

CARING FOR PEOPLE

Social worker



Social work is all about helping people who are finding life tough. If you choose this career, you might be helping to protect children from abuse or to keep young offenders out of prison. Your clients might be the elderly, people with mental health problems or disabilities, drug users, alcoholics or truants. All sorts of people need the understanding ear and practical help of a social worker at some stage of their lives. A social worker can act as an advocate or friend, guiding clients through the law or benefits system, dealing with other professionals, keeping accurate records and sometimes giving evidence in court.

Degree needed

Social workers qualify by taking either an undergraduate social work degree or a shorter postgraduate course, and they must register with the General Social Care Council. There are bursaries for full and part-time students.

From September 2007, newly qualified social workers will have to complete their post-qualification award in social work within two years of qualifying. There are also numerous on-the-job training courses for those wanting to specialise in particular areas of social work, such as mental health.

Good courses

- BSc social work (University of the West of England)
- BA and MA Social Work (Goldsmiths College, University of London)
- BA Social Work (Manchester Metropolitan University)
- BA Social Work (University of Birmingham)



Simon Bream at work
Social worker, Lambeth Youth Offending Team



ask:
what if?

Your career - our future

Facts and Figures

Starting salary

Between £21,000 and £25,000.

Working hours

Typically 37.

Days' holiday per year

26 - 36.

Skills and experience

Empathy, the ability to communicate with a wide range of people and understand their needs and wishes are essential qualities.

Would suit

Those who are good with people and have a strong desire to help others to improve their lives are likely to enjoy social work.

Likely employer types

- Local authorities
- Charities
- Privately run care homes
- Prisons and hospitals
- Recruitment agencies

How many jobs available?

Demand varies. Child protection teams and local authorities in London have historically had staff shortages, but the problem is less acute in other areas, according to the British Association of Social Workers (BASW).

A 2005 survey for the Improvement and Development Agency, which works with local authorities, found 88.8 per cent of councils struggled to recruit children's social workers and 72.5 per cent had trouble finding social workers for adults.



Meet the expert
Simon Bream,
Lambeth Youth
Offending Team

Visit AskWhatIf.co.uk to watch video diaries and get opinions from other real people doing real jobs.



Did you know?

Social work officially came into existence in local authorities in the 1970s, but it originated in the 19th century as philanthropists worked alongside courts, hospitals and workhouses to tackle the problems of the poor.

Number of people employed in this field

The General Social Care Council has registered more than 90,000 social workers and student social workers.

More information

- The Department of Health's social work recruitment website has information about careers in social work www.socialworkandcare.co.uk
- The General Social Care Council oversees professional standards for social workers www.gsc.org.uk
- The British Association of Social Workers represents many social workers www.basw.org.uk

"Social work is tough but it's worthwhile. You have to be determined, well organised, thoughtful, caring and motivated by making things better for other people rather than by getting rich yourself."