



Social Work
Postgraduate

Why study at postgraduate level?



On the MSc in Social Work, our aim is to equip graduates with the necessary skills to fulfill the role expected of newly qualified social workers. This includes meeting the professional requirements that have been set out by the social work regulator, adhering to the standards of proficiency and demonstrating the appropriate level of capability. With this qualification, award-holders can register as social workers in England.

As a postgraduate programme, we also strive to produce social workers with excellent analytic and research skills in order to contribute to the development of the profession's knowledge base.

On completion of the programme, graduates will be able to:

- Communicate effectively with a range of people (including children and adult service users, colleagues, other professionals and people in authority) and in a range of settings;
- Establish effective working relationships with a range of people who use social work services, providing support and exercising authority when required;

- Demonstrate a holistic approach to the identification of needs and of effective responses to these;
- Promote the welfare of children and adults using social work services;
- Play a role in the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults;
- Understand the professional role and demonstrate professional capability as defined by the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF);
- Work within a professional ethical framework, understanding and applying professional values and principles and work in accordance with the social work regulator's Professional Standards (see www.socialworkengland.co.uk);
- Contribute to the effectiveness of organisations providing social work services.

Why choose Bristol?

The MSc Social Work programme provides students with a qualification which is approved by Social Work England. It is a joint professional practice and academic award. On successful completion of the programme, graduates will be eligible to apply for professional registration.

Aims, values and principles

The University is committed to ensuring that future users of the personal social services have effective and competent workers who uphold the dignity of individuals and, where possible, establish a shared approach to problem-solving.

Qualifying students will understand the structural and personal factors that lead to oppression and discrimination and be able to work within an anti-oppressive framework. They will develop skills as reflective practitioners, be able to appraise critically a range of relevant evidence (including research) to evaluate their own work and that of others, and to contribute to the development of policy and practice as social scientists.

Research live, practice near

Our Social Work programme is unique in that it is situated within the School for Policy Studies. The academic staff who lecture students are all actively involved in their own research around a broad range of social work subjects including, for example, gerontology, mental health, child protection and learning disabilities.

The University of Bristol also has longstanding partnership arrangements with a consortium of social work agencies in the region, including statutory, voluntary and independent agencies providing a range of social work services. Staff from these agencies have worked with us to develop the programme and continue to share current best practice with our students.

Collaboration with stakeholders

The programme is informed by the perspectives of people who have or have had social workers in their lives, and who are collectively involved in our Service User and Carer Forum. Representatives from the Forum play an important part in the life of the programme and are highly valued by staff and students alike, contributing to all stages of the programme from interviewing candidates, delivering teaching, advising on assessment panels and contributing to discussions about the strategic direction of the programme.

What will I study?

The MSc Social Work programme is designed to comply with University requirements, QAA guidelines at Masters Level and with the requirements of the the social work profession regulator, the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care. In addition, all students are required to meet professional requirements in accordance with the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF).

Year One

Introduces students to the general principles of social work, developing an understanding of oppression and considering the importance of social work values and ethics. Students will develop insights into the social context of social work considering contemporary social work questions within the fields of social work with children and families, adult social care, homelessness, domestic violence, substance misuse and mental health. A critical appreciation of social work methods and skills will also be established and students will develop a critical understanding of applied social science including developmental psychology, social policy and the law. In addition, students will consider the role of interagency and professional practice and the importance of the role of community and community networks in social work practice. Students will also undertake a number of research methods workshops.

Students will undertake 70 days of assessed practice placement in a social work setting.

Year Two

This year provides opportunities for students to further develop and demonstrate the importance of evidence based practice in social work with children and families, and in social work with adults. Students will undertake further study in child and adolescent mental health and/or

adult mental health, as well as in social work community practice.

Students will be required to complete a 15,000 word dissertation. Students also undertake 100 days of assessed practice placement in a social work setting.

Assessment

Student learning is assessed through a variety of assignments including practice analyses, reflective writing tasks, a policy briefing, a research proposal, a community work proposal, group presentations and two open-book exams. Practice placements are assessed jointly by a skilled and experienced practice educator and a member of University staff. Students will be required to compile a portfolio of work based on a holistic model of assessment informed by the nine domains of the Professional Capabilities Framework (BASW) and the standards of proficiency as identified by the social work regulator. This will include practice with service users and carers, critical reflections and structured observations. The programme concludes with a research-based dissertation project.

“The programme was brilliant. Everything you need to prepare you for practice. I felt really well supported and the placements were appropriately selected to allow me to build my knowledge base in children and families, but also to explore a new interest in adult mental health.”

Nick Aslett, Social Work graduate

Practice placements

Students will spend 50% of the course on practice placements developing their practice skills and knowledge.

The aim of placements is to allow students to develop skills, knowledge and a value-base for their work. The regulator's standards of proficiency for social work are based on the principle that a social worker trains and qualifies with a broad experience and understanding of the profession and therefore we seek to ensure that all students experience some breadth and variety in their placements.

The regulator recommends that students should have different learning experiences in their first and last placement and this will mean different placement settings and different service user groups. Your last placement requires you to have access to statutory tasks. Prior to commencing your placement you will be required to complete an enhanced DBS disclosure.

The first placement commences in the second term for a period of 70 days. Students will be on placement four days a week. The second placement starts in the first term of the second year and runs for a period of 100 days.

Practice placements will vary:

Agency

These may include placements in the following areas: statutory children and families teams, statutory social services and health adult care teams, voluntary and independent sector and community organisations.

Setting

Direct practice with a range of service user groups.

Collaboration with people who have had social workers

Students could be working with: older people, offenders, children, young people, families, people experiencing mental distress, people with learning disabilities, homeless people, asylum seekers.

Location

These might be urban (inner city, outer suburb), small town and rural areas. Students may be required to travel within a 50 mile radius of the University for your placement. All eligible postgraduate students may be entitled to a placement travel allowance. Please see www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/social-work-students

Social Work Methods

These may include, group work, family work, community work, individual counselling, task-centred work, cognitive behavioural approaches, empowerment approaches.

“The placement in the Referral and Assessment Team gave me more opportunity to put the methods and theories learnt in university into practice. The biggest aspect of learning, therefore, was gaining knowledge and experience of the variety of issues that children and families face and how best to support or intervene in these circumstances. The second placement allowed me to develop my identity as a social worker and I began to feel more of a sense of professional integrity.”

Social Work graduate

Research and practice interests of academic staff

The results of the 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF) confirms the excellence of research in Social Policy and Social Work in the School for Policy Studies. 98% of our Social Work and Social Policy research was rated overall as either world-leading (4*) or internationally excellent (3*).

The academic team behind the social work programme at Bristol pride themselves on bringing the latest research and practice messages to lectures and seminars.

Dr Agnes Bezzina

Adult social work – mental health, disability and older persons; service user and carer involvement; mutuality and reciprocity in professional-client relationships; the use of power in social work.

Mim Cartwright

Practice background in statutory children and family services; wellbeing of children in care; education of children in care and in need; the social work role with children, parents and professionals.

Professor Geraldine Macdonald

Executive member of Cochrane Collaborations; looked after children; sexual health and young people in care; mental health and young people; participation; disabled children and families; fathers; social interventions and children's wellbeing.

Dr Lucy Series

Adult social care, disability human rights and mental capacity law and policy.

Dr Victoria Sharley

Interprofessional and multiagency working, child protection and safeguarding, child neglect, social work in schools, international practice, coproduced research with communities in low income countries.

Dr Jon Symonds

Fathers, parenting and separation, parents with learning disabilities, children in care, family support, social work engagement skills, service user involvement.

Harriet Tamlyn

Practice background in both statutory and voluntary sector adult services; practice education; developing placement opportunities, co-ordinating and working with external agencies, training and supporting placement supervisors and Practice Educators; assessment processes for students during work based placements.

Jo Toye

Practice background in statutory children and family services; practice education; developing placement opportunities, co-ordinating and working with external agencies, training and supporting placement supervisors and Practice Educators; assessment processes for students during work based placements.

**Dr William Turner**

Practice and outcome evaluation in social policy; psychotherapeutic approaches in working with young people; gender identity and development in children and young people; research synthesis and systematic reviews in child mental health and child welfare programmes.

**Dr Paul Willis**

Older men's experiences of loneliness and social isolation; social care and sexuality; ageing, gender identity and sexuality; equality issues for carers; workplace participation and equality; rights and interests of sexually diverse youth; web-based qualitative research.



How will I be supported?



Pastoral

The school has a well-developed system for pastoral care. Students have a personal tutor throughout their Masters programme who can help signpost to the most appropriate university services.

There is a wide range of specialist help offered by the University.

Support for your health and wellbeing

Bristol is one of the few universities in the UK to run a full NHS GP practice. It provides all the usual GP services and is run by a team of doctors, nurses and administrative staff who have a wealth of experience in working with students and their dependants.

Wellbeing Access

This service launched in the academic year 19/20 to provide an easily accessible contact point to help students navigate the most appropriate support for their situation quickly and easily. Trained advisers are available to help triage student enquiries relating to any requests about wellbeing and mental health support.

This might include minor and / or major life events, through to concerns about managing existing mental illness. Wellbeing Access can also facilitate access to other support services within the university, including:

- **Wellbeing Service and ResiLife**

University wellbeing advisers work with academic staff to offer professional help and guidance if a student is experiencing challenges or wants some extra support to address any personal and emotional difficulties and make the most of academic study.

In our residences, there is a range of pastoral support to promote wellbeing and foster a sense of community.

- **Specialised emotional support**

The Student Counselling Service offers ways for students to maintain positive mental health, through self-help materials, workshops, and group and individual counselling. The Counselling Service also has an agreement for support provision through a local BAME charity which provides culturally appropriate counselling services.

- **Disability support**

The Disability Services team can provide confidential advice and information about options for disability-related study support for students with a wide range of disabilities, including learning difficulties, health and mental health conditions, autism spectrum conditions, sensory impairments and mobility difficulties.

- **International student support**

Our International Team will support you from the moment you accept an offer, right through to graduation, including welcome events and practical support on visas and immigration through to travel and living advice as you settle into life in Bristol.

How to apply

To be eligible to apply for the MSc Social Work programme applicants will normally hold a minimum of an upper second class honours degree (or equivalent qualification) in any discipline, and evidence of experience in any area of work which is relevant to social work. This may be either paid or voluntary experience.

We also welcome applications from those with non-standard qualifications who can demonstrate knowledge, experience and skills developed in the workplace, or elsewhere, relevant to the programme of study. Please use your personal statement to provide further details.

Bursaries

We currently receive social work bursaries from the Department of Health and Social Care to allocate to new students commencing the course who meet the eligibility criteria. The University of Bristol will be allocated a set number of bursaries for each academic year.

For further information regarding social work bursaries, please visit www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/Students/2741.aspx

Selection procedure

Shortlisting

The following criteria are used when considering applications:

- academic preparedness and good written English;
- relevant learning from work and life experience;
- experience and understanding of social work and social care and appropriate personal and intellectual qualities;
- understanding of, and commitment to, the values and ethics of social work.

Interview*

Shortlisted applicants will be required to undertake an online written exercise. If successful, they will be invited to interview. Interviews will be held regularly from the end of January. Candidates will usually be interviewed by one member of University staff, a social work practitioner, and a representative of the Service User and Carer Forum.

The interview day will include:

- an information session; and
- a personal interview.

* subject to change

Relevant experience

Understandably, we are often asked by applicants what we consider to be 'relevant' experience. The following guidance is not intended to be prescriptive or comprehensive, since social work is a dynamic field of work where new needs, responses and organisations are regularly developing.

The examples given below of work which is directly or partly relevant to social work are mainly illustrative of work in the UK, but we also welcome applicants with international experience (paid or voluntary work), either because that is your home, or because you have undertaken paid or voluntary work abroad. The range of experience which students bring to the course is an important element in the learning and teaching available for all students.

The key elements we are looking for in any experience involve demonstrable interest and commitment combined with practical experience. Whatever form this experience takes, it should include the following elements:

- Face-to-face work or telephone work with people
- Problem-solving and/or counselling skills
- Responsibility and decision-making
- Some knowledge of the social work task, law and procedures
- Care and support work for individuals with support needs.

Together these elements should provide the opportunity to gain a foundational understanding of the knowledge, skills and values of social work.

Types of work which are relevant to social work

We require an understanding of the knowledge, skills and values of social work. Here, we list a range of types of work which are directly or partly relevant to social work, while keeping in mind that generalisations are difficult since each agency may work in a different way.

More directly relevant

Any direct role involving social work skills, including residential social work, day care, community work; counselling and advice work; foster care; youth work; personal support work for disabled or older people; mental health nursing, mental health recovery work or mental health care assistant work; work in residential schools for children with special needs where the role contains a high degree of pastoral care; support work in high support housing projects or hostels; mentoring of young people or others; working with self-help groups; supporting volunteers including organising training.

Partially relevant

Play group/nursery/creche work; playscheme work; nursing home experience; teaching experience in 'special needs' work; housing advice work; job coaching, assisting in schools; basic skills tutoring; general nursing/nursing assistant work including district nursing; general teaching.

If the experience mainly falls into the partially relevant category, it may be that specific tasks and projects undertaken in this work are more relevant to social work. For example, a teacher may have a major pastoral role or a nurse may have supported patients with social needs. It is important to explain and draw on this experience in the personal statement

Career prospects

Those students who successfully complete the MSc in Social Work and register as social workers will be able to work in statutory or voluntary and independent sector organisations.

There are a wide range of roles within the social work sector and successful graduates apply for work in various fields including children and families, learning disabilities, adult care or mental health, to mention but a few. The programme delivered and qualification gained is generic and so there is no limit in which of these sectors you will be able to apply for work. Our experience is 95% of our successful students find employment in the social work sector within 6 months of qualifying.

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The information contained in this leaflet is correct at the time of printing (Oct 2022).

For up to date information, prospective applicants should check the website:

bristol.ac.uk/sps/study/postgraduate/social-work/

bristol.ac.uk/sps

Contact information

If you have any queries about the programme please contact:

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