



1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Raising the quality of social work education, training and practice has been central to social work policy for several decades and was a specific area of focus during the Social Work Task Force (2008-9) and Reform Board (2010-12)⁴ processes. Following the publication of the Narey⁵ and Croisdale-Appleby⁶ reviews of social work education, central government (Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care) introduced Social Work Teaching Partnerships (SWTPs). SWTPs aim to formalise collaborative working between social work educators and employers, with part of the core mission being identified by Government being to raise the standard of social work by attracting and selecting 'high caliber' students into the profession.

One of the core areas for the West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership (WMSWTP) has been admissions and the requirement to attract and recruit students with a 'unique blend' of intellectual, personal attributes and attitudes, and the abilities needed to enter social work qualifying programmes⁷. To meet Department for Education (DfE) set aims, the WMSWTP Workstream Plan for admissions is to raise the quality and consistency of recruitment, selection and admissions processes and procedures for entrants onto qualifying social work education programmes from partner Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the region. Given the complex and multi-dimensional nature of social work selection, consideration of multiple requirements is essential.

1.2 Purpose

This document provides best practice guidance set in the broader context of HEI remits and responsibilities and the requirements and guidance of the current regulator, Social Work England (SWE)⁸. As well as providing guidance on best practice in relation to DfE stretch criteria, this guides includes references to the Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) recommendations for the selection of social work students. This document provides explanation and further detail intended to be helpful to those involved in social work student admissions. Exemplars and proforma are available in Appendices for adaptation as needed.

1.3 Scope

This guidance should be read in conjunction with other key documents, for example the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) Benchmark Statement for Social Work (2019)⁹ and the Social Work England Standards (2021)¹⁰

1.4 Context

Currently HEIs are required to demonstrate that their processes for selection and admission to social work programmes meet the requirements of the regulator's standards in order to be approved by Social Work England, with approval being mandatory prior to offering courses leading to initial social work qualifications.

⁴<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/social-work-reform-board>

⁵ Martin Narey (2014) Making the education of social workers consistently effective. Report of Sir Martin Narey's independent review of the education of children's social work.

⁶ David Croisdale-Appleby (2014) Re-visioning social work education. An Independent Review.

⁷http://www.swapbox.ac.uk/1133/1/Admission%2520to%2520SW_Dec2011_final%2520doc%5B1%5D.pdf

⁸ <https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk>

⁹ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/subject-benchmark-statement-social-work.pdf?%20sfvrsn=5c35c881>

¹⁰ <https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/standards/education-and-training-standards/>

The term 'service user' is used in this document to cover the wide and diverse set of individuals, groups and organisations who are involved in, or who benefit from, the contribution of social work. This group includes some that are involuntary or unwilling recipients of social work services. The term 'carer' is used in this guidance to mean those who provide unpaid care to a member of their family or to another person, and who work in partnership with social workers.

The term 'practitioner' is used in this document to mean any qualified registered social worker. The terms 'social work' and/or 'social worker' are protected titles in legislation¹¹ and anyone using the title 'social worker' is required to be registered with the relevant care council.

1.5 How the guidance has been developed

This guidance, based upon sector guidance produced as part of the Social Work Task Force and Reform Board processes, has been further developed through a process of consultation with WMSWTP organisations and individuals involved in, or with an interest in, the selection of social work students. The SWRB recommendations and the DfE stretch criteria for the WMSWTP were a starting point, in addition to associated literature.^{12, 13}

HEI admission tutors were contacted to provide summaries of their admission and recruitment

processes, specifically what works well, what needs to improve and how involved service users and practitioners are in the processes. Sessions took place with admissions tutors to look in detail at individual institutions selection processes. It is important, however, to recognize here the limited evidence about the long-term efficacy of various approaches to selection in relation to subsequent practice competence, but the Partnership are of the view that this does not invalidate this exercise of supporting and developing best practices.

Learning from other social work initiatives admissions processes, Frontline, Step Up and Think Ahead, aided and informed this guide.

Admissions workshops were facilitated across the region with academics, practitioners, students and those with lived experience. This enabled employers, service users and carers perspectives to be voiced. The purpose of each workshop was to look at each element of the selection process and establish best practice in each area. Outputs from the workshops have informed this guidance.

¹¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2005/491/made>

¹² <http://www.swapbox.ac.uk/1133/1/Admission%2520to%2520SW%20Dec2011%20final%2520doc%5B1%5D.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/assessing-suitability-students-enter-and-remain-qualifying-social-work-programmes>

