Royal Holloway, University of London
Course specification for a postgraduate award
MSc in Social Work 1395

Section 1 – Introduction to your course
The overall aim of the course is to produce social work practitioners who are able to demonstrate an ability to be critically reflective practitioners and who are able to integrate the specific subject knowledge, values and skills in analytical ways to promote and safeguard individual and collective well-being with a range of user groups in complex situations. On successful completion of the course students will be able to demonstrate qualifying level capabilities in line with the Professional Capabilities Framework (established by the British Association of Social Work (BASW)) and the professional standards set by Social Work England. The MSc in Social Work is delivered over 2 years of full-time study. Teaching takes place during the day over three terms from September to June. The dissertation is submitted in June of the final year. Whilst being a self-contained degree in its own right, each course provides suitable and recognised qualifications for entry to PhD study in the same or a closely related field. While Royal Holloway keeps all the information made available under review, courses and the availability of individual modules, especially optional modules are necessarily subject to change at any time, and you are therefore advised to seek confirmation of any factors which might affect your decision to follow a specific course. In turn, Royal Holloway will inform you as soon as is practicable of any significant changes which might affect your studies. The following is brief description for some of the most important terminology for understanding the content of this document: *Degree course* – Also referred to as 'course', this term refers to the qualification you will be awarded upon successful completion of your studies. 'Courses' were formerly known as 'programmes' at Royal Holloway. *Module* – This refers to the credits you will study each year to complete your degree course. Postgraduate taught degrees at Royal Holloway comprise 180 credits. On some degree courses a certain number of optional modules must be passed for a particular degree title. 'Modules' were formerly known as 'course units' at Royal Holloway.

Section 2 – Course details			
Date of specification update	January 2026	**Location of study**	Central London Campus
Course award and title	MSc in Social Work	**Level of study**	Postgraduate
Course code	1395	**Year of entry**	2026/27
Awarding body	Royal Holloway, University of London		
Department/ School	Department of Law and Criminology (including Social Work), School of Law and Social Sciences	**Other departments or schools involved in teaching the course**	None
Mode(s) of attendance	Full time in person	**Duration of the course**	2 years
Accrediting Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body requirement(s)	Social Work England require passing of all modules to receive the award of MSc in Social Work	**For queries on admissions:**	https://royalholloway.ac.uk/applicationquery
Link to Coursefinder for further information:	https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/studying-here/		

Section 3 – Degree course structure				
3.1 Mandatory module information **The following table summarises the mandatory modules which students must take in each year of study**				
Module code	**Module title**	**Credits**	**FHEQ level**	**Module status (see section 6)**
Stage 1				
SW5019	Readiness for Direct Practice	0	7	MNC
SW5020	Knowledge and Skills for Practice 1	30	7	MNC
SW5021	Life course Development and Observational learning	15	7	MNC
SW5022	Law and Policy for Social Work	30	7	MNC
Stage 2				
SW5023	Critical Social Work	30	7	MNC
SW5024	Knowledge and Skills for Practice 2	15	7	MNC
SW5025	Social work Research and Dissertation	60	7	MNC

This table sets out the most important information for the mandatory modules on your degree course. These modules are central to achieving your learning outcomes, so they are compulsory, and all students on your degree course will be required to take them. You will be automatically registered for these modules. Mandatory modules fall into two categories; 'condonable' or 'non-condonable'. In accordance with the professional requirements for a social work qualification (set by SWE) no modules on the MSc in Social Work postgraduate are condonable. All modules must be passed in order to progress and become eligible for application to Social Work England for registration as a qualified social worker on completion (see below).

In the case of mandatory 'non-condonable' (MNC) modules, you must pass the module to successfully graduate with a particular degree title, or before you can proceed to the next year of your course where studying part-time. In the case of mandatory 'condonable' (MC) modules, these must be taken but you can still progress or graduate even if you do not pass them (see Academic Regulations on condonable fails). Please note that although Royal Holloway will keep changes to a minimum, changes to your degree course may be made where reasonable and necessary due to unexpected events. For example, where requirements of relevant Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies have changed and course requirements must change accordingly, or where changes are deemed necessary on the basis of student feedback and/or the advice of external advisors, to enhance academic provision.

3.2 Optional modules
All modules taken on the MSc Social Work are mandatory.
3.3 Optional module requirements
N/A

Section 4 - Progressing through each year of your degree course
For further information on the progression and award requirements for your degree, please refer to Royal Holloway's Academic Regulations. Progression throughout the year/s is monitored through performance in summative or formative coursework assignments. Please note that if you hold a Tier 4 (General) Student Visa and you choose to leave (or are required to leave because of non-progression) or complete early (before the course end date stated on your CAS), then this will be reported to UKVI. You must pass SW5019 Readiness for Direct Practice before you are permitted to start a placement. To progress from the 1st stage of the degree course to the 2nd stage, you must pass all taught modules, which includes passing all components of assessment, and the placement undertaken in SW5020 Knowledge and Skills for Practice 1. To achieve the award of the MSc in Social Work you are required to pass all stage 1 and stage 2 modules and the placements. You must pass with a mark of at least 50% for all taught components and achieve a Pass level in both placements. To pass the course, you must achieve an overall weighted average of at least 50.00%. All postgraduate taught students are required to take and pass the non-credit bearing Moodle-based Academic Integrity module SS1001 to be awarded. The pass mark for the module assessment is stated in the on-line Academic Integrity Moodle module. Students may attempt the assessment as often as they wish with no penalties or capping. Students who otherwise meet the requirements for award as stipulated in the Academic Taught Regulations but fail to pass the Moodle-based Academic Integrity module will not be awarded.

Consequences of failure of placement

You must pass both placements (year 1 and year 2) in order to be awarded an MSc in Social Work or a Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work.

If a student is awarded a **fail** for a first social work placement the Practice Assessment Panel will consider:- requesting a second attempt (placement), unless it is considered that Fitness to Practice issues need to be considered.

If a student **fails** Practice Learning 1 after a second attempt the student will not be eligible for the MSc in Social Work and will not be permitted to proceed to the 2nd year of the MSc in Social Work course.

If a student **fails** Practice Learning 2, the student will be given a further opportunity to undertake a placement subject to the agreement of the Practice Assessment Panel.

Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work

A student who fails to pass the dissertation (SW5025) but reaches a 50% pass mark in all other work (including Practice Learning 1 and 2) can be awarded a Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work. Failure marks cannot be condoned for the MSc in Social Work or the Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work.

Please refer to the link below for the Social Work England requirements for professional social work registration https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/education-training/students-and-graduates/

Students who are awarded the Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work as an exit award by Royal Holloway University, are eligible to apply for registration with Social Work England.

Non-Social Work Awards

The award of a MSc in Social Studies, Postgraduate Diploma in Social Studies or a Postgraduate Certificate in Social Studies does not confer eligibility to apply for admission to the Social Work England register.

Failure marks cannot be condoned for the MSc in Social Work or the Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work, however, failure marks in the region 40-49% in modules may be condoned for non-social work awards. These are subject to maximums as listed below.

Award	**Maximum number of credits to be condoned**
MSc in Social Studies	30
Postgraduate Diploma in Social Studies	30
Postgraduate Certificate in Social Studies	0

Students may still be considered for an exit award in Social Studies if they pass the required number of academic credits for an award but fail or do not complete either Placement 1 or 2. Where this is the case, they will be removed from SW5020 Knowledge and Skills 1/ SW5024 Knowledge and Skills 2 and transferred onto SW5052 Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies 1 or SW5051 Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies 2 depending on which placement has been failed or not completed.

An aegrotat award does not confer eligibility to apply for admission to the Social Work England register.

Section 5 – Educational aims of the course

The aims of this course are to:

- Provide a curriculum which supports students to meet Social Work England standards of Education and Training and the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF, BASW, 2019);
- Provide a teaching and learning environment which enable students to develop their skills and knowledge across diverse areas of social work practice and to gain practice learning experiences which meet required professional standards in a supportive and safe setting.

Specifically, the aims of the MSc Social Work course are to:

- Meet and demonstrate adherence to the professional standards for social work practice as set out by Social Work England;
- Develop an understanding of the value base of social work and the application of ethical principles to guide practice;
- Develop a knowledge and understanding of diversity and applying anti-oppressive principles in practice;
- Develop abilities in critical reflection and analysis of relevant theory, research, policy, and law to inform the rationale for professional decision-making;
- Develop an understanding of appropriate methods of practice, theoretical perspectives, and research evidence to apply in their work with individuals, families and communities;
- Develop an understanding of complex social problems and be able to integrate this into work with vulnerable people and communities;
- Develop intervention skills for direct practice to promote independence and prevent harm, neglect, and abuse;
- Demonstrate an understanding of working in organisational contexts including, collaborative working and inter-professional practice;
- Develop and use skills in research and critical use of literature and research evidence and an awareness of professional and ethical issues involved in research;
- Demonstrate a commitment to promote rights, justice and economic well-being;
- To develop their professional identity as a social worker, taking responsibility for their own conduct in accordance with the education and training standards and professional standards set by Social Work England.

Section 6 - Course learning outcomes **In general terms, the courses provide opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate the following learning outcomes. (*Categories – Knowledge and understanding (K), Skills and other attributes (S), and Transferable skills (*)*)**	
Course learning outcome	**Level 7**
To demonstrate professional standards and capabilities as required and set out in the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF, BASW, 2018), Social Work England professional standards for students (SWE, 2021) and Key Knowledge and Skills for Social Work (KSS) with children and families (2018) and for adult social work (2015).	1. Demonstrate capacity to critically use theories of human growth, behaviour and development throughout the lifespan including the key concepts of attachment, loss, separation, change, strengths and resilience, as well as the centrality of relationships for people.
	2. Evaluate and select relevant knowledge from social work practice, research, social policy, social sciences, law, other professional and relevant fields and from the experience of people who use services.
	3. Recognise and understand the responsibilities and accountabilities of professionalism, including the capacity to identify and behave as a professional social worker committed to professional development.
	4. Demonstrate capacity to work within legal and ethical frameworks, applying knowledge, skills and values to the appropriate use of professional authority, judgement and use of power.
	5. Critically evaluate and use social work ethics, social justice principles and values to guide professional practice, drawing on the professional Code of Ethics to promote people's human rights, views and wishes whilst balancing rights and risks.

Section 7 - Teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching and learning in the courses are closely informed by the active research of staff, particularly in the areas of applied research, including areas such as mental health, children and families, adoption, decision-making, dementia, homelessness and the role of emotions in professional practice. The course content and delivery is informed by a problem based teaching and learning approach which supports active learning, critical reflection and analysis and transfer of theory, knowledge and skills, drawing on the current knowledge, values and ethics base, evidence informed practice and research.

In general terms, the courses provide opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate knowledge of both core subject material and specialised research areas, and for students to develop and demonstrate the above learning outcomes. Teaching and learning is mostly by means of lectures, interactive seminars, workshops including critical reflection and child observation seminars. Specific modules include problem-based learning activities involving facilitated and self-directed group work, reflective and research activities. Students who opt to extend their studies to undertake the research methods and dissertation module will develop their research project by attending module lectures and undertaking research project supervised by an academic. Assessment of knowledge and understanding is typically by theoretical, applied and reflective essays or case studies, examination, practice learning placements, and a dissertation.

Teaching and learning take place in both academic and practice settings, informed by academic research, specialist practitioners (including social work service and training managers), service users and carers, practice educators, and practice tutors.

A range of teaching methods are employed, including lectures, seminars, workshops, group work, blended learning sessions, individual and group tutorials, guided independent research, guided independent study, observations, case discussions, practice presentations, supervised fieldwork and practice supervision. Details of the assessments for individual modules can be obtained from the Royal Holloway Curriculum Catalogue.

Assessment on placement is through direct observation of practice, feedback from other professionals and service users and carers, case summaries, reflective commentaries, critical incident analyses and practice placement portfolios. A student's ability to meet the requirements of the *Professional Capabilities Framework* (PCF), the Social Work England Education and Training Standards (2021) and Social Work England Professional Standards (2019) and the Key Knowledge and Skills for Social Work with children and their families and for adult social work (KSS) will be assessed throughout the practice placements. See the Department of Law and Criminology website for course details: - https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/studying-here/postgraduate/social-work/social-work/

The course provides 200 days of practice learning which will include:

- 30 days for development of practice skills in SW5019 and SW5024
- 70 days first placement – in the Module SW5020
- 100 days last placement - in the Module SW5024.

The 30 days for the development of practice skills are spread across different modules as follows: -

- Readiness for Practice and Knowledge and Skill for Practice 1 modules– approximately 25 days which include topics such as but not limited to: developing communication skills, interviewing skills, direct work with service users, exploring, working with resistance, working with substance use, working with child sexual

abuse, working with dementia, practising intervention approaches like motivational interviewing and cognitive behavioural therapy, direct work with children, working with fathers and developing writing skills such as recording, report writing and well-being. Skills days include topics delivered by service users and carers.

- Life course development and Observational Learning _ module - up to 4 days focusing on observational learning and presentation skills
- Knowledge and skills for Practice 2 module - 3 days which includes developing skills in systemic family work, court skills and skills for preparing for SWE registration, ASYE and CPD.
- Critical Social Work module: - 5 days of skills linked to critical reflection seminars

Section 8 – Additional costs
You will need to travel to and from placements and may wish to apply for an NHS bursary to help cover transport costs.
These estimated costs relate to studying this particular degree course at Royal Holloway. General costs such as accommodation, food, books and other learning materials and printing etc., have not been included, but further information is available on our website.

Section 9 – Indicators of quality and standards	
QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) Level	7

Your course is designed in accordance with the FHEQ to ensure your qualification is awarded on the basis of nationally established standards of achievement, for both outcomes and attainment. The qualification descriptors within the FHEQ set out the generic outcomes and attributes expected for the award of individual qualifications. The qualification descriptors contained in the FHEQ exemplify the outcomes and attributes expected of learning that results in the award of higher education qualifications. These outcomes represent the integration of various learning experiences resulting from designated and coherent courses of study.

The course is designed and delivered to high professional standards in social work knowledge, values and practice and in line with entry and qualifying levels of the Professional Capabilities
Framework.

The curriculum is designed to meet the requirements for social work training specified by Social Work England's education and training standards (2021), the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), as well as meeting the relevant descriptors of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and the QAA's Master's Degree Characteristics. The first year of the Masters offers a generic foundation. In the second year, students are provided the opportunity to consolidate learning from year 1, further develop critical reflection skills, develop research skills, and consider social work practice with different service user groups. The course is designed taking into account the QAA subject benchmark statement (2019) https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/subject-benchmark-statement-social-work.pdf?sfvrsn=5c35c881_8

QAA Characteristics Statement (Master's Degrees) – September 2020	https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/characteristics-statements
Subject benchmark statements provide a means for the academic community to describe the nature and characteristics of courses in a specific subject or subject area. They also represent general expectations about standards for the award of qualifications at a given level in terms of the attributes and capabilities that those possessing qualifications should have demonstrated.	

Section 10 – Further information
This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the course and the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve and demonstrate when taking full advantage of the learning opportunities that are available. More detailed information on modules, including teaching and learning methods, and methods of assessment, can be found via the online Royal Holloway Curriculum Catalogue. The accuracy of the information contained in this document is reviewed regularly by the university and may also be checked routinely by external agencies. Your course will be reviewed regularly, both by the university as part of its cyclical quality enhancement processes, and/or by your department or school, who may wish to make improvements to the curriculum, or in response to resource planning. As such, your course may be revised during the course of your study at Royal Holloway. However, your department or school will take reasonable steps to consult with students via appropriate channels when considering changes. All continuing students will be routinely informed of any significant changes.

Section 11 – Intermediate exit awards (where available)

You may be eligible for an intermediate exit award if you complete part of the course as detailed in this document. Any additional criteria (e.g. mandatory modules, credit requirements) for intermediate awards is outlined in the sections below.

Award	Criteria	Awarding body
PG Diploma in Social Work	Passes in at least 120 credits. This includes both placement components of the programme.	Royal Holloway and Bedford New College
PG Certificate in Social Studies (non-qualifying award)	Passes in at least 60 credits with no condonable fails	Royal Holloway and Bedford New College

Section 12 -Associated Awards with Banner codes

MSc Social Work (1395)

PG Diploma Social Work (1736) – qualifying exit award, subject to meeting the requirements outlined in sections 4 and 11.

PG Certificate Social Studies (2684) – non-qualifying exit award. See section 4 for further information about non qualifying exit awards.