



## Programme Specification

A statement of the knowledge, understanding and skills that underpin a taught programme of study leading to an award from  
The University of Sheffield

1	<b>Programme Title</b>	Social Work
2	<b>Programme Code</b>	SPRT007
3	<b>JACS Code</b>	L500
4	<b>Level of Study</b>	Postgraduate
5	<b>Final Qualification</b>	MA
6	<b>Intermediate Qualification(s)</b>	PGDip in Social Work MA in Social Care Studies (non-professional) PGCert in Social Care Studies (non-professional) PGDip in Social Care Studies (non-professional)
7	<b>Teaching Institution (if not Sheffield)</b>	Not applicable
8	<b>Faculty</b>	Social Sciences
9	<b>Home Department</b>	Sociological Studies
10	<b>Other Department(s) involved in teaching the programme</b>	None
11	<b>Mode(s) of Attendance</b>	Full-time
12	<b>Duration of the Programme</b>	Full-time for 2 years (24 months)
13	<b>Accrediting Professional or Statutory Body (if applicable)</b>	Health Care Professions Council (HCPC). The Department of Sociological Studies was accredited as a provider of the new social work awards in August 2002, has transitional approval under the new regulator, and will be undergoing a re-approval process with the HCPC in 2013.
14	<b>Date of production/revision</b>	December 2012, March 2026

### 15. Background to the programme and subject area

The Department of Sociological Studies has a longstanding history of postgraduate social work training and the new MA in Social Work, which includes both academic teaching and practice learning, was first introduced in 2004. Three years later, a comprehensive review of the programme took place and a revised MA Social Work programme (implemented in September 2008) introduced further changes to meet changing requirements, although the learning outcomes and academic and practice learning content of the programme were unchanged.

As a result of a review of the profession set up by the previous government in 2010 and carried forward under the current administration through the Social Work Reform Board (SWRB), the previous regulator, the General Social Care Council (GSCC) closed with effect from August 1<sup>st</sup> 2012, and all regulatory responsibility passed to the – newly titled – Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). In addition, a newly constituted College of Social Work (TCSW) has been charged with responsibility as the new professional body for a number of professional matters involving qualifying education, and TCSW has agreed a process to endorse programmes which demonstrate their ability to meet a high standard of provision alongside the benchmark approval arrangements for HCPC.

As a result of these changes and in anticipation of the need to maintain the position of the University of Sheffield as a provider of high quality education in this field, further changes are being introduced to meet new regulatory and professional expectations. These changes have been consulted on widely, seeking to incorporate the views of teaching staff, students, service users, carers, social work practitioners and employers' workforce development services.

Postgraduate entrants bring to their social work training established, transferable skills which are of particular value in the study and practice of social work. Our postgraduate programme is designed to maximise and develop the critical, analytic and reflective skills possessed by the graduate, so as to enable our students to function as newly qualified and registered social workers at a high level of beginning professional practice with

the capacity to further develop their potential to contribute to the development of the profession.

Programme content and structure continues to be underpinned by the Quality Assurance Agency's benchmarking statement for social work, but now also reflects the new regulatory standards and the professional capabilities as set out within the new products endorsed by the Departments of HCPC and TCSW.

## 16. Programme aims

Social work training in the Department of Sociological Studies is delivered in an academic environment which conforms to the University's aim of maintaining the highest standards of excellence as a research-led institution, whose staff work at the frontiers of academic enquiry in a research environment. The MA Social Work programme seeks in particular to :

- Enable students to realise their potential in order that they may make a full contribution to the society in which they live and serve;
- Foster in students a commitment to self improvement and the development of life skills;
- Inculcate a respect for the traditions of higher education and a commitment to the values of truth, tolerance and justice.

The following aims apply to the MA Social Work:

1. To provide a learning experience which will equip students to practise social work in a variety of settings within the statutory, voluntary and independent sectors;
2. To engender sensitivity to social divisions such as 'race', gender, age, disability and sexual orientation and competence in anti-oppressive practice;
3. To develop an in-depth understanding of social work practice that is grounded in the idea of partnership with service users and other professionals;
4. To develop an understanding of professional accountability and the legal framework within which social work operates;
5. To encourage students to study social work within a comparative framework;
6. To develop the capacities of the reflective practitioner;
7. To promote the importance of research and develop research aware practitioners who can both utilise research and undertake independent research, which they are capable of applying to the development and delivery of social work practice.

## 17. Programme learning outcomes

The new awards in social work are required to address closely the QAA social work subject benchmark statement, the appropriate outcomes specified by the Professional Capabilities Framework, The Standards of Proficiency which set out the benchmark standards for professional practitioner registration and the Standards of Education and training specified by the regulator. These have been used to provide the frameworks for knowledge and understanding and skills respectively. Postgraduate students are expected to utilise in the learning process those generalisable and transferable academic skills which will enable them to achieve at the end of two years the core learning outcomes which are necessary for the beginning social worker.

### Knowledge and understanding:

Masters in Social Work students will understand how social work as a discipline is constructed, the significance of contributing to cognate disciplines and their interrelationships; most particularly, the dynamic relationship between current professional issues and the development of the knowledge base. Students will be expected to demonstrate originality in the synthesis of knowledge and transfer of practice techniques. As students in an applied discipline they will be equipped both to understand, and to work within, the context of contested debate about nature, scope and purpose, and be enabled to analyse, adapt to, manage and eventually to lead the processes of change.

<b>K1</b>	Students will have knowledge and understanding of social work services and service users, including an understanding of the range of needs and problems which cause people to become service users, knowledge of the range of resources used to address these problems and the shape of the service delivery network. They will have established foundation knowledge across all service user groups and more specialist knowledge and understanding in relation to either adult service users and community care or services for children in need and their families, to reflect their career aspirations and prospects.
-----------	---

<b>K2</b>	Students will have knowledge and understanding of the service delivery context, including an understanding of historical developments and of the political, social, economic and philosophical contexts which shape service development and impact on service delivery. They will understand the relationship between social policy and social work services and be able to make comparisons between the UK and other international systems.
<b>K3</b>	Students will have a critical understanding of social work knowledge and theory, including a critical appreciation of psychological and sociological dimensions of the problems with which service users are grappling and the psychosocial basis for social work assessment and intervention. Students will be able to demonstrate an appreciation of and be able to evaluate the use of different intervention methods and models, and demonstrate an ability to apply an appropriate range of specific theoretical approaches in appropriate practice contexts.
<b>K4</b>	Students will have knowledge and understanding of the values and ethics of social work as a profession, paying particular attention to the concepts of rights, responsibility, autonomy, power and control and the ways in which these operate in social work practice. They will demonstrate understanding of the socio-legal, moral and ethical dilemmas and of the conflicting imperatives which confront the practitioner.
<b>K5</b>	Students will have knowledge and understanding of the nature of social work practice, and the legal frameworks which underpin it, most particularly as this relates to the characteristics of a professional activity in which individual accountability and decision-making are exercised within organisational and agency boundaries and procedures. They will understand the nature of reflective practice and its continuing importance for their professional development and the delivery of a quality service.
<b>K6</b>	Students will have knowledge and understanding of the methods and uses of research and its application to social work. They will understand the genesis, purposes and uses of different types of research and their relevance for addressing particular policy and practice problems. They will be able to engage with current debates about the way in which research both informs and responds to policy and practice developments and understand the criteria for evidence-based practice.

<b>Skills and other attributes:</b>	
<b>S1</b>	Students will have communication and information technology skills and they will be able to apply these to specific data storage and retrieval systems utilised in social care agencies, together with an appreciation of the importance of data protection in the service of professional privacy and confidentiality. Students will have a high degree of literacy and numeracy skills. And an appreciation of how to apply these in differing professional contexts. They will have a general understanding of the uses of statistical information in service and work force planning and be able to supply such information as required.
<b>S2</b>	Students will have problem solving skills such that they can undertake complex assessments of multi-dimensional problems experienced by individuals, families and groups, plan activities and interventions to address problematic issues (demonstrating the links between their assessment and plans), intervene appropriately in problematic situations, assess the subsequent situation and evaluate the impact of their intervention on the original problem(s). They will be able to manage this process, including the management of change and risk.
<b>S3</b>	Students will have interpersonal communication skills which facilitate their interactions with service users, including those requiring specific communication skills such as people with learning disability and children. They will be able to communicate appropriately using language interpreters and deaf language signers. They will be able to employ a range of written and oral communication skills appropriate to the task, such as in court work, case conferences and the production and presentation of reports.
<b>S4</b>	Students will have skills in working alongside others, working in partnership with service users and with other professionals within and across agencies. They will be able to work effectively in teams and networks.
<b>S5</b>	Students will have skills in personal and professional development, be able to reflect critically on their own practice and to be proactive in the use of professional supervision. They will be able to initiate change within their own practice and have begun the process of contributing to team, agency and service development.
<b>S6</b>	Students will be able to demonstrate and apply specific intervention approaches as appropriate to the situations with which they are dealing and be able to evaluate and reflect on the outcomes of those interventions.
<b>S7</b>	Students will be able to utilise a range of research tools and to use research to critique practice. They will be able to pursue independent research and to transfer the skills of academic enquiry and research application across topics and areas of interest.

## 18. Teaching, learning and assessment

### **Development of the learning outcomes is promoted through the following teaching and learning methods:**

The social work curriculum addresses diverse theoretical and knowledge bases and requires the integration of knowledge, skills and values and of theory and practice. A range of teaching methods and styles is therefore employed and most units are taught through teaching sessions consisting of a mix of lecture inputs, seminar discussion groups, practical exercises and the use of illustrative audio-visual material.

K1, K2 and K3 and K6 are taught principally though not exclusively through more formal lecture sequences.

Student-researched and presented seminars are an important learning tool in which students are required to research and present comparative topics in social work and social policy and evaluations of current practice. Students are encouraged to engage in critical examination of claims of new knowledge.

Facilitated class-room discussions and tutorials are used to help students develop an integrated approach to their learning involving a wide reflection on professional practice, organizational context and the policy to practice interface within an overall conceptual framework which integrates core professional values and beliefs.

Workshops are used for practice and research skills teaching.

On practice placement, learning is facilitated by a practice educator, approved under a new national Practice Educator Framework (Professional Educator Professional Standards for Social Work, (TCSW, 2012) who undertakes close one-to-one supervision of the student's practice as well as employing group teaching as appropriate. This forms one of the key development strands designed to meet K4 & K5.

### **Opportunities to demonstrate achievement of the programme learning outcomes are provided through the following assessment methods:**

A range of assessment methods is employed: essays, seen and unseen examinations, practice-based assignments, case study assignments, group presentations, web-based IT tasks, individual and group projects, a debate, action-based research project, a research proposal, **and** a literature-based dissertation.

Some essays require a critical evaluation of the student's own practice on placement within a wider evaluation of practice – e.g. the care management process, the framework for assessing children.

All social work students are assessed on:

- Their use and understanding of relevant knowledge bases.

*Assessed through essays, seen and unseen examination (Law), application in practice and project work.*

- Their knowledge and understanding of relevant theory.

*Assessed through essays, case study analyses, evaluations of practice.*

- Their competence in practice and the ability to critically reflect on and evaluate their own practice and the service delivery contexts in which they are working.

*Assessed through practice placements and practice-based assignments.*

- Their appreciation of the underpinning values of social work, its critical dilemmas and complexities and demonstration of their understanding of this in practice.

*Assessed through essays, direct practice, debate, practice based assignments.*

*Academic modules in Year 1 will have elements which will contribute to the assessment of a student's Readiness for Direct Practice (RfDP), to enable a judgement to be made as to the suitability of a student to progress to their first placement. This will be in the form of a portfolio of capability, comprising elements from all the above modules, completed and submitted at the end of the taught period of study. The assessment decision will be made in the first instance by members of academic staff, with suitably qualified practitioners making a contribution to the process of moderation.*

## 19. Reference points

**The learning outcomes have been developed to reflect the following points of reference:**

- HCPC Standards of Education and Training;

These are the standards on which the regulator will determine programme approval.

- HCPC Standards of Proficiency for Social Workers

These are the benchmark standards which any practitioner must meet in order to be eligible for registration with the professional regulator. Students must therefore be able, on completion of the course of qualifying study, to demonstrate that they can meet these registration standards

- QAA social work benchmark statement;

This provides a detailed account of the diverse and complex areas of knowledge and skills and the demonstration of the value base.

- QAA level descriptors

These have been used to determine the levels of academic input and assessment requirements for Masters level.

- Professional Capabilities Framework

This framework has been adopted as the professional reference for practitioner development, and defines a set of learning outcomes at agreed levels (both pre- and post-qualifying) within a developmental matrix designed to give coherence to the promotion of professional capability.

## 20. Programme structure and regulations

Social work programmes are shaped by the professional requirements of the regulator, informed by an appreciation of the critical themes and debates in current practice. There is thus a core knowledge and skills base which are further supported by a set of non-prescriptive curriculum guides. A common standard of professional capability must be achieved by all students on social work degree programmes which lead to the professional award. Professional capability incorporates the demonstration of an anti-oppressive value base. The MA in Social Work is a 2-year programme which integrates academic modules and practice learning. The Practice Learning element is assessed at Pass/ Fail and is additional to the credit-bearing academic modules.

A number of professional and non-professional exit routes are available to enable students who are unable to complete or unsuited to the work to withdraw as appropriate.

Detailed information about the structure of programmes, regulations concerning assessment and progression and descriptions of individual modules are published in the University Calendar available on-line at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/govern/calendar/regs.html>.

## 21. Student development over the course of study

Students are expected to establish or consolidate foundation knowledge in social science through independent study and follow in Year 1 a concentrated programme focusing on the specific knowledge base of social work and the application of core generic skills. In Year 2, the focus develops to concentrate on specific skills components and on more challenging practice and judgement issues relating to a range of practice contexts. This advancing capability and focused interest is carried through into the dissertation, which follows a grounding in research methods. Practice learning takes place in both years of the 2 year programme, through 70 and 100 day full-time placement periods in years 1 & 2 respectively following an initial academic Semester.

## 22. Criteria for admission to the programme

Graduates in any discipline may apply. Applicants will be selected according to University procedures, incorporating the involvement of service users and local social work employees in the interview selection process and the provision of a written test; other selection methods may be used as appropriate. All students will need to provide evidence of appropriate literacy and numeracy skills. Candidates will normally have a 2:1 first degree and any international applicants must demonstrate literacy to IELTS 7.

Detailed information regarding admission to the programme is available at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/prospective/>

### 23. Additional information

The University has transitional approval to provide awards in social work by the new regulator, the HCPC and following full approval, monitoring of each programme takes place through the HCPC's Inspectorate and QA procedures.

The planning, delivery and assessment of practice learning (the Practice Placements) is undertaken in partnership with statutory, voluntary and independent agencies in the region and beyond and overseen through a formal local partnership established for the specific purpose of addressing quality of provision. Through this partnership students are provided with practice learning opportunities in social work and related settings. All students are allocated practice educators who meet professional requirements and are familiar with and approved under University requirements as set out in the relevant QAA subject benchmark documents for the provision of practice learning.

This specification represents a concise statement about the main features of the programme and should be considered alongside other sources of information provided by the teaching department(s) and the University. In addition to programme specific information, further information about studying at The University of Sheffield can be accessed via our Student Services web site at [www.shef.ac.uk/ssid](http://www.shef.ac.uk/ssid).