Royal Holloway, University of London
Course specification for a postgraduate award
Step Up to Social Work Post Graduate Diploma 2682

Section 1 – Introduction to your course

This course specification is a formal document, which provides a summary of the main features of your course and the learning outcomes that you might reasonably be expected to achieve and demonstrate if you take full advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. Further information is contained in the University prospectus, and in various handbooks, all of which you will be able to access online. Alternatively, further information on the University's academic regulations and policies can be found here. Further information on the University's Admissions Policy can be found here.

The Step Up to Social Work Postgraduate Diploma (Step Up PGDip) is a full-time course delivered over a 14 month period. Teaching takes place during the day over 4 terms January to April. It is a fast-track condensed qualifying social work course supported and funded by the DfE and run in partnership with the commissioning Step Up Partnership Group ie the group of commissioning local authorities. The current partnership is the South East London Step Up partnership consisting of the London Boroughs of Greenwich, Southwark and Lewisham. . The course was originally approved by the College of Social Work and then the HCPC, before regulatory responsibilities transferred to Social Work England (SWE), who approve annual monitoring of the course.

The overall aim of the Step Up PGDip course is to produce social work practitioners who are able to demonstrate an ability to be critically reflective practitioners who can analyse and analytically integrate the specific subject knowledge, values and skills 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 (BASW, 2019) and Social Work England's Education and Training Standards and Professional Standards. On successful completion of all required elements of the course students are eligible to apply to Social Work England for professional registration. The social work team in the Royal Holloway Law School, works closely with the Step Up Partnership Group. The Steering Board consists of employer representatives from the commissioning Local Authority partner agencies, Department representatives and staff from the Department of Education on an occasional basis.

Your degree courses at Royal Holloway, University of London, will be delivered over 14 months, which normally involves modules to the value of 120 credits (which is equivalent to 60 ECTS credits[1]).

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 a brief description for some of the most important terminology for understanding the content of this document:

Degree course – Also referred to as 'programme', 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.

[1] The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer. ECTS credits reflect the total workload required to achieve defined learning outcomes and their associated workload, including teaching hours and guided independent study. 15 UK credits is equivalent to 7.5 ECTS. 30 UK credits is equivalent to 15 ECTS. Further details on ECTS can be found within the ECTS User Guide 2015.

Section 2 – Course details			
Date of specification update	November 2026	**Location of study**	Central London campus
Course award and title	Step up to Social Work Postgraduate Diploma	**Level of study**	Postgraduate
Course code	2682	**Year of entry**	2027/28
Language(s) of Tuition	English		
Awarding body	Royal Holloway, University of London		
Department	Royal Holloway Law School	**Other departments involved in teaching the course**	External involvement of Partnership Group of agencies is a required element.
Mode(s) of attendance	Full-time, in person	**Duration of the course**	14 months (60 weeks) full-time
Accrediting Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body requirement(s)	Social Work England		
Link to Coursefinder for further information:	https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/studying-here/	**For queries on admissions:**	https://royalholloway.ac.uk/applicationquery Admissions to the Step Up PGDip course is via a DfE application process, administered by the lead agency for the Step up Partnership Group. Admissions for future cohorts is subject to DfE tendering by the partnership . https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/studying-here/postgraduate/social-work/social-work-step-up-to-social-work/ Information about the DfE admission requirements for previous cohorts is available here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-step-up-to-social-work

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 (Mandatory Condonable MC or Mandatory Non-Condonable MNC
Stage 1				
SW5019B	Readiness for Direct Practice	0	7	MNC
SW5020B	Knowledge and Skills for Practice 1	30	7	MNC
SW5021B	Life Course Development	15	7	MNC
SW5022B	Law and Policy for Social Work	30	7	MNC
Stage 2				
SW5023B	Critical Social Work	15	7	MNC
SW5024B	Knowledge and Skills for Practice 2	30	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 each year. 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 Step Up PGDip are condonable. All modules and placements 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 before you can proceed to the next year of your course, or to successfully graduate with a particular degree/ diploma title. 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. 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

In addition to mandatory modules, there may be a number of optional modules available during the course of your degree. Although Royal Holloway will keep changes to a minimum, new options may be offered, or existing ones may be withdrawn. For example, where reasonable and necessary due to unexpected events, where requirements of relevant Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) 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. There may be additional requirements around option selection; please contact the Department for further information.

On successful completion of the Step-Up PGDip students can opt to extend their studies to complete the 60 credit Social Work Research and Dissertation module SW5025. Successful completion of this module leads to an MSc qualification. Any continuation of studies at RHUL may require consultation with the candidate's employer re: funding and time away from employment to complete academic work.

SW5025 Social Work Research and Dissertation (60 credits)
SW5025 is available only to students who choose to top up their PG Dip award to the MSc Social Work qualification.

Section 4 - Progressing through each year of your degree course

For further information on the progression and award requirements for your postgraduate diploma, 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 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.

All postgraduate taught students are required to take and pass the non-credit bearing Moodle-based Academic Integrity module SS1001 in order 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.

You must pass SW5019B Readiness for Direct Practice before you are permitted to start a placement.

Postgraduate taught students on the Step-Up PGDip course must pass their first placement (Knowledge and Skills for Practice 1) to progress to their second placement (Knowledge and Skills for Practice 2). To successfully complete the Postgraduate Diploma award students must pass all modules (this also means passing the individual assessment components within each module).

Students must pass with a mark of at least 50% for all taught components and achieve a Pass level in their first and second placement. To pass the course a student must achieve an overall weighted average of at least 50.00%. (120 credits in total). Progression throughout the year/s is monitored through performance in summative or formative coursework assignments.

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 by Royal Holloway are eligible to apply for registration with Social Work England.

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 (2021) and the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF, BASW, 2019);
- Provide a teaching and learning environment which enables 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 Step Up to Social Work Postgraduate Diploma aims to enable students 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.

1. 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).

Meeting the above requirements includes the following overarching learning outcomes. Students are expected to:

2. Demonstrate critical understanding of the centrality of relationships for people and the key concepts of attachment, separation, loss, change, strengths and resilience.

3. Demonstrate capacity to critically apply theories of human growth, behaviour and development throughout the lifespan.

4. Evaluate and critically apply relevant knowledge from social work practice, research, social sciences, law, other professional and relevant fields and from the experience of people who use services.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. Critically evaluate and apply 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.

8. Demonstrate a critical understanding of diversity, equality and power to apply anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive principles in direct practice, in interprofessional and organisational systems.

9. Demonstrate capacity to understand and evaluate the intersections of individual and structural factors which impact on people's lives, including personal and organisational discrimination and oppression.

10. Demonstrate a range of social work skills to promote independence, quality of life and well-being, and to prevent disadvantage, harm, neglect or abuse.

11. Demonstrate the capacity to work autonomously and effectively in social care agencies, including capacity to work in partnership with people with lived experience, other professionals and agencies.

12. Apply critical reflection and analysis to different aspects of practice including self-awareness, experiential learning, values, direct practice and supervision.

13. Demonstrate a holistic approach to identification of needs, strengths, rights and risks and use judgement, knowledge and authority to intervene and support people and communities to promote independence, prevent harm and enable progress.

14. Develop and use skills in communication, information technology, advocacy and critical use of literature and research evidence to complete accurate and accessible assessments and documentation.

15. Demonstrate capacity to practice safely in complex situations, taking responsibility for personal professional development and the promotion of ethical and professional social work practice.

Section 7 - Teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching and learning in the social work qualifying courses are closely informed by the active research of staff, particularly in the areas of applied social work practice, including areas such as children and families policy and practice, children in care and adoption, poverty-aware practice, risk and decision-making, mental health, dementia, homelessness and the role of emotions in professional practice. 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 delivered mostly by means of lectures, workshops, interactive seminars, including critical reflection 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 Social Work Research and Dissertation module will develop their research project by attending module workshops and undertaking a research project supervised by an academic member of staff. Assessment of knowledge and understanding is typically by theoretical, applied and reflective essays or case studies, an examination, practice learning placements, and a dissertation for those opting to take the additional research module. 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 and study, observations, case discussions, practice presentations, supervised fieldwork and practice supervision. 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.

- Assessment of knowledge, understanding and skills is by formal examinations, coursework exercises, reports, essays, case studies and oral presentations. 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) are assessed throughout the placements. See Royal Holloway Law School 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 includes:
  - 30 days for development of practice skills and 70 days first placement – SW5019B and SW5020B
  - 100 days final placement - SW5024B
  - The 30 days for the development of practice skills are spread across different modules as follows: -
  - Readiness for Direct Practice module - Approximately 10 days, this module prepares and assesses students' readiness for their first practice placement. Topics will include initial understanding of the social work role, professional standards, communication, values and input will in cooperate perspectives from people with lived experience and practitioners.

- Knowledge and Skills for Practice 1 module – approximately 15 days which include topics such as but not limited to: developing communication skills, interviewing skills, direct work with people who use services, working with conflict, working with substance use, working with child sexual abuse and exploitation, social work

with people who are LGBTQ+, social work and race, working with dementia, practising intervention approaches like motivational interviewing and cognitive behavioural therapy, direct work with children, working with fathers, well-being and developing writing skills such as recording and report writing. Skills days include topics delivered by service users and carers and their content is subject to change.

- Lifecourse 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 e.g. 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

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.

Section 8 – Additional costs

There are no single associated costs greater than £50 per item on this degree course.

Students obtaining a place on the Step-Up PGDip receive a DfE bursary which contributes towards costs, including travel to/from placements. DBS costs at the beginning of the course are covered by the Step-Up partnership, subject to any possible review/changes in DfE funding.

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.	
QAA Subject benchmark statement(s)	http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/subject-benchmark-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. The qualifying social work courses at Royal Holloway are designed to take account of the QAA subject benchmark statements for social work (QAA, 2019). https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/subject-benchmark-statement-social-work.pdf?%20sfvrsn=5c35c881_6	

Section 10– 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 Certificate in Social Studies (non-qualifying)	Passes in at least 60 credits with no condonable fails	Royal Holloway and Bedford New College