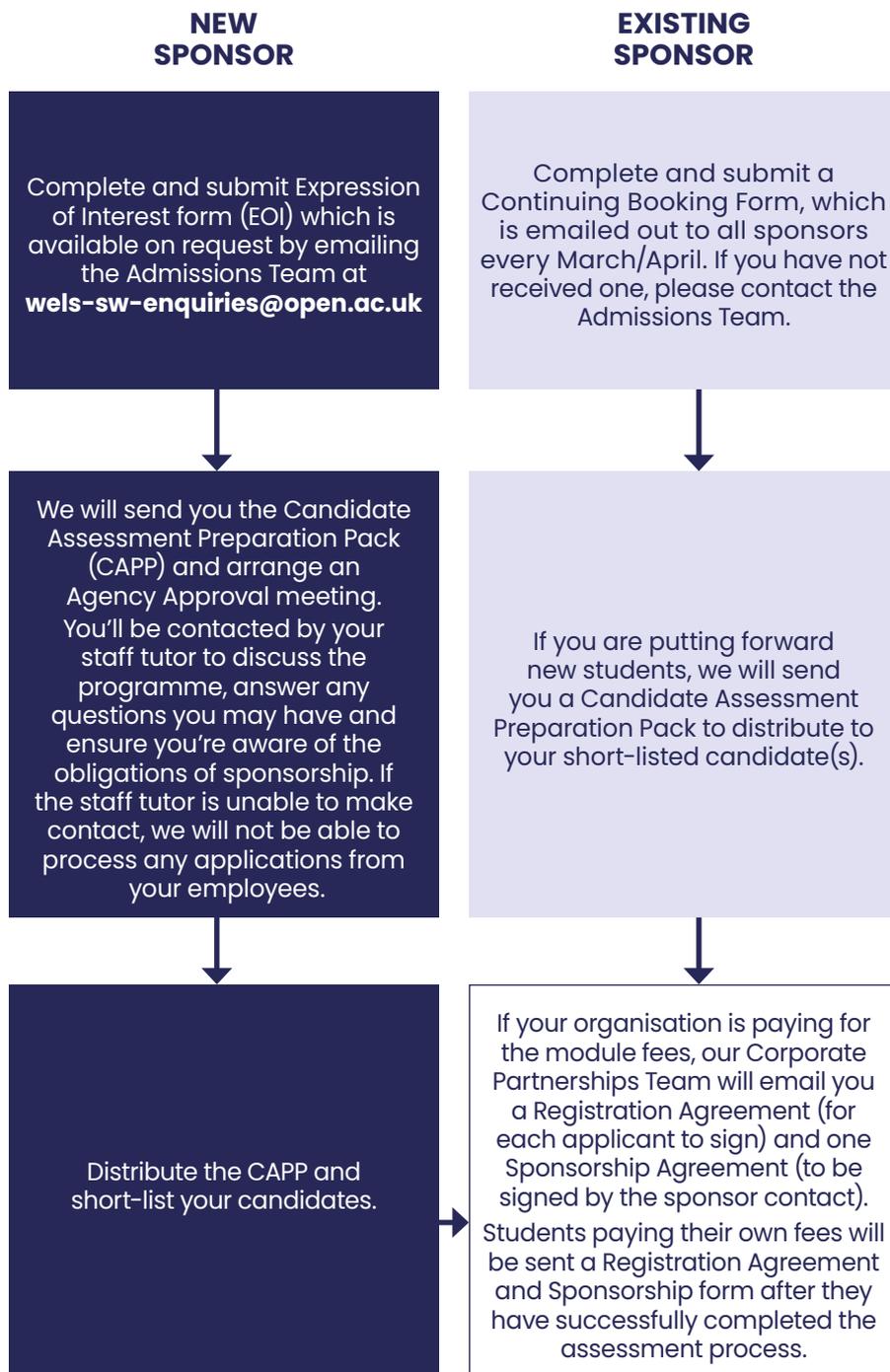
Application forms can be downloaded from the website **open.ac.uk/credit-transfer** (or you can contact the Credit Transfer Office on **01908 653077**). Claims may take a while to process so applicants wishing to make a claim for credit transfer must apply before the guaranteed assessment date (for further information regarding deadlines please refer to the credit transfer website).

Section D

Administration

Making a booking

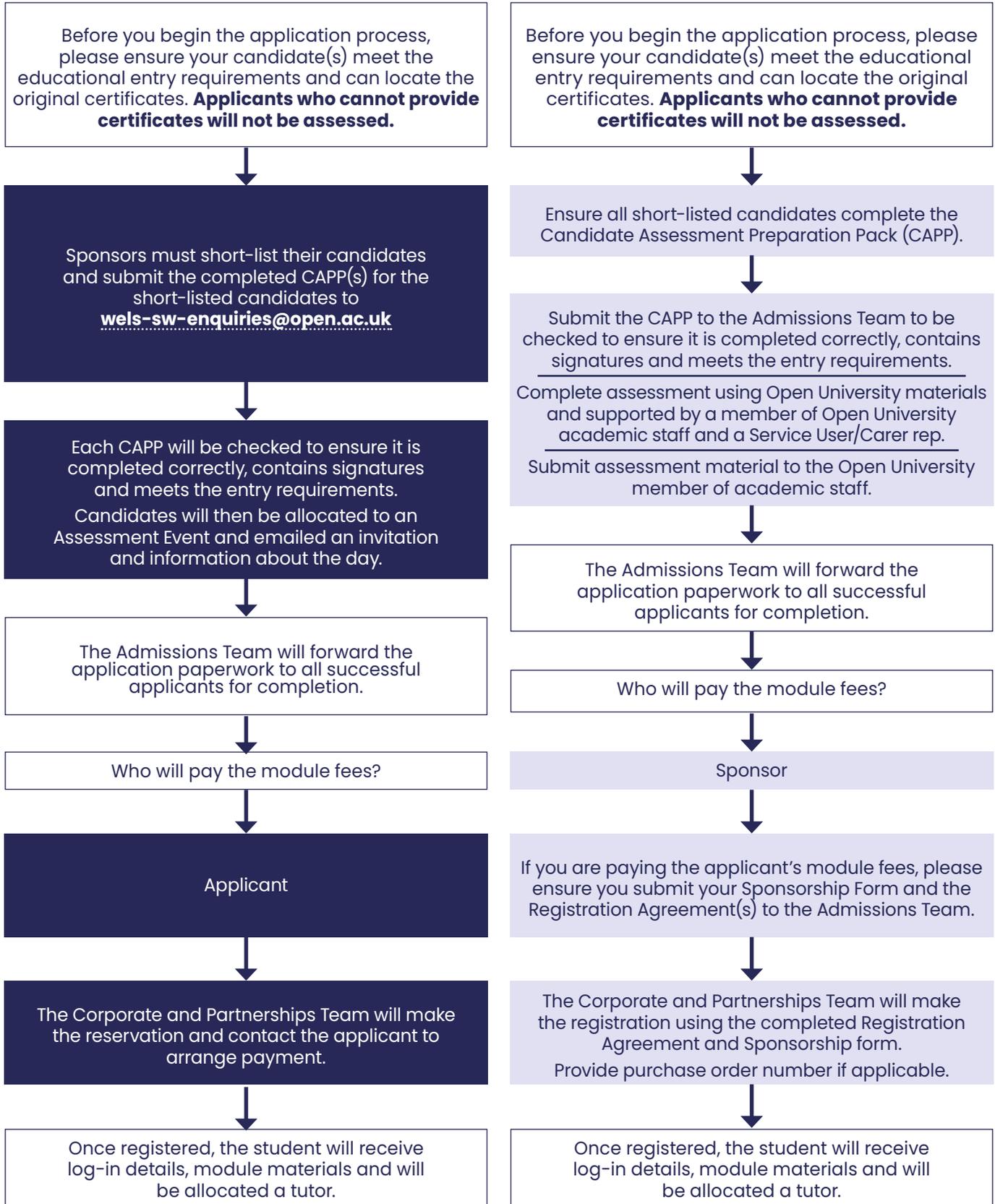
If you have never sponsored a student on to any of our Social Work degree programmes, or not within the last 4 years, please follow the guidance for 'New Sponsor'. If you are currently sponsoring students or are a recent sponsor please follow the guidance for 'Existing Sponsor'.



Assessing Applicants

OU ASSESSMENT PROCESS

ASSESSMENT BY SPONSORS



Recruitment and selection Schedule

Recruitment and selection to the programmes can take a while, so it is best to plan as early as possible. The chart below provides you with indicative timescales:

October Intake	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
Discussion with applicant regarding study intentions												
Submit Expression of Interest form/ Booking form												
Application deadline												
Assessment Events for October intake												
Final enrolment deadline												
Programme start												

January/February Intake	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
Discussion with applicant regarding study intentions												
Submit Expression of Interest form/ Booking form												
Application deadline												
Assessment Events for January/February intake												
Final enrolment deadline												
Programme start												

To enable us to provide the best possible service to you and your staff, it is vital that you register on time. Failure to do may result in delays with appointing tutors, allocating students to local tutor groups and arranging the dispatch of materials.

Submitting the application documentation

Sponsor assessment

Once the assessment process has been completed, all paperwork should be returned to the Admissions Team.

The application pack will be forwarded to the successful candidates for completion. Once received by the Admissions Team, if everything is in order, the documentation will be held on file and the candidate(s) registered.

Please ensure completed application paperwork is sent by the stipulated deadline. Failure to do so could result in delays in registration.

Students will not be permitted to progress to Stage 2 until all their paperwork is complete, so please ensure you check that all the documents requested are submitted. You will find a reminder of the items required on the checklist.

Open University assessment

If the OU will be carrying out the assessment, please gather together the Candidate Application Preparation Pack and copies of the educational certificate, and submit these to the Admissions Team.

If everything is in order, the candidate will be invited to an Assessment Event.

Registration

The Admissions Team will carry out final checks on all applications and will forward them to our Corporate and Partnerships Team, who will finalise registration.

Students who are paying their own fees will receive:

- Registration Agreement and Sponsorship form
- HESA Data Collection form
- A link to the University's fees and funding page which will provide information on the various payment and loan options available.

It is strongly advisable that candidates begin to make necessary financial arrangements as early as possible to prevent delays with their registration.

If you are assessing your candidates, please ensure all actions are completed by the stipulated deadline.

If for any reason you cannot adhere to the deadline, it is important that you negotiate an appropriate time extension with the Admissions Team.

If you fail to register your staff or arrange an extension, we reserve the right to cancel your booking.

Paying the module fees

Sponsors will be invoiced for the fees due for each module soon after the module start in October or February. Invoices will automatically be sent out in time for payment to be made within 30 days.

Students who pay for their own fees will be notified directly of payment deadlines.

Problems post registration

Conduct issues

If a student commits a criminal offence, receives a police caution, is suspended from work, or is the subject of a disciplinary hearing whilst on the programme, it is the responsibility of the Agency Coordinator and the student to notify us immediately.

Cancellation of a module

If a student decides to withdraw after formal registration but **before** the start date of the module, they are advised to contact The Corporate and Partnerships Team immediately to arrange cancellation. There will be no fee liability if the module has not started.

If it becomes necessary for a student to withdraw **after** the official start date, then they should contact the Student Support Team immediately to discuss the study and financial implications.



If you need further advice, contact the Admissions Team at wels-sw-enquiries@open.ac.uk.

Responsibility for cancellation normally rests with the student and cancellation of non-practice modules **must** be made by the student. Cancellation of practice modules (K123, K216, K315, K832 and K833) must be made by the student's sponsor.

The Collaboration Agreement and sponsorship

To clarify the contributions made by the OU and sponsors for the programme offered to students, we ask all agencies to sign a formal Collaboration Agreement. This will be sent to you after registration has taken place; it should be signed and returned as soon as possible.

Most students sponsored are either full or part-time employees of the sponsor. However, we are aware of agencies who have sponsored non-employees (e.g. volunteers and employees of other agencies linked to them in some way). As this is an employment-based route, agencies must ensure they only sponsor students who can meet the programme's requirements in relation to study days, placement timings etc.

Experience has shown that sponsors come to a variety of financial arrangements with staff to suit their individual circumstances. Some sponsors pay the full cost of the fees and other associated costs such as travel expenses. Practice with respect to any requirements following completion of the programme (for example, to stay employed by the sponsor for a period) varies widely. Other sponsors meet their obligations towards ensuring the fees are paid (and providing the necessary study leave and practice learning opportunities), but recoup some or all of the fees from staff. Some expect their staff to take unpaid leave to meet the study leave requirements. Many students now take full financial responsibility for their fees and make use of various finance options available. For the latest information on ways to pay please refer to the fees and funding

section of the OU Social Work programmes website.

We do not make recommendations about what kind of sponsorship arrangements are made with staff as long as the agency meets the full obligations of the Collaboration Agreement e.g. the agency ensures that staff undergo a period of 20 days of verified practice learning and are provided with two contrasting practice learning opportunities with a suitable practice educator, and that study leave arrangements are agreed. Whatever the nature of the arrangements, make sure you and your student have a written agreement.

If you would like further guidance on different approaches to sponsorship, contact the Admissions Team.

Getting ready for the programme start

BA (Hons) applicants

October intake

Students starting in October will receive their first mailing of study materials, details of tutorials, etc. in September.

February intake

Students commencing K123, K216 and K315 in February will be sent their first mailing of study materials in December/January. Details of tutors and dates and venues of tutorials and workshops will be available online.

Those studying K216 and K315 will be sent a Practice Learning Guide for the practice educators, who will also be invited to attend a regional briefing day during the period February – March.

Postgraduate applicants

Students will be sent their first mailing of study materials in January. Details of their tutors, tutorial information and workshops will be available online.

The Developing social work practice (K832) mailing will include a Practice Learning Guide for the practice educators who will be invited to attend a regional briefing day during February – March. Students will be required to complete ten days of practice experience in their own current social care setting. The ten practice experience days must be completed by the end of the first four weeks, in order to submit the 'Confirmation of student's preparation for practice' SWDip6 (TMA 15) form and TMA 01 by the cut-off date soon after. It is advisable, therefore, that arrangements are made as early as possible to undertake the ten practice experience days.

The SWDip6 (TMA 15) form can be accessed from the K832 18B module website and the Social Work Agency website. We suggest that the SWDip6 form may provide a suitable checklist for students and practice verifiers to use in these initial discussions.

The K833 mailing will include a Practice Learning Guide for the practice educators, who will be invited to attend a briefing day.

Residential school

K832 students are required to attend a compulsory residential study weekend (Friday – Sunday) which takes place in Milton Keynes at the end of week 4. The exact date will be notified to students with their offer letter. This weekend is compulsory because it supports students with their Readiness for Practice assessment, submitted soon afterward.

Meeting the Readiness for Practice requirement

In preparing for the 'readiness for practice' assessment prior to the first placement, students must complete the following practice skills component:

- Ten days of verified practice experience in a social care setting (see below)
- The compulsory residential school run by OU staff.

At the beginning of K832, students must complete **ten days of practice experience** in their own current social care setting. They are not expected to do any additional practice days during the early part of the module, although they may need to spend time doing activities that are not part of their usual workload.

The practice experience days must be completed by the end of the first four weeks in order to submit both the SWDip6 (TMA 15) form and TMA 01 by the cut-off date.

Students should arrange to meet with the person who will be acting as the practice verifier to confirm:

- when the ten-day period of practice should begin
- the nature of the activities to be carried out (this must include the opportunity to observe a social worker, and a conversation with a service user) in line with the guidance outlined above
- the expectations of the person who is acting as the practice verifier.

The practice experience days will be done within students' usual place of work and in consultation with the agency coordinator, who should, wherever possible, be present at this meeting. Prior advice and guidance will be provided to the verifier, including the SWDip6 form which we suggest might provide a suitable checklist for students and verifiers to use in these initial discussions.

During the period of verified practice, students **must** arrange to:

- have a conversation with a service user or carer about their experience of using health, education or social care services, and write reflective notes about this conversation (these will be used for TMA 01, the assignment which forms part of the readiness for direct practice assessment)
- observe the work of a qualified social worker and in addition have a discussion with the social worker, to gain an understanding of their role, its legal basis (if applicable) and the methods of intervention they are using

- find out about the main policies and guidance that influence the agency's decision about who it offers a service to, and how it protects both service users and staff.

In addition, students should seek permission to undertake a range of other relevant activities which reflect the nature of the setting and the student's role. A few examples include:

- writing a case summary using appropriate sources
- observing a meeting involving a service user or carer
- observing a staff team meeting
- arranging to discuss an aspect of social work provision in supervision.

However students arrange the activities, they should aim to find out as much as they can about the organisation, the experiences of service users and the role of social workers. This learning will contribute to TMA 01.

Practice skills workshops

There are three full-day practice skills workshops on K832, and a further three on K833. Together with the residential weekend, attendance is compulsory because these days contribute towards the required thirty practice skills days provided across the PGDip programme. This is a regulatory requirement and any missed learning must be made up, regardless of the circumstances.

The fast pace and intensity of the Postgraduate Diploma is such that students will be required to study 15 hours per week. It is strongly recommended that students are offered (and take) study leave of one day per week, and where possible, be given protected time to complete the written components of practice assessment.

Practice learning funding

The Department of Health and Social Care provides funding for all agencies who are providing a practice learning opportunity. Funding is intended to cover three elements:

- Planning (e.g. discussing with the student how the placement will be structured and what they will be expected to do)
- Delivery, i.e. the actual placement delivery by the provider
- Assessment, i.e. assessment of the student while on placement.

If the placement provider is unable to provide one of the elements (e.g. where the practice educator is provided by a different agency), it is important that both parties agree rates and payment for the practice educator at the outset. Since the placement provider is entitled to all of the funding, they should take the lead in negotiations. It is recommended that there is a formal agreement which should be signed and kept by both parties.

Daily placement rate

The amount payable per placement day is set annually as part of government funding plans and administered by the NHS Business Authority. Current rates are posted on our website.

Please note that the funding arrangements do not cover the 10 days of verified practice learning.

How to claim funding

A claim form will be sent to you by the OU once we have received confirmation of the practice arrangements as well as confirmation of placement rates. This usually happens around June. Confirmation of the exact number of placement days completed will be required before the money can be paid, usually in August/September. It is important that you complete the paperwork when requested or your payments may be delayed – or lost altogether if you claim outside the appropriate financial year.

Unclaimed grant monies are returned to the government each year, so if your claim is late we will be unable to pay it.

The programme does not cover any travel costs associated with placements. The OU expects sponsors to reach agreement with students over the payment of travel costs to and within placements. This is an important area to explore when placements are being arranged outside the student's sponsor.

Preparation of candidates for study

BA (Hons) degree

Assuming that staff have been assessed as suitable to become professional social workers, and you are confident that they have the skills required to begin study at higher education/postgraduate level, there is no particular need for any detailed preparation for the academic aspects of the programme (although students with limited ICT skills could usefully spend some time between assessment and the module start on the development of basic skills. The programme has been designed to introduce students to practice-based learning and to academic study (including work on study skills) as an integral part of the programme. However, some agencies like to give their staff an opportunity to get a taste of study at this level, and to familiarise them with the style of distance learning, and perhaps to re-awaken dormant study. Students are encouraged to access our OpenLearn website: An Introduction to social work:

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/health-sports-psychology/social-care-social-work/introduction-social-work/content-section-0?active-tab=description-tab>. It contains useful advice and guidance on effective study and provides students with the opportunity to undertake a skills check which will provide them with a personal learning plan.

Postgraduate diploma

Successful candidates for K832 will be provided with additional advice on postgraduate study skills and are encouraged to consider these in advance of the module start. Due to the fast-paced nature of the programme it is essential that all students (in addition to the academic skills tested at interview) begin their postgraduate diploma with a sound understanding of skills such as academic referencing and critical analysis.

Section E

Readiness for Practice – BA (Hons)

For PGDip students, please see the information provided under 'Getting ready for the programme start'.

The 20-day requirement

It is a requirement that students on all courses leading to a degree in social work in England must demonstrate that they are prepared for their practice learning.

K123 students must complete a structured programme of 20 practice skills days, preparing them for their first assessed practice learning opportunity at Stage 2. This programme of 20 days is not part of the 170 days of assessed practice learning which takes place while students study K216 and K315.

The programme of 20 practice skills days will consist of the following:

- 10 days of practice experience in a social care setting
- 15 online skills workshops, which are compulsory
- at least 3 days of skills activities which are incorporated into the module materials.

The 20-day practice skills programme will also prepare students to submit written assignments, which demonstrate their 'readiness for practice' in accordance with the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) criteria. This is a regulatory requirement and will be part of the academic assessment on K123. Students will receive full details with their module materials.

The 10 days of practice experience should take place in the student's normal workplace. We do not expect students to have to do any practice days in addition to their normal employment during their K123 studies. An example, based on the 2013 preparation for practice, is shown opposite.

The practice experience days are designed to confirm that the student:

- has the potential to conduct themselves in a professional manner
- has the potential to engage safely and effectively with service users, and
- is unlikely to present any inappropriate behaviour to service users or colleagues

If you need further advice, contact the Admissions Team at wels-sw-enquiries@open.ac.uk.



Arguably, within the OU programme the student should have shown their preparedness for practice already. Students who are sponsored by their employers may have had substantial and successful previous service user contact and may through a process of assessment be deemed to have the capacity and potential to learn from practice. Nevertheless, it is a national requirement that all students must complete assessed preparation for direct practice, including the opportunity to shadow a social worker, and the 20-day skills programme must be completed in order to pass K123 and proceed to K216.

The Practice Verifier

The sponsor is expected to nominate a practice verifier, who should be either a qualified social worker or someone who holds an equivalent qualification, for instance a nurse, teacher, community worker, registered manager or doctor. In most cases the verifier will be the student's line manager. The verifier is verifying that the student has undertaken the required period of preparation for practice, has had the opportunity to shadow a qualified social worker, and has had a conversation with a service user. The verifier will also be asked to confirm that the student has behaved in a professional way and that their conduct and attitude towards service users and others is appropriate to begin the process of practice learning.

This evaluation is registered by the submission of a 'Confirmation of Student's Preparation for Practice' form (SWD6) by the verifier. The submission date will be advised at the start of the module. This is an essential document which is considered by the K123 Practice Assessment Panel and the Examination and Assessment Board. Without this document a student cannot pass K123 and cannot proceed to study K216.

If for any reason the verifier cannot confirm that the preparation for practice has been completed, then they should inform the student, the relevant Open University staff tutor and the agency coordinator in writing. Further information about the procedures to be followed in these circumstances will be provided when the module begins.

Example of preparatory activities to be completed on the practice experience days

(Full details to be provided with K123 module materials)

In confirming preparedness for practice, a verifier should be able to confirm that the student has demonstrated:	This may be achieved by:
A Some understanding of the range of tasks social workers carry out	Reading relevant policy and procedure documents and visiting other service delivery settings; shadowing, and interviewing qualified workers working with different service user groups
B Some ability to communicate appropriately with service users both in writing and orally	Direct observation of an interaction with a service user, by a supervising social worker or others; feedback from a service user; simulations; use of letters or other documents to communicate with service users Discussion with service users, participation and/or observation of a meeting of a service user group
C Some understanding of the experience service users have of services	Oral or written reports from line manager; observation of their work; feedback from service users
D Their potential ability to meet deadlines, and be punctual and reliable	Oral or written reports from line manager; observations of their work; feedback from a service user group Discussions with supervising social workers, reading the organisation's mission statement, relevant policies and procedures
E Some understanding of their responsibilities as an accountable of their organisation	Discussions with supervising social workers; reading the organisation's mission statement, relevant policies and member procedures
F The ability to comply with the relevant professional code of conduct and ethics	Reading the Standards of Proficiency of Social Workers and identifying how the student has demonstrated that they comply with it

Section F

Organising practice learning in the agency

Agencies which sponsor students on the Social Work degree programme are responsible for finding practice learning opportunities ('placements') and practice educators for their staff. Detailed guidance on delivering practice learning is available on the agency website, which you will be granted access to once your applicant(s) are registered. Practice educators will also need access to the website. In this section we cover those aspects of agency responsibility which come prior to the start of the practice modules in January.

For those agencies unfamiliar with the Social Work degree, the terms used in this section are explained below:

Terms used in relation to practice learning

Practice Learning Opportunity (PLO): also known as 'the placement'. There are two periods of assessed practice learning. One of these can take place in the student's normal place of work and one must take place in a contrasting work setting, but the contrast must primarily be in relation to the service user group involved. The requirements clearly indicate that the contrast must be as great as possible, e.g. child care and adult mental health.

BA (Hons)

The first placement (on K216) will last for 70 days, and the second placement (on K315) for 100 days.

PGDip

There are two placements (4 days per week) on the Postgraduate Diploma. The first, on K832, is for a period of 80 days beginning in week 9. The second placement, on K833, is for 90 days beginning in week 5. Please note that due to the fast pace of the PGDip, it is very important that placements begin on time because there is only a short period between each module.

Agency Coordinator: this is the person in the agency who arranges the PLOs, ensures they provide suitable learning opportunities and represents the agency if there are difficulties with the PLO or the student's practice.

Practice Educator: this is the person who takes on the teaching and assessment tasks associated with practice learning on the programme. Agencies are responsible for appointing practice educators. Guidance about who can become a practice educator is given below.

Off-site Practice Educator: in some circumstances where there is no suitable practice educator working in the practice setting, an off-site practice educator can be brought in to undertake the formal requirements of supervision, teaching and assessment. In these circumstances, a workplace supervisor is designated to undertake day-to-day support and supervision of the student.

Workplace Supervisor: in circumstances where the practice assessor/educator is not working in the practice setting of the student, day-to-day supervision of the student is undertaken by the Workplace Supervisor. This may be the student's line manager, or someone else with whom they work in the practice setting.



For K315 the workplace supervisor should be a registered social worker in a post requiring Social Work England (SWE) registration. Further guidance is given below.

Practice Tutor: For both the BA (Hons) and PGDip a Practice Tutor is also appointed by The Open University. The Practice Tutor liaises with agency coordinators, practice educators, workplace supervisors and students to agree a work plan (known as the 'Practice Learning Agreement' – PLA) and to monitor the progress of the student in the PLO and in their other work on the programme. They do not find the placements for students – this is the responsibility of the sponsor.

Practice Tutor: For the PGDip programme, the University will appoint a Practice tutor to undertake two placement visits (meetings) at the beginning and middle of each placement. The final placement meeting takes place with the student and practice educator (and where applicable, on-site workplace supervisor). The Practice tutor does not normally attend the final meeting.

Preparing for practice learning

We strongly advise agencies to start preparing for their roles and tasks in delivering practice learning as early as possible. This includes the following:

- Discussing the implications of staff undertaking the Social Work degree with managers and colleagues
- Understanding the timing of PLOs and the implications for full-time and part-time staff
- Deciding which PLO will be 'in-house', and which will be 'out-house' (although in certain circumstances agencies may decide both PLOs need to be 'out-house')
- Understanding the requirement for contrast in PLOs
- Understanding the requirement to perform statutory social work in PLO
- Locating practice educators (and workplace supervisors if necessary)
- Locating practice learning opportunities

These points will be dealt with in detail below.

Discussing the implications of staff undertaking the Social Work degree with managers and colleagues

Experience has shown that an important factor in the success of staff on the Social Work programme is the support they receive from their employers, line managers and colleagues. To secure this support, managers and others must be given information on what is involved, and how this will affect the work of staff undertaking the degree prior to, during, and immediately after the programme. In particular, it is important that they understand the following:

- That staff on the programme should have their study leave protected, and not eroded by demands to do extra shifts, or pressure to come in because of crises at work or other reasons
- That at least one of the periods of assessed practice learning will be outside the normal place of work, and that the member of staff will be effectively absent for the whole of this period and may need replacing
- That during assessed practice learning which takes place in the member of staff's own workplace, they will not be able to do their 'normal job'. Their learning needs may require different work and/or a restriction of their normal workload. Their approach to the work will be affected by the need to be assessed, and by their different role as a 'student' within their normal workplace. This will affect both managers and colleagues and should be discussed and prepared for. Students who are managers normally require some adjustment to their management role to enable them to undertake work with service users. This is necessary in order for them to demonstrate their capabilities in relation to the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF). Sponsoring such students often results in higher replacement costs being incurred than with other students.

Understanding the timing of PLOs and the implications for full-time and part-time staff

For the degree, practice learning opportunities must take place between early February, and mid to late-August. The latest possible start date is the end of February.

For PGDip students, please see the information provided under 'Getting ready for the programme start'.

In order to plan for the required number of practice learning days in the time available, agencies should take into account our recommendation for study leave for students on the degree programme: 36 days per study year for students undertaking 120 credits (i.e. two 60 credit modules simultaneously) and 18 days for students undertaking a 60 credit module. Part-time staff can undertake the programme and their study days should be provided on a pro rata basis. **Staff who cannot work 3–4 days per week should not be sponsored on to the programme.** If in doubt, contact the Admissions Manager via the Admissions Team for more information.

K216 and K315 both have an introductory workshop, followed by six compulsory face-to-face and online practice skills workshops. These six practice skills workshops contribute to the programme's 30 practice skills days which are a regulatory requirement. Therefore, just as for the placement days, if students miss a practice skills workshop due to exceptional circumstances, they will be required to complete a piece of reflective written work to address the learning that they have missed.

Deciding which PLO will be 'in-house', and which will be 'out-house'

The programme is designed in such a way that students can usually undertake one period of practice learning in their own workplace, and one in another workplace. The programme does not stipulate which PLO should be external and agencies can decide this for themselves. However, the requirements for both 'contrast' and performing statutory social work tasks must be considered. The practice learning opportunities that are outside the students' own workplace do not have to be in another agency. The PLO can be in another part of their own agency if it offers an appropriate 'contrast' and meets their learning needs. Contrast in workplace setting is important but it is crucial that the student should work with contrasting service user groups.

There may be a few students who need to undertake both placements outside their usual workplace setting to obtain sufficient opportunities to demonstrate their ability to meet the PCF standards at the relevant level, or because of conflicts of interest which may arise in some types of agency. As a last resort, if these matters cannot be resolved in any other way, the programme reserves the right to require a sponsor to find two external placements for a sponsored student.

Understanding the requirement for contrast in PLOs

The social work regulatory requirements are based on the principle that a social worker trains and qualifies with a broad experience and understanding of the profession, in a variety of settings and service user groups. This means that all students need to be offered broad practice experience to be able to meet the standards of proficiency when they have completed their training.

In practical terms this means that each practice learning opportunity must be with a substantially different service user group and at least one placement must be outside the student's normal work setting. In addition, students must gain experience of performing statutory tasks on their K315 or K833 placement. These issues of contrast need to be considered before the practice learning opportunity for K216 or K832 is planned and again before K315/K833. Some examples of acceptable and unacceptable contrast are outlined below. We cannot be exhaustive, and these are only examples and indicators.

Examples

An adequate contrast in practice learning would be an opportunity with an adult service user group and an opportunity with a child service user group. It would tend to show inherently different practice issues which the student could learn from. It would be more difficult, but still possible, to justify a contrast which did not involve this kind of age difference – for example, contrast between a local authority children and families team and a local authority children's disability team or a child and mental health services team.

It is doubtful, however, if there would be sufficient contrast between a K216/K832 practice learning opportunity in a local authority children and families team and a K315/K833 opportunity based in a 'Looked After Children' or a 'Leaving Care' service. The overall nature of the service user and service would be too similar. Also, it is very doubtful if a practice learning opportunity centred on a housing association could be

used for both K216/K832 and K315/K833. In addition to the potential issue of statutory tasks, the fundamental aspect of the service user would relate to housing and homelessness, whether or not it involved young people or adults. In such cases it would better to think in terms of a completely different setting for service provision. Similarly, sufficient contrast would not be obtained if the student were to work with offenders in both the K216/K832 and K315/K833 practice learning opportunities. Neither would sufficient contrast be obtained if a student wished to move between an educational welfare service and a local authority children and families team.

A suitable contrast would be achieved if it was proposed that the student work in K216/K832 with older adults and in K315/K833 with mental health service users. Another suitable contrast would be between services for older adults, on the one hand, and working with young people and adults whose issues are centred on housing and homelessness, on the other. However, there will be 'grey areas' in looking for contrast between practice learning opportunities between K216/K832 and K315/K833. In such cases the Agency Coordinator, Practice Tutor may need to refer to the Staff Tutor for a decision. Further guidance is available on the agency website.

Understanding the requirement to perform statutory social work tasks

It is also important to remember that in K315/K833 a student must be able to demonstrate that they have performed 'statutory social work tasks'. This does not mean that the practice learning opportunity must be in a local authority or other statutory body, although, if this were the case, it would be clearly advantageous in meeting this requirement. Many voluntary and independent organisations perform functions and tasks which are directly related to the statute and could therefore provide appropriate learning opportunities.

The K315/K833 placement setting should, however, be one in which the student will not be the sole social work representative. This is to meet the college requirement that, to support the development of professional identity, in the last placement the student must work alongside a qualified social worker who is in a post requiring registration. This person would normally be the practice educator or – if the practice educator is off-site – the workplace supervisor (see below for further advice).

Some agencies may offer their OU students additional statutory experience in their first (K216/K832) PLO. If statutory duties are undertaken on the K216/K832 placement it is important that the work is appropriate for a

K216/K832 student and enables them to demonstrate the PCF standards at the relevant level. Further advice can be obtained from the Practice Tutor.

It is especially important to note that students undertaking statutory tasks will need to be appropriately supervised and supported.

A 'statutory social work task' has the quality of being something that a social worker or social care worker must do or has the power to do because of legislation.

Examples of Statutory Social Work Tasks

Mental health

Contributing to the provision of statutory after-care supervision and support to a formerly detained patient who has returned to live in the community.

Contributing to an assessment of a patient who may need to be detained in hospital. Such assessments are undertaken formally by a qualified Approved Mental Health Professional, but students may assist in the process.

Learning disability and older people

Contributing to a community care assessment of a person over the age of 18 who may be eligible for a statutory assessment of their community care needs.

Youth offending

As a member of a multi-disciplinary Youth Offending Team, or other statutory agency, contributing to the supervision of a young offender sentenced to compulsory supervision in the community.

Children and family work

As a member of a local authority children and families team, contributing to an assessment of need, including issues of abuse and neglect.

As a staff member of a voluntary organisation working with children subject to care proceedings, making a report to appropriate local authority staff for the purposes of assessment of need; or providing evidence, either written or oral, to a court regarding the needs of a child.

In both K216/K832 and K315/K833 students must be able to meet the PCF standards at the relevant level. In K315/K833 students must be able to demonstrate that they can work with an appropriate level of complexity, independence and autonomy. How this can be done and assessed will be explained in the Practice Learning Guide.

When considering the implications of these requirements, agency coordinators must keep in mind that the two periods of practice learning on the programme should be designed to give the student an opportunity to meet the requirements of the PCF at the relevant level. Although the learning needs of students will, to some extent, depend on their existing knowledge, skills and experience, they must have the opportunity in each of the two periods of practice learning to assemble evidence of their ability and to demonstrate this to the satisfaction of their practice educators and the Assessment Board.

At the end of both practice learning opportunities there will be a meeting called the End of Practice Learning Review. In K216/K832 the focus of this meeting will be looking ahead to the K315/K833 practice learning opportunity and discussing the type of PLO required in K315/K833. The meeting would also discuss the kinds of PLO which would be appropriate for learning in K315/K833 to satisfy contrast requirements. This discussion would be recorded and provided to the agency coordinator and the student would bring this record to the K315/K833 practice learning agreement meeting. In K315/K833 the focus of the End of Practice Learning Review meeting will be the Continuing Professional Development needs of the student post qualification.

If you are unsure how to interpret the guidance above, contact the Admissions Team for further advice.

Locating Practice Educator and workplace supervisors

To meet the requirements for both K216/K832 and K315/K833, the Practice Educator should:

- be a qualified social worker with two years' post-qualifying experience, and registered with the social work regulatory body
- have a working knowledge of the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), as well as the regulatory body's standards of conduct, performance and ethics and its Guidance on Conduct and Ethics for Students

Role and responsibilities of the practice educator

Each student will need a designated practice educator (PE) and Social Work England requires all PEs to be registered and practising social workers with at least 2 full years' post qualifying experience at the start of the practice education training programme.

The role and responsibilities of the practice educator are set out in the Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS) for social work refresh published by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) in 20July 2019 and available via this link: <https://www.basw.co.uk/social-work-training/practice-educator-professional-standards-peps>

The PEPS standards also cover updating, currency, training and mentoring requirements for PEs. The requirements vary slightly depending on placement level but in all cases the practice educator should not be:

- someone with direct line management responsibility for the student within the student's sponsoring agency
- someone who owns or is a director or chief executive of the student's sponsoring agency.
- On-site supervisors of learners may be experienced or hold professional qualifications other than social work. If this is the case, there should also be a registered social worker practice educator involved in the learner's placement. You should discuss the detail of the PEPs requirements (including

equivalent PE qualifications) with the relevant Staff Tutor in order to confirm that placement arrangements meet the regulatory requirements.

Agencies should give careful thought to recruitment of practice educators as the experience of the practice educator is an important factor with respect to both learning and assessment on the programme. If you wish to appoint a practice educator who does not fit these requirements, you must get the agreement of the programme first. Please contact your staff tutor if you wish to use a non-standard practice educator.

Locating practice educators may depend on whether the PLO is in the agency, or in another 'outside' agency (see below). Where the practice educator is in a different workplace from the student, or indeed is independent of the agency, a workplace supervisor will need to be appointed. This will normally be an experienced practitioner (or the student's line manager) in the placement setting, who can provide day-to-day supervision and support.

Students are required to have a different practice educator in each PLO. If agencies are unable to meet this requirement, they should contact the Admissions Team for advice.

If it is necessary to appoint both a practice educator and workplace supervisor (see above), please note the following new requirements for workplace supervisors:

- In K216/K832 the workplace supervisor may be a registered social worker, but this is not essential, and they need to be competent to provide day-to-day supervision practice to social work students and be located in the students practice learning workplace. They should ideally if possible be working towards a PEP's Stage 1 proficiency.
- a K315/K833 workplace supervisor must be a registered social worker in a post requiring registration with the social work register.

Locating practice learning opportunities

When locating practice learning opportunities, agency coordinators need to give close attention to the sections above on 'in-house' and 'out-house' PLOs and the requirements for contrast and statutory tasks in K315/K833. Similarly, the location of practice learning opportunities and practice educators is likely to be closely entwined. Many agency coordinators will have experience of arranging PLOs for other degree programmes and be part of local formal, or informal, networks. Others will be new to this and may want to make use of the network of agencies which use the OU programme. In all circumstances, it is critical to start to locate and plan for practice learning opportunities as early as possible in the year prior to your students studying K216/K832 or K315/K833.

There are several reasons why some agencies using the OU programme for their staff may wish to cooperate with other programme users to find suitable practice learning opportunities, including the following:

- because the agency is small and/or highly specialised and is unable to provide opportunities for the students to get contrasting and/or statutory experience and to transfer learning
- because a student has particular learning needs which cannot be met by the agency even if its learning opportunities are fairly diverse
- because it is felt that the student/agency/service users would benefit from the student undertaking at least one period of practice learning in a different agency.

Before embarking on negotiations to cooperate with other programme user agencies, it is important to take account of the responsibilities of the agency with respect to sponsoring a student on the degree. These are included in the Collaboration Agreement which the agency signs with The Open University.

Agency contractual responsibilities with respect to practice learning

- The agency is responsible for finding two periods of assessed practice learning which meet The Open University requirements and the student's learning needs for each student they sponsor on the programme
- The agency is required to provide the student with a practice educator who meets the programme's requirements for both periods of assessed practice learning.

When negotiating cooperation with another programme user agency, agency coordinators should ensure that any agreement reached takes account of the following:

Factors to consider when negotiating cooperation over practice learning opportunities with other programme user agencies

- Is the arrangement to provide a period of practice learning only, or a period of practice learning and a practice educator?
- How will practice learning funding for the period of practice learning be shared between agencies and how will the practice educator be paid?
- In the event of the practice learning opportunity breaking down because the practice educator is unable to continue, or the placement failing to provide what has been agreed in the practice learning agreement, who will be responsible for providing additional or alternative practice learning opportunities?

- Who will bear the costs of travelling to and within the practice learning opportunities?
- What rules governing DBS checks exist in both agencies?

Practice learning opportunity quality standards

The Open University Social Work programmes have laid down certain standards for practice learning opportunities. These standards govern (i) the content of the practice learning agreement, (ii) the quality and quantity of practice assessment, and (iii) reporting procedures, including that the practice educator's final report is submitted on time. Full details of the standards are included below.

For all providers the following Quality Standards are to be applied to all practice learning opportunities funded under the arrangements.

1 Practice learning agreement

Agreement is written and signed by student and representatives of both programme and provider.

Agreement identifies learning needs and practice learning opportunities.

Agreement is explicit about how the student can access (i) support arrangements and (ii) systems for complaints.

Agreement specifies the duration and frequency of supervision.

2 Practice assessment

Practice educator meets minimum requirements specified by the OU Programme.

The student receives the supervision as set out in the Agreement.

Provider has established support systems and training for practice educators or access to such arrangements.



The practice educator will ensure that the student is made aware of the provider's health and safety procedures and other relevant policies and procedures.

3 Reporting

The student has read and contributed to the Practice Assessment Report and countersigned to this effect.

Report states that the student has or has not provided evidence of their ability to meet the standards of the PCF at the relevant level and refers to the appropriate evidence for this statement.

Practice Educator Report is completed and submitted to the OU on time.

Health and safety issues for students in practice learning opportunities

Employers are accustomed to giving advice to staff on the necessity for vaccination against hepatitis B if the nature of their work is likely to put them at particular risk. However, the issue may be overlooked where a student is going out of their normal work environment into a new setting for a practice learning opportunity.

We strongly recommend sponsors and students to take advice from the agency providing the practice learning opportunity, from their own Occupational Health Department or the student's own GP if there are worries about a risk of hepatitis B infection while a student is on placement.

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a viral infection which is usually spread from person to person by blood to blood contact, including injury with sharp objects or sexual intercourse. Transmission has also rarely followed bites from an infected person. It is not passed on by normal everyday contact.

The illness can be anywhere between mild and very severe and usually causes jaundice. Hepatitis B can lead to long-term liver and health problems.

Risk assessment

Vaccination is recommended for individuals who are at risk of contracting hepatitis B because of their lifestyle, occupation or some other factor.

A higher prevalence of hepatitis B carriage has been found among certain groups of people with learning disabilities, both in residential accommodation and in special schools, than in the general population. Decisions on immunisation should be made on the basis of a local risk assessment.

Employers are required to undertake a risk assessment where there may be a risk to workers because of their occupation, and to take necessary measures to protect workers and others who may be exposed, as far as reasonably practicable. The risk assessment must be made available to and understood by anyone it applies to. If the risk assessment highlights a requirement for vaccination against hepatitis B, then all those who are undertaking the work must be able to prove they have been vaccinated.

Vaccination

Where vaccination is indicated, the course consists of three injections and should be commenced at least two months before any possible exposure to hepatitis B.

Immunisation against hepatitis B is not a substitute for good hygiene practice. Universal precautions must be maintained.

If you need further advice, contact the Admissions Team at wels-sw-enquiries@open.ac.uk.

Section G

Issues or problems arising after the programme start

Help from the OU

Help, advice and information are available from a range of OU staff, both centrally-based administrative staff at Milton Keynes and Practice Tutors, Associate Lecturers and Staff Tutors in your region. Students will have details of their own tutors and Practice Tutor. Information about the programme is also available on our website: wels.open.ac.uk/overview/school-health-wellbeing-and-social-care

Notifying the OU when things go wrong or change

Agency staff, agency coordinators, practice educators and workplace supervisors can help us by letting us know about:

- changes which affect a student's position on the programme
- any problems they encounter as a result of programme procedures
- change of name or address of student.

It is very important to let us know immediately if:

- a student leaves the agency's employment
- a student is suspended from work or is the subject of a disciplinary hearing
- a student commits a criminal offence or receives a police caution
- the agency is contemplating suspending or terminating a placement for any reason
- there are any changes in agency-appointed personnel: agency coordinator, practice educator or workplace supervisor (or their contact details).

If an agency is concerned about any aspect of the programme, please do let us know by contacting the Admissions Team.



Useful contacts

Professional Programmes Admissions Team (Admissions Team)

(for further advice or guidance on implementing the programme)

Professional Programmes
Admissions Team
Faculty of Wellbeing
Education and Language Studies
The Open University
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA

Email:
WELS-SW-Enquiries@open.ac.uk

The Corporate and Partnership Team

(for issues relating to registration)

Corporate and Partnership Team
Student Recruitment
The Open University
PO Box 197
Milton Keynes
MK7 6BJ

Tel: **0300 303 6333**

Email:
Partnerships-enquiries@open.ac.uk

Credit Transfer Centre

(for queries relating to transferring external study to The Open University)

Credit Transfer Centre
The Open University
PO Box 80
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AS

Tel: **01908 653077**

open.ac.uk/credit-transfer

Student Support Team

(for on-module support)

The Open University
Clarendon Park
Clumber Avenue
Sherwood Rise
Nottingham
NG5 1AH

Tel: **0300 303 0529**

