Codes of Professional Conduct and Fitness to Practise

All social work students are now expected to adhere to the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC) Guidance on conduct and ethics for students (GCES). Students entering the social work programmes at the University of Birmingham will be required to sign the University Professional Conduct and Fitness to Practise document which incorporates the HCPC’s GCES.

The GCES is based on the standards of conduct, performance and ethics, as these standards apply to both social work students and those applying to be registered with the HCPC. The HCPC guidance on the following page is intended to make you more familiar with the standards expected of you on this programme and once you qualify.

The headings used on the following page of this document are taken from the standards of conduct, performance and ethics. Under each heading the HCPC has provided bullet points which give guidance on how the standards relate to you. The guidance does not provide answers to every situation you may face. However, the HCPC hopes that these will help you and encourage you to ask for extra information from your education provider (if appropriate).

The University of Birmingham and practice placement settings also have their own policies and procedures which you are expected to follow.

Conduct outside the programme

On this programme you have the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge you need to become a professional in an environment which protects the public. You also have the opportunity to learn about the behaviour that the public expects from a HCPC registered social worker.

As a student studying to become a professional in a regulated profession, you have certain responsibilities. On this programme you will be expected to meet high standards of conduct and ethics. You should be aware that in very serious circumstances, your conduct may affect your ability to complete this programme, gain the final qualification or register with the HCPC.

The HCPC requires our programme to have processes in place to deal with concerns about student behaviour. This means that misconduct may affect your ability to complete the degree and or register as a social worker.

When you apply to join the HCPC register, they ask for information as part of a declaration that you have a ‘good character’. This includes whether you have any convictions or cautions, been disciplined by a professional organisation, regulator or employer; or had any civil proceedings made against you.

The professions regulated by the HCPC are not covered by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. This means that you must tell them about all of your convictions and cautions, including those that are considered ‘spent’. A spent conviction is one which, under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, can be ignored after a certain amount of time. Usually the convictions or cautions that might affect your registration are those for more serious offences. It is important that you give the HCPC any information about your character that falls within the declaration. The HCPC look at any information you give them to see if it may affect whether you can go onto the Register. In most cases, information you give about your character will not affect whether or not you can go on The Register.
HCPC Guidance on conduct and ethics for students

1. You should always act in the best interests of your service users.
   - You should respect a person’s right to have their interventions carried out by a professional and not a student.
   - You should not exploit or abuse your relationships with service users.
   - You should treat everyone equally.
   - You should not do anything that you think will put someone in danger.
   - If you are worried about a situation which might put someone at risk, you should speak to a member of the placement team or your education provider.

2. You should respect the confidentiality of your service users.
   - You should keep information about service users confidential, and only use it for the purpose for which it was given, unless the information raises concerns about a situation where someone may be at risk.
   - You should not knowingly give any personal or confidential information to anyone who is not entitled to access it.
   - You should remove anything that could be used to identify a service user from confidential information which you use in your assessment.
   - You should follow local policies or guidelines if you want to use information that may identify someone in your assessments.
   - You should follow local policies or guidelines on confidentiality produced by your education provider or placement provider.

3. You should keep high standards of personal conduct.
   - You should be aware that conduct outside of your programme may affect whether or not you are allowed to complete your programme or register with us.
   - You should be polite with service users, your colleagues and the programme team.
   - You should make sure that your personal appearance is appropriate for your placement environment.
   - You should follow your education provider’s or placement provider’s policy on attendance.

4. You should provide any important information about your conduct, competence or health to your education provider.
   - You should tell your education provider and placement provider about any existing health conditions or changes to your health which may put your service users or yourself at risk.
   - You should tell your education provider if you are convicted of, or cautioned for, any offence.

5. You should limit your study or stop studying if your performance or judgement is affected by your health.
   - You should get help from a doctor or an occupational health professional if you are worried about your health.
   - You should be aware that you may put your service users or yourself at risk if your performance or judgement is affected by your health.

6. You should keep your professional knowledge and skills up to date.
   - You are responsible for your own learning.
   - You should think about and respond positively to feedback you are given.

7. You should act within the limits of your knowledge and skills.
   - You should only carry out an unsupervised task if you feel that you have the appropriate knowledge and skills.
   - You should make sure that you are appropriately supervised for any task that you are asked to carry out.
   - You should ask for help when you need it.
   - You should make sure that you do not claim that you have knowledge and skills which you do not.

8. You should communicate effectively with service users and your education provider and placement providers.
   - You should take all reasonable steps to make sure that you can communicate appropriately and effectively with service users.
   - You should communicate effectively and cooperate with colleagues to benefit service users.
   - You should communicate effectively and cooperate with the programme team and placement team.
   - Where appropriate, you should share your knowledge with colleagues.

9. You should get informed consent to provide care or services (so far as possible).
   Informed consent is when someone has all the information they need, in a format they can understand, to make a decision about receiving care or services.
   You should do the following (so far as possible).
   - You should make sure that before you carry out any intervention, the service user is aware that you are a student.
   - You should make sure that the service user has given their permission for the intervention to be carried out by a student.
   - You should explain the intervention you are planning to carry out.
   - Before you carry out any intervention, you should explain any risks associated with it.
   - You should follow your education provider’s or placement provider’s policy on consent.

10. You should keep accurate records on service users.
    - You should make sure that any information you put in someone’s record is accurate and clear.
    - You should protect information in records from being lost, damaged, accessed by someone without permission or tampered with.

11. You should deal fairly and safely with the risks of infection.
    - You should make sure that you take all appropriate steps to deal with the risks of infection.
    - You should follow your education provider’s or placement provider’s policy on managing the risks of infection.

12. You should behave honestly.
    - You should not pass off other people’s work as your own.
    - You should make sure that you reference other people’s work appropriately.
    - You should make sure that you truthfully and accurately fill in any documents.
    - You should not let any improper financial reward influence the advice and services you provide, or the products you recommend.
    - You should follow your education provider’s policies on ethics when carrying out research.

13. You should make sure that your behaviour does not damage public confidence in your profession.
    - You should be aware that your behaviour may affect the trust that the public has in your profession.
    - You should not do anything which might affect the trust that the public has in your profession.
I understand that successful completion of the academic qualification I am seeking leads to admission to a professional body and that I am required, during my studies, to adhere to the requirements of that professional body and any related statutory body.

I recognise that this Code of Professional Conduct and Fitness to Practise identifies the behaviour required of me, and that it is supplemented by the above HCPC Code. I understand that breaches of this Code may lead to disciplinary action including my exclusion from the University or the inability of the University to provide me with a supportive professional reference. In the event of any breach of this Code, I understand that I may be treated differently to other students of the University of Birmingham who are not subject to this Code.

2. Personal Behaviour

2.1 I will at all times behave in a manner appropriate to my position as a student of the University studying for a qualification, the successful completion of which leads to entry to a professional body and/or statutory registration.

2.2 I understand that behaviour including, for example, dishonesty, indecency, harassment, bullying, violence, abuse of drugs or alcohol to the extent that it impairs or prohibits my learning and ability to meet expected levels of competence in any part of the programme, will lead to disciplinary action under this Code and may result in the inability of the School to supply a positive character reference on completion of the qualification. It may also lead to my exclusion from the programme of study. I recognise that such disciplinary action will include consideration of any criminal convictions, including those for offences that are not directly connected with my studies and for offences committed prior to my registration as a student of the University. I understand that, where relevant, consideration will also be given to any disciplinary action by a current or previous employer.

2.3 I undertake to notify the appropriate person in the School should I be subject to a criminal conviction, caution and/or Community Resolution Order subsequent to my application to the University. I understand that a criminal conviction or caution may lead to my suspension from certain aspects of my study until the relevant provider’s duty of care can be assured. I understand that this may lead to the need for me to extend my studies where it has not been possible to arrange replacement activities. I understand that the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (1975) may not apply to the professional body to which I am seeking membership and that, should I be subject to a criminal conviction or caution, this may never be considered “spent”.

2.4 I consent to the College sharing with relevant partnership placement agencies:

2.4.1 information contained in the CRB disclosure made against me, when it is requested by the placement provider, where it is intended I undertake the placement, as a precondition of that placement, and

2.4.2 information in connection with or arising from fitness for practice proceedings taken by the College against me.

3. Behaviour Towards Others

3.1 I will at all times treat my service users, colleagues, staff and other members of the University or partner institutions with due respect and conduct myself in a professional, honest, decent and courteous manner. During the course of my studies, I will use language appropriate to the situation and people involved.

3.2 I will acquire an understanding of working with diversity, including gender, race and culture, in order to work with my service users appropriately.

4. Appearance

4.1 I will follow the School’s guidelines on standard of dress with regard to risk, namely not to dress in a way which endangers health and / safety of self and / or others, and will ensure that I maintain a standard of appearance that will be perceived as professional (that is dress which does not disadvantage the interests / welfare of service users and / or carers) by such persons as I may encounter in the pursuit of my studies and practice.

5. Learning

5.1 The content of my programme of study is designed to meet the requirements of the HCPC to enable me to register as a Social Worker. I will pursue my studies with due diligence (in accordance with University Regulation Section 5). See www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP_Student_Attendance_Reasonable_Diligence.pdf I will ensure I avail myself of the educational opportunities made available and I will seek to acquire the range of skills and knowledge identified in the Professional Capabilities Framework and HCPC Code of Practice.

5.2 I understand that I must take responsibility for my own learning through regular attendance at lectures, tutorials, seminars and practice learning opportunities and through being suitably prepared for them. I will notify the appropriate person or department, in accordance with University and School guidelines, if I am to be absent from any part of the course, due to sickness or other reasons, and I will make up the lost learning opportunity, making appropriate use of School support structures. I understand that if I persistently fail to follow my programme of study with due diligence that I will be subject to disciplinary action under this Code.

5.3 I will not disrupt the delivery of teaching or the learning experience of fellow students, and will not jeopardise the health and safety of those involved, during attendance at lectures, tutorials, seminars and practice learning situations.

5.4 I understand that if I behave dishonestly during the application and / or assessment process (including plagiarism or other forms of cheating) I will be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with University Regulation 8 - Student Conduct and may be excluded from my programme of study.
5.5 I understand that if I behave dishonestly in relation to my attendance or the attendance of others by falsifying signatures or other means I will be subject to disciplinary action under this Code.

6. Barriers to Learning or Professional Practice

6.1 I have read the HCPC specific inclusion to this Code which outlines the conditions which may affect my ability to follow my programme of study or take up the profession to which the qualification I am seeking leads and which should be reported.

6.2 I have reported to the appropriate authority within the School any specific requirements I may have to enable me to follow my programme of study (including any physical, health or learning requirements) and I undertake to work with the School or support services provided to address these requirements.

6.3 I undertake to report to the appropriate authority within the School any pre-existing information or new condition, which may affect my ability or suitability to follow my programme of study or take up the profession to which the qualification I am seeking leads, as soon as I become aware of it. In the event of any pre-existing or new condition arising I undertake to work with the School or support services provided.

6.4 I understand that failure to report any condition, which may affect my ability to follow my programme of study or take up the profession to which the qualification I am seeking leads, may lead to my exclusion or transfer from my programme of study.

7. Duty of Care

7.1 I will at all times act in the best interests of my service users and conduct myself in a professional manner in all aspects related to service user care.

7.2 I will undertake to familiarise myself with all School and partner institution guidelines, including health and safety guidelines, codes of conduct and, where relevant, employment contracts, in advance of and during service user contact, and will apply these guidelines in all dealings with them. I understand that breaching these guidelines and codes of practice, will lead to disciplinary action under this Code, and may include exclusion from my programme of study.

7.3 I understand that dishonesty, including the falsification of service user and / or other records, in any previous practice situation or in the current programme may lead to exclusion from my programme of study.

7.4 I recognise that in the course of my studies I may be placed in a position of trust and that as such I am subject to the requirements of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2003. I understand that failure to comply with the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2003 will lead to disciplinary action under this Code and may result in my exclusion from the programme of study.

8. Duty to Report

8.1 I undertake to report to the appropriate authority and to the School any action by others, which may put service users at risk. I understand that failure to do so may lead to disciplinary action being taken against me.

9. Confidentiality

9.1 I understand that I may have access to confidential personal information and that I am required to comply with the Data Protection Act. I understand that I may not disclose this information to any third party, other than in accordance with the relevant professional code or in accordance with the law. I understand that failure to comply with this requirement will lead to disciplinary action under this Code.
I understand that the contents of this document do not absolve me from complying with other University regulations currently in force. The requirements of the professional body or University Regulations may be revised from time to time and I will comply with any revision.

(Full Name)

I have read, understood and agree to abide by the above code of professional conduct and fitness to practice. I permit my School or the University to make my personal data available, on a confidential basis, to members of a fitness to practise Committee convened to consider my fitness to practise.

Signature: ..................................................................................................................

Date:  .........................................................................................................................