

Careers in social work



Social Work. It's all about people.
It's that simple and that complicated.

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It's all about people. Possibly more than any other career, social work is committed to enabling people to cope with the challenges they face, and bringing some security and re-assurance into their lives. Good intentions are the starting point. But as a social worker you back this up with professional expertise and knowledge acquired through intensive education and training, and practical experience.

Your focus is on improving people's well-being. They may be parents and children who are struggling in the face of deprivation, disability or abusive behaviour. Young adults who find it hard to handle the pressures of living independently. Clients of mental health services or people coping with disabilities. Those with drugs or alcohol problems, or managing with HIV/AIDS. Older people whose independence is waning, or refugees and homeless people. Your job will be, as far as possible, to support your clients in taking control of their lives. Success isn't guaranteed but when it happens the job satisfaction is considerable.

There are many other plus points. You'll have a professional qualification in a sector that's continuing to grow, offering the chance to work in a range of different settings. There will be scope to manage your own time and make your own decisions, whilst receiving professional support and training to develop your skills. Your career prospects will depend on what you want to achieve, as well as your dedication and capabilities. Good pension and other benefits are attached to most positions.

But it always comes back to people. If you're interested in people this is a career that you will always find stimulating.

4 What do **social workers** do?

You form partnerships with people, helping them to assess and interpret the problems they face and support them in finding solutions.

Sometimes you provide the service yourself – as advocate, guide, hand-holder, or critical friend. In other cases you will co-ordinate carefully planned 'packages of care' that involve doctors, nurses, lawyers, police, court officials and probation workers among others. Whatever the situation, you need to know how the law works, what services are available and how to use them to best advantage on behalf of your client.

You will also have certain legal powers and duties to protect people who cannot protect themselves, for example clients of mental health services who may be a danger to themselves or to others, or a child who is at risk of abuse.

This is a job carrying real responsibility. It requires initiative and commitment, as well as professional knowledge. You have to be quick-thinking, thorough, persuasive, non-discriminatory, non-judgemental - above all, committed to seeing things through. You will also need to develop skills to manage resources and budgets.

It sounds demanding and it can be, but you do not work in isolation. Mostly, you work in a team and have close support.

During your career you are likely to work with two broad client groups:

- Children, families and young people
- Adults

Working with **children,** **families** and **young people**

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About half of social workers are involved in some way with supporting children, families and young people. Working in the community you may make regular visits to families, or run support groups for parents. Or you might be working in children's homes, or managing the processes of foster care or adoption.

You may be involved with a slightly older age group: with young people who need support as they leave care, or are at risk or in trouble with the law. You could be associated with education and health, looking after the interests of children who have problems at school, or who face difficulties brought on by illness in the family.

It will come as no surprise that acting on behalf of children and young people requires high levels of skill and judgement. You will also need detailed knowledge of the statutory duties of child protection and child care law. The foundations of this knowledge and skill are learnt during your initial degree studies, and you will continue to develop these as your career progresses. But you can never be complacent about your ability to judge a situation; sometimes it's important to take advice as well as to give it.

Who employs you? Most social workers in this field are employed by a local council Children's Services department. But you could also work for an NHS trust, or with a private or voluntary sector organisation such as the NSPCC or Barnardo's. As your career develops the possibilities multiply. You might work for the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) or be seconded by your local council to work in a specialist team, for example in child and adolescent mental health. In the team, you would work alongside specialist health professionals including child psychiatrists and psychologists, occupational and family therapists, and community psychiatric nurses. You would need special training for such a role.

6 Working with adults

As with children and young people, working with adults could take you into a wide variety of situations. You may be supporting someone through a period of temporary difficulty, or care may be needed over a much longer term.

Many cases will throw up complex problems requiring close co-ordination with other services. This is known as care management and would involve a formal assessment and written care plan agreed by everyone involved. In other cases, you may be the direct provider of support – in effect you are the service. Some cases involve both approaches.

There are many specialist areas. For example, residential care work enables clients of mental health services or people with a learning disability to live more independent lives in homes or hostels within the community. You help residents with their personal and social skills, and provide practical guidance on budgeting and benefits. You might also be looking at service provision, ensuring that what is offered to people from different ethnic backgrounds reflects their cultural or religious needs.

Enabling people to live more independent lives

Another field is work with offenders, supervising them in the community, helping them to find jobs, and addressing problems to prevent re-offending. You manage a caseload on an individual basis: making assessments, devising care plans, reviewing progress in partnership with each individual.

You could work with older people living at home, enabling them to make key decisions for themselves. Here you become involved with their families and others who provide care. The care management part of this role might include tackling social isolation, or helping older people to sort out problems with their housing or benefits.

With specialised training, you might work with clients of mental health services. You may be a key member of a multi-disciplinary healthcare team, working alongside nurses and doctors in hospitals or in the community. You could also be part of a community team working with adults with disabilities, co-ordinating with their families and other carers to help individuals live as independently as possible.

Who employs you? Most social workers in this field are employed by a local council Adult Services department. But you could also work for an NHS trust, or with a private or voluntary sector organisation. Some social workers are self-employed and work independently through agencies.

"I assess patients in hospital who require a service to support them at home or in the community, like residential care or nursing care placements. I see patients on the ward, assess them and see how much they've been able to do for themselves. I also take into consideration risks for their return home, and look at arranging services appropriate to meeting their needs, so that their independence is promoted.

You've got to be a good listener and you've got to be analytic with your thinking. The decision-making aspect, as it relates to any one individual, is really very important because you've got to be specific with the particular individual you're dealing with. No two individuals are the same and no two people have the same needs, so that's where the challenges are.

What I enjoy most about this job is coming in to work in the morning and seeing that I am going to be able to achieve a lot in the day, and the fulfillment of meeting somebody's needs for when they leave hospital."

Maureen is amazed at how much she has learnt as a social worker – including negotiation and communication skills, decision-making and problem solving. She says "you're not restricted to what you're practising. You can move away from there and you can transfer the skills as well."

Maureen started off as a volunteer worker before obtaining a degree in Social Work. She now works a hospital discharge unit, ensuring that adults in vulnerable situations are safe to go home. Maureen provides assessments and care packages for patients, and works with community teams to prepare them for their return home.



10 Eleanor Johnston Senior Care Manager

"I've had the kind of career I couldn't have guessed at when I started out. My first job was as a nursery nurse. Then I became a residential support worker in a children's home and I was promoted to deputy manager there while still very young.

"After we moved to London, I took a non-residential care job in a children's home, working flexible hours that suited me while I was bringing up my own children. As they grew up I decided to study for the social work qualification. To help make ends meet, I carried on working part-time at evenings and weekends. It was demanding, but worth it.

"Placements on the course interested me in older people's and mental health services and that's the area where I now work. I'm a senior member of a team developing better co-ordinated community mental health services in our area. I take the lead role in deciding how individual service users can best be supported and cared for.

"Usually we get involved when an older person who has been trying to cope on their own reaches some sort of crisis. We make assessments in discussion with users, their families and carers, and service providers. The aim is to put together a package of home care and respite care which will allow the person to continue living at home, or arrange residential care if that's the best option."

Eleanor has acquired professional qualifications as her career has developed, combining work and study with family commitments. Experience in social care with children enabled her to enter the course for social work qualification to which she has added an Open University degree in Mental Health Care. As part of a multi-disciplinary team she manages her cases in collaboration with psychiatrists and community psychiatric nurses.



12 Career prospects

This booklet offers only a brief introduction to the careers that are available in social work. The career path you take will be largely up to you. This is a large and growing sector, with many possible routes toward team leadership and management. To assist you, professional development training is increasingly emphasised. This will ensure that your skills are up to date and that you can cope with the demands of the positions you take up as a senior practitioner or manager.

Most social workers are employed by councils who offer good pension schemes, paid holidays, flexible hours, child care facilities and possibly subsidised housing. As a social worker living in London, the South East or Eastern England, you may be entitled to key worker housing assistance. For more information on the Key Worker Living Programme go to: www.direct.gov.uk and type 'key worker living' in the search box.

A varied, fascinating career awaits you

Registration

All social workers have to be registered with the General Social Care Council (GSCC). This ensures that everyone who is called a social worker is appropriately trained and assessed as fit to be in the workforce, and they follow a code of practice. For details of this code visit www.gsc.org.uk Registration also means that your qualification is easily transferable if you move areas or employers.

Returners

If you have been a social worker before and are planning to return, you will need to have a current registration with the GSCC. Re registration may involve some further training. If you aren't currently registered, or are unsure about your registration status, contact GSCC Registration on 0845 070 0630 or email registration@gsc.org.uk

Social workers who qualified outside the UK

Social workers who have qualified outside the UK will need GSCC registration before they can work in England. This involves assessment to check that your qualifications are equivalent to the social work degree. For further information on the status of overseas social work qualifications, contact the GSCC International Recognition Team: tel: 0845 0700 630 or +44 (0) 1788532402 if calling from outside the UK email: international@gsc.org.uk

14 Routes into social work

The Social Work Qualification

The professional qualification to practise as a social worker is currently an honours or postgraduate degree in social work that involves course work and a minimum of 200 days spent in practice settings. For a full list of universities and colleges who offer undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, visit our website www.socialworkcareers.co.uk or speak to one of our advisers on 0300 123 1100. Or visit the GSCC website at www.gsc.org.uk where you can find a list of approved courses.

A high proportion of social work students come to the course as a second or third career, bringing previous qualifications and a range of work and life experience. This experience will be valued and may be considered in place of formal academic qualifications when considering your eligibility. Depending on your educational achievements and work experience, these are your options:

Access Courses: If you do not have the entry qualifications and it is a while since you studied, many local colleges provide Access courses which will help prepare you for study at degree level. Most colleges have links with universities and can help you move on to a social work degree programme. Contact your local colleges for more information or search for local courses on www.accesstohe.ac.uk

Standard Entry: Undergraduate entry via UCAS*. Most universities ask for 2 A levels or equivalent qualifications, and experience of working with people as a volunteer or employee in social care. Personal or family experience of using social care services may also be taken into account. A full-time course will usually take 3 years; some universities offer part-time courses.

*See 'Useful addresses and contacts' on page 21

Postgraduates: Many universities offer shorter social work training programmes leading to a masters degree for people who already have a degree, although this may depend on the subject and class. Contact the universities for more information.

Employment Based Routes (EBR): Some employers offer an employment based route for their own employees working in social care roles. Students on EBR programmes are sponsored by their employer and study part time. Ask your employer for details. If you aren't already working within social care, you could consider working for a period with an employer who may be willing to sponsor your social work training in the future.

Distance Learning: The Open University runs a distance learning qualifying programme for employees already working in social care. You will need your employer's support with your training. Website: www.open.ac.uk

Trainee Schemes: Trainee schemes are run by some local council departments, and independent or voluntary organisations. Your employer may pay a reduced salary during training, provide work experience and cover your tuition fees, in return for a commitment to stay with the organisation for a period after you have qualified. These trainee schemes are usually advertised in the local press, on individual employers' websites, Community Care magazine and the Wednesday edition of the Guardian.

Notes

All students must have at least the equivalent of Key Skills Level 2 in English and maths, and be able to communicate clearly in spoken and written English. If you don't have any formal qualifications in maths, talk to the university about other ways to demonstrate that you meet the required standard.

Working as a volunteer within your local community or further afield can be rewarding and show you whether you'd like to make a career in this area. For entry to degree courses, some evidence of volunteering or social care work is often looked for along with your academic qualifications. You will find contact details for voluntary organisations listed at the end of this booklet, in telephone directories and Yellow Pages, in libraries, and through your local council and Citizens Advice Bureau.

Before starting your course, you must register with the General Social Care Council (GSCC). As part of the registration process you have to show that you are physically and mentally fit to be a social worker. Your university will guide you through this procedure. You will also have a criminal records check. (Having a criminal record does not automatically exclude you from social work registration. Your university or GSCC will be able to advise.)

Once qualified, registered social workers are required to keep their training and learning up-to-date in order to maintain their professional registration with the GSCC. This can include many different sorts of learning, such as reading, attending conferences and training courses or gaining a post-qualifying award.

Financial support during training

Students accepted on to a social work degree course who meet the residency criteria may receive a non means tested bursary. Students will also receive help towards the cost of travel to practice placements.

The amount of the non means tested bursary is subject to change. To confirm the current arrangements contact the NHS Business Services Authority who is responsible for the bursary scheme.

NHS Business Services Authority
Social Work Bursary, Sandyford House
Archbold Terrace, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE2 1DB
tel: 0845 610 1122 fax: 0191 203 5507 email: swb@ppa.nhs.uk
www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/students.aspx

Students on postgraduate courses may be eligible for further means tested funding. Contact details as above.

Students on their first degree course may also be eligible for student loans and grants from the government and bursaries from their university or college. If you have dependants or have a disability you may be entitled to further grants. For information about higher education student support, grants and allowances see the education and learning section at www.direct.gov.uk or telephone Student Finance England on 0845 300 50 90.

You may also be entitled to Working Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit. Ask your local Inland Revenue office for advice. Information is also available on the website:

www.taxcredits.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/HomeNew.aspx

"I'd been a full-time mum from the age of 18, fitting part-time jobs around family responsibilities. Then I had a back injury that stopped me working altogether for a while. On my way back from that, I did some volunteering with local groups helping children who had special needs and learning disabilities. That sparked my interest in taking up social work as a career.

"The Access course at the local college was brilliant preparation for doing the research and writing work here. After leaving school years ago with very few qualifications, I'd have really struggled. I'm amazed to think I've come so far. I'm in my first extended placement just now, in the area of mental health services for children and adolescents. It's going really well, and we still have two days a week at university for lectures and workshops linking the theory to the practice.

"Obviously I'm looking forward to completing the course and starting my new career. I'll feel a real sense of achievement. The course stresses the importance of social workers having a good knowledge base. I think my life experience gives me a very wide appreciation of the problems people face."

Mary came relatively late into social work studies, although 50 per cent of her fellow students are over 30. A two year part-time Access course gave her the academic preparation she needed join the social work degree course. Hers is a three year full-time course and she is using her bursary and student loans to help finance her studies.



20 The next step

If you don't already have some experience in social care or as a volunteer, this is where to start.

- Look for part-time and full-time care jobs advertised in local newspapers and elsewhere by local council Children's Services or Adult Services departments, residential homes and other employers.
- Contact local voluntary organisations who will have details of opportunities for volunteers (see below).
- Our website www.socialworkcareers.co.uk has links to local councils and voluntary organisations.
- Contact your local JobcentrePlus office for details of vacancies registered with them. Website: www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk
- If you're still at school talk to your careers teacher or Connexions advisor.

This booklet gives you general information only. Call our information service on 0300 123 1100 or visit our website on www.socialworkcareers.co.uk for:

- details of universities offering the degree
- more information on the qualification criteria required for social work training
- further advice on the career opportunities available.

As social work is all about working with people in local communities, contact your local council Children's and Adult Services Departments or voluntary organisations in telephone directories, libraries, and the Citizens Advice Bureau. They should be able to advise you about opportunities for volunteering locally and ways of gaining work experience. Contacts for other organisations are listed below.

Useful **addresses** and **contacts** 21

Social Work and Social Care Careers

PO Box 2313, BS2 2ZR

Tel: 0300 123 1100

www.socialworkcareers.co.uk

email: swcc@postroom.com

General Social Care Council (GSCC)

Tel: (Switchboard) 020 7397 5100

email: info@gsc.org.uk

British Association of Social Workers (BASW)

Tel: 0121 622 3911

email: info@basw.co.uk

www.basw.co.uk

Skills for Care

www.skillsforcare.org.uk

Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC)

www.cwdcouncil.org.uk

University courses

Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS)

Application Enquiries

Customer Service Unit on 0871 468 0 468

email: enquiries@ucas.ac.uk for an automated response with general information and guidance on the UCAS procedures.

www.ucas.com

Open University

www.open.ac.uk

Funding

General information on funding for higher education students can be found in the education and learning section at www.direct.gov.uk

For information on the social work bursary, contact

Social Work Bursary

NHS Business Services Authority

Sandyford House

Archbold Terrace

Newcastle Upon Tyne NE2 1DB

www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/students.aspx

email: swb@ppa.nhs.uk

Tel 0845 610 1122

Volunteering

Community Service Volunteers (CSV)

www.csv.org.uk

V inspired (for 16-24 year olds)

www.vinspired.com

Volunteering England

www.volunteering.org.uk

Do it org

www.do-it.org.uk



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For information or copies of this booklet, contact:
Social Work and Social Care Careers, PO Box 2313, BS2 2ZR
www.socialworkcareers.co.uk email: swcc@postroom.com
tel: 0300 123 1100 minicom: 0300 123 3090
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