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Room C421, Park Square Campus
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19th March 2014

Dear Mr. Potter,

Observations on the Visitor Report from Frontline

Thank you for your detailed feedback and guidance on how we can demonstrate that the Frontline Academy (PG Dip Social Work) meets HCPC standards. We have attached observations relating to the report and restate our commitment to meeting the required professional standards for approval.

Further to these observations we will be sharing a plan with you for how we intend to evidence the standards. We hope that this will be informative ahead of the Education and Training Committee on the 27th of March and that it will provide an opportunity for the visiting team to share any additional guidance on the nature of the evidence that they require.

Frontline is an innovative social work programme that is being developed over a relatively short time period. In this context, there was considerable development in the articulation of the details of the programme policies and procedures between the submission of the documentation for the HCPC visit (January) and the visit itself (at the end of February). The more detailed and developed proposals for delivery of the programme identified at a number of points by the Visitors in relation to the verbal feedback is an indication of this. Furthermore, our increasingly thorough documentation of the details of the course has continued since the visit. We therefore look forward to the opportunity to send you a full set of revised documents that address the points raised by the Visitors for consideration at the recommended visit.

As you know, we are keen to move quickly in turning around further visits or requests for documentation. The Frontline Academy team are intending to send a full set of revised documentation to you on Friday the 4th of April. Given this, we would like to explore the possibility of provisionally planning for a visit on the week commencing the 21st of April subject to a final decision being made by the ETC on the 27th of March. Hopefully, this would allow the visiting team to have two weeks in which to review the documentation before the visit and it would allow HCPC visitors and the programme team to make time available in advance.

Regarding the recommended further visit, we would like to work closely with the HCPC visiting team to ensure that the agenda provides full opportunities for visitors to explore areas where conditions are set in detail. We would welcome suggestions from you for how

we might create an agenda the best creates these opportunities. The Frontline Academy would welcome any feedback or questions from the visiting team once the documentation is shared with you on the 4th of April within the fortnight before the visit so that we can make best use of the visit. We would like to confirm whether this is possible.

Once again, thank you for your feedback and we look forward to providing further evidence in the weeks ahead to satisfy your standards.

Yours sincerely,

Donald Forrester
Professor of Social Work Research
University of Bedfordshire

Josh MacAlister
Chief Executive
Frontline

OBSERVATIONS

- 1. Sources of evidence:** Absence of a Practice Placement Handbook.

Observation:

We note that while a separate Practice Placement Handbook was not submitted, this was because Practice Placement information was integrated into the student Programme Handbook. This was because learning on the Frontline programme is integrated into practice across the whole course and we therefore chose to submit a single integrated Handbook. However, for clarity we will now provide a separate Practice Placement Handbook.

- 2. Condition:** The education provider must provide further evidence of how and when applicants to the programme are made aware of the obligations they will be required to fulfil as part of the bursary contract they are required to sign.

Observation:

The Visitors commented that they were: "unclear as to when students or applicants would be informed of any other obligations and / or liabilities they would be subject to when entering into these contracts".

We are happy to provide further information to participants about these contracts, however we note that there is further information available on some obligations and liabilities on the Frontline website (<http://www.thefrontline.org.uk/faqs> under Pay and Employment Terms). The website link was provided in submitted documentation.

- 3. Condition:** Further evidence must be provided to further articulate how the education provider receives the information they require in order make an informed choice about making offers to applicants who wish to take up a place on the programme.

Observation

In relation to this it was commented that: "members of the programme team had been present at the most recent assessment days". In fact two academic staff from the University of Bedfordshire were present for all assessment days, save one due to staff illness, they had overview information on all candidates and had veto over any not considered appropriate.

In verbal evidence it was outlined that the academic team from the University of Bedfordshire were involved in the design of the assessment process to ensure that adequate information was collected to enable the university to make an informed decision about admissions.

We accept the need to provide more documentary evidence of the nature of the University control over admissions decisions to support the verbal evidence provided. This observation is solely a correction of fact.

- 4. Condition:** The education provider must provide further evidence of how external examiners will be involved in the programme to fulfil their responsibilities as required of them in the established University of Bedfordshire quality assurance procedures.

Observation

The Visitors commented that:

In the meeting with the programme team, the visitors were informed that the role of the external examiner for this programme may include greater involvement in the moderation of practice placement assessments. This involvement would be designed to provide greater assurance of the parity in the assessment of students across all practice placement areas, and may involve scrutinising recordings of student performance while on placement. The visitors also noted that external examiners may be asked to comment on the professional suitability of students through the problems arising in practice learning policy (appendix 7). Whilst the visitors were aware these may be the roles fulfilled by the external examiners on this programme they could not determine, from the evidence provided, how these additional roles may impact on the external examiners' ability to undertake the role as defined by the education provider. In particular the visitors could not determine how the programme team would ensure that if they had any duties over and above what was expected of them by the UoB how the external examiner would maintain their independence from the programme. Therefore the visitors were unable to determine, from the evidence provided, how the external examiner role will work in practice and how any expanded role, over and above that usually expected, will ensure that the programme can fulfil the requirements of the education providers' quality assurance procedures. The visitors therefore require further evidence of the defined role of the external examiners on this programme and how this role will ensure that the requirements of the education providers' QA procedures will be fulfilled.

This seems to be a different understanding of the external examiner role. The external examiner role for Frontline is identical to that for other social work programmes at the University of Bedfordshire. The only difference is a practical one: many of the marked assignments on the Frontline course involve recording of direct practice. The role of the External Examiners in relation to these is identical to that for an academic assignment. However, we did comment that this would require Examiners to come in to the University

to listen to a sample of recordings, as confidential recordings cannot be sent out in the same way as written assignments, and that the extra time requirements makes three External Examiners more appropriate. We are sorry if our verbal evidence caused confusion. We do not believe there is any evidence of grounds for this condition.

- 5. Condition:** The education provider must provide further evidence as to the obligations of each partner institution, in regards to their responsibilities to any students undertaking the programme, should funding for the programme change or be withdrawn.

Observation

We note the suggested contradiction outlined in the visitors report between what was submitted in documentation and verbal evidence:

The visitors also noted in paragraph 10.12 (page 12) that the University of Bedfordshire (UoB) has no responsibility to "...teach out Participants the remainder of the Programme and shall have no liability to Frontline (ARK) in respect of the decision not to teach out save that prior to the decision not to teach out, the HEI shall give Frontline (ARK) reasonable notice and consult with Frontline (ARK)." However, in the meeting with the senior team the visitors were informed that UoB would ensure that students would be transferred to suitable alternative programmes at the university should this situation occur and that students would receive suitable awards based on their achievement. The visitors were also informed that the arrangements in place between Frontline and the DfE would ensure that any cohort on the programme would be funded until the programme could be completed. As such, while the visitors acknowledged the undertaking of the collaborative partners, they were unsure how these arrangements would be agreed and how they would be enacted should any issues with the grant funding of the programme occur.

We believe our written and verbal evidence to be accurate and congruent. The collaboration agreement between the University and Frontline states (in clause 10.12) that the University is "not obliged" to teach out students. This relates to the University's legal responsibilities to Frontline through our contract with them and not to our ethical responsibilities to students, which are as set out during the HCPC visit. For Frontline as for any other University of Bedfordshire social work students we would support students to complete their studies, either by finishing the Frontline programme or transferring to another social work course as appropriate. We do intend to provide documentary evidence to support and clarify this in our submission.

- 6. Condition:** The education provider must provide further evidence of how they will ensure and maintain parity of access to resources between students in all areas of the country.

Observation

The Visitors commented that:

From the documentation provided and the meetings at the approval visit, the visitors were made aware of the resources that are available to all students on the programme. In particular the visitors were made aware of the online resources that would be made available to students as well as some of the physical resources that will be available to students at the education provider. In discussion with the programme team the visitors were made aware that the programme team recognise that due to the different areas of the country in which students would be undertaking their placement experience this could potentially lead to a disparity in access to these resources. The visitors were made aware that it would be a priority of the academic co-ordinators to ensure that the resources provided, particularly on practice placement, would allow students to gain the experience they require in order to successfully complete the programme. However the visitors could not determine, from the evidence provided, how the policies and processes in place would allow the academic co-ordinators to ensure parity of access to resources for students in all areas of the country. In particular the visitors were unclear as to what processes would be enacted to identify if students in the one area of the country lacked access to any resources compared to students in another area and what the team would do to address an issue such as this. The visitors therefore require further evidence to demonstrate how the programme team ensures that all students have access to the resources they require in order to successfully complete the programme. They also require further evidence of the policies and processes in place that will enable the academic co-ordinators to ensure that students in all areas of the country will have parity of access to these resources throughout the duration of the programme.

We were unclear of the reason for this condition. As set out throughout the documentation, all students will receive the same teaching, delivered by the same academic staff. This will be delivered at the summer institute and in the region in which they are based for recall days. Learning in practice will be supported through academic staff visiting placements with the same pattern for every placement. All students will have equal access to online resources. None of the students are based at or taught in the University. We seek clarification regarding the lack of evidence of parity between regions in relation to teaching and learning resources.

- 7. Condition:** Further evidence must be provided to highlight the processes that are in place to ensure that if concerns about a students' profession related conduct arise in placement these feed back into the education providers' professional suitability procedure where appropriate.

Observation

We note the same process, with identical wording, was approved by the HCPC during the approval of the University's Step-Up programme in 2013.

8. **Condition:** The education provider must provide further evidence to demonstrate how the programme team have considered and addressed the knowledge base included in relevant curriculum guidance, particularly from the professional body.

Observation

We did not recognise the knowledge, skills and values for child and family social work as something distinct and different from "adult" social work as outlined by the Visitors. For instance, the Visitors commented that "In discussions with the programme team it was highlighted that the curriculum content delivered at the summer institute and recall days would include aspects of social work practice outside the sphere of child and family social work." The types of issues referred to, such as adult mental health, learning difficulties and substance use, and working with older people, are all relevant to working with families and integral to effective child and family social work and will therefore be covered by teaching on the programme. We seek a variation in the report to reflect the understanding outlined above.

Given the significance of this issue, we would benefit from more detail in relation to the Visitors' understanding of child and family social work. Our approach to the programme is to teach knowledge, values and skills for working with children, adults and their families. Understanding and working with a variety of "adult" issues is in our opinion an essential and core part of child and family social work and thus integral to the Frontline course. If this is a different understanding of social work in a child and family setting to that of the Visitors, it would be helpful to have clarity on (a) what their understanding of child and family social work is? and (b) what the additional elements of "adult" work that would not be covered by this but required on a social work course are thought to be?

We accept the need to provide more detail about the incorporation of both curriculum guidance and the inclusion of learning across a range of service user groups and will do so when we submit our revised documentation. However, we were not clear what the extent of the Condition was in relation to The College of Social Work curriculum guides. Is it considered necessary to include reference to all of them? If not, which ones specifically do the Visitors feel need to be addressed?

9. **Condition:** The education provider must provide further evidence to demonstrate how students will be prepared for placement through the clear articulation of the learning outcomes they will be required to meet as well as when, and where, in the placement experience these learning outcomes are expected to be met.

Observation:

Here and in a number of other Conditions the Visitors comment that:

“the visitors were made aware that assessment of students’ performance while undertaking practice placement experience would be made through the scrutiny of students’ portfolios at regular review meetings. The visitors also noted, from documentation provided at the visit, that the programme team would utilise a matrix to grade students’ performance based on these review meetings along with direct observations of students’ practice”.

This is inaccurate. As set out in the Programme Handbook, portfolios of evidence are assessed against the PCF and review meetings are part of this process (as with all other social work programmes at the University of Bedfordshire). In addition, direct practice is assessed using a grading matrix. The processes of assessment and moderation for this are as for academic assignments and are not related to the holistic review process. This does not affect the specific condition (which is to provide more evidence on the curriculum) but is a point of accuracy. The comment would be made accurate by deleting “based on these review meetings”.

This comment was also found in 5.11 condition 3, and conditions relating to 6.1, 6.4 and 6.6

10. Condition: Further evidence must be provided to demonstrate how the education provider will ensure that the use of contrasting placements to deliver elements of the curriculum will provide all students with the experience they need to meet the relevant learning outcomes.

Observation:

We seek clarification of this condition. The Visitors conclude by stating:

The visitors therefore require further evidence of how the programme team will ensure that the experience provided to students in the contrast placement settings will be of sufficient quality and length to allow each student to meet any associated learning outcomes.

We were not clear whether addressing the guidance, policies, procedures and quality assurance processes around these contrasting practice experiences would potentially be sufficient to satisfy the Visitors or whether they believe that contrasting experiences such as those proposed are not able to be of sufficient “quality and length”. We would like guidance from either the Visitors or the HCPC around the requirements for “length” in particular.