

Getting into Social Work

This leaflet offers an overview of social work settings and information on qualifications and training to become a social worker.

Social Work: an Overview

Social workers work with people and families to support them and ensure that vulnerable people are safeguarded from harm. They work in a variety of settings but tend to specialise in supporting either children and families or vulnerable adults. It can be a challenging role, and Social Workers often need to use their judgement to make decisions that are not always well received.

Many social workers are employed by local authorities who have a statutory responsibility for keeping vulnerable adults and children safe. In non-statutory roles, you might still work with a similar client group but are not specifically responsible for enforcing the law.

You could be employed in the charity sector or in specialist roles, such as providing support for drug and alcohol users, homeless people and people with mental health issues. You may also work in early intervention roles, aiming to prevent the escalation of problems in society to where statutory services are required.

Examples of people you could be working with

Elderly people, children with disabilities, young offenders, children, young people or adults with mental health problems, people with alcohol, drug or other substance misuse problems, refugees and asylum seekers, people who are socially excluded, carers, foster carers and adopters, people including children who are being abused, have been abused or at risk of being abused and neglected.

Skills and attributes required for the job

- Resilience with ability to stay calm in a crisis
- Ability to observe, analyse and reflect
- Rapport building and listening skills
- Negotiation, mediation, interpretation and advocacy on behalf of service users
- Reading and absorbing large amounts of legal and procedural information
- Working to policies and procedures

For more information see <https://basw.co.uk/careers>

Routes into Social Work

There are several routes to Social Work after your undergraduate degree. Your degree does not always have to be in a relevant subject but you will need to demonstrate an interest in and commitment to social work. Universities and employers will want to see evidence of relevant work experience in a social care or social work setting and your reflection on this, either paid work in community settings or relevant voluntary work. Check whether you need a minimum number of hours spent on gaining experience before applying.

You will also need a DBS background check, and English and Maths at grade C or equivalent.

Other entry requirements are indicated below.

1. MA or Post Graduate Diploma in Social Work

The most common route into social work for graduates. The course should be approved by the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC).

- Approved Masters courses are 2 years full time with over 200 days of supervised work placements with some part time courses.
 - Minimum 2:2 honours degree required (minimum 2:1 at some universities)
 - Find courses at www.ucas.com and www.socialworkengland.org.uk/ For Wales, NI and Scotland please see www.prospects.ac.uk Social Work job profile.
 - Local providers include University of Worcester, University of Birmingham, University of Gloucestershire, and University of Wolverhampton.
 - Course fees are payable. Check rates with the universities.
 - Bursaries might be available, check with your course provider. They could include a contribution towards course fees and a small maintenance award
- See www.gov.uk/social-work-bursaries/overview

2. Step up to Social Work Programme

An employer-based fast-track 14-month programme for graduates and career changers aiming to qualify as a social worker in a short period of time. The programme accepts applications every 2 years and applications are made a year in advance.

- The minimum entry requirement is a 2:2 plus 6 months' experience working with vulnerable people.
- Trainees complete a post-graduate diploma (and social work qualification)
- Candidates receive a tax-free bursary (around £21,995) to support with training.

www.gov.uk/guidance/step-up-to-social-work-information-for-applicants

3. Approach Social Work Programme (previously Frontline)

Aimed at high flyers, a two-year graduate programme offering a fast-track route into a career in children's social work with a focus on leadership

- Minimum entry requirement is a 2:1 degree, or a 2:2 and a level 7 qualification (e.g. Master's). Prior qualifications must not be in social work.
- In the first year trainees complete a five week intensive summer institute, followed by a year-long placement in a local authority alongside academic sessions.
- At the end of the first year trainees register with Social Work England and become a qualified social worker.
- In the second year Frontline trainees work as a qualified social worker in children's services and continue studying towards a master's degree as well as completing a leadership development programme.
- In the first year trainees receive a tax-exempt bursary of around £18,000.
- In the second year paid a salary by their 'host' council' (typically £25,000 to £35,000).

<https://thefrontline.org.uk/become-a-social-worker/approach-social-work/>

Gaining relevant work experience

Relevant work experience is a condition of entry onto most postgraduate social work courses, with many asking for a minimum of four to six months recent relevant practice experience.

Prior work experience will:

- give an insight into whether you are really suited to social work
- help you to develop relevant skills
- broaden your understanding
- help you to make practical sense of the taught content of the course.

Experience can be paid or unpaid and could include schools, summer camps, youth clubs and local sports teams if you wish to work with children. Volunteering with victim support organisations, homeless shelters and mental health charities such as Mind provides valuable experience for those hoping to work with vulnerable groups.

Match the work experience to the area of social work that interests you and which might relate to the practice of social work. For example, teaching in a special needs environment might be directly relevant, even if teaching in itself is not. If you're unsure whether a particular voluntary or paid position would make you a stronger candidate, you could contact the admissions tutors for the course you are interested in before taking it on.

Examples of organisations looking for volunteers can be seen in the Careers leaflets below:

- Working with Children and Young People
- Working in Criminal Justice
- Building work experience for Careers in Psychology

Search for voluntary experience on the following sites:

- www.worcsu.com/volunteer/
- www.doit.life/
- <https://volunteermatters.org.uk/>

Making the most of your social work experience

Once you've found a paid or voluntary position, it's important to make the most of the opportunity, both to help you decide whether social work is a career you definitely want to pursue, and to support your application. You could keep a reflective diary: this is often recommended for students on practice placements, and could stand you in good stead when preparing your applications.

If you would like to book a careers appointment
please visit: <https://worcester.targetconnect.net>

myCareer