

Thinking About a Career in Social Work? Talk to the Open University about Our Unique Work-Based (Hons) Degree in Social Work

Frequently Asked Questions

Questions about Qualifications and Entrance Criteria

Q. What is the entrance criteria to study social work at the Open University?

A. There are several essential criteria that prospective students must meet to apply for the Social Work degree.

The process is slightly different (as we do not use the UCAS website), students enter the programme via an employer (Expression of Interest form), then the completion of a full Application Pack, and then an interview.

UCAS tariff threshold of 96 points or equivalent, OR, successful completion of OU module K101 An Introduction to Health and Social Care, along with the following:

- GCSE Grade C or above in English and Maths or equivalencies
- Successful performance in at interview
- Sponsorship by a social work/social care agency – usually your employer
- Access NI Enhanced Disclosure
- Medical fitness to practice
- Completion of Declaration of suitability

UCAS tariff points equivalencies may be checked at <https://www.ucas.com/ucas/tariff-calculator>

Q. I do not meet this criteria, what are my options?

A. You could study a Certificate in Higher Education in Social Care (T39) or K102 and K113 separately.

A lot of students pursue the Certificate route and it is a good opportunity for them to test their academic ability first. We find students have a lot of success beginning their studies with the first 2 modules K102 (previously K101) and K113 (120 credits). These modules comprise the qualification called the Certificate in Higher Education in Social Care. If you are successful in completing the Certificate and obtain sponsorship you can apply for direct entry into stage 2 of the BA (Hons) Social Work. This is also a great way to introduce yourself to the Open University and achieve a qualification that is a smaller time and financial commitment than the degree.

Having the Certificate does not guarantee direct entry onto the BA programme as all criteria for the BA programme needs to be met and you would also need to have a sponsor.

Q. What does sponsorship from an employer mean?

A. Practice learning is a really important part of the NI Social Work Degree. Social work students complete two placements as part of their degree and require additional support

from employers to do this. Initially, employers complete an Expression of Interest (EOI) and liaise directly with the OU Social Work Team.

The programme is currently available only to individuals who are working/or volunteering with social care agencies and are supported/sponsored by their employer. Sponsorship means that the agency/employer agrees to provide two practice learning placements for the candidate during the 2nd and 3rd year of the BA. The first placement is 85 consecutive days and the second is 100 consecutive days. When sponsoring a student, an agency/employer may agree to pay all or part of a student's fees. Alternatively, a student may self-fund. If an employer/agency is in agreement to sponsor a student, they should contact Ireland-Social-Work@open.ac.uk in the first instance to request an Expression of Interest form. Prior to sending out an Expression of Interest form, we would need to check whether your employer is a Designated Practice Learning Site or an Associate provider for placements. Your employer can check about becoming a Designated Practice Learning Site directly on the NISCC website or speak to NISCC who can advise.

If you are working in the third sector and only one placement can be provided the employer should talk to the NI Social Work Team.

Q. Do I need all of my GCSE/A Level certificates?

A. Yes, your original certificates will need to be produced at interview for GCSE English and Maths Grade C or equivalent to meet the entry requirements.

Students need to provide original certificates as proof of how they meet the 96 UCAS points – A Level certificates, vocational qualifications etc. as well as the GCSE equivalencies.

Q. Can I complete my GCSE English/Maths whilst undertaking the BA Programme?

A. No, you would need to have completed your qualifications at application stage. Certificates for all qualifications need to be produced at interview.

Q. I don't have all my certificates and my school is no longer there – what can I do?

A. Make contact with the examining board, who should hold a record ie: CCEA

Q. I have an NVQ/HNC/BTEC but it isn't in health and social care, does this meet the English language requirement?

A. Only, if it is stated on the certificate that the qualification included functional skills.

Q. I have completed other OU modules – do they count towards credit for the programme?

A. Credit Transfer for Social Work is extremely limited because it is a professional programme. Restrictions such as time limits and credit applicability apply.

K102 is the only module that you can transfer to the social work programme. There is a time line for applications for credit transfer. You need to inform yourself of the process on commencement of your studies with the OU.

If an applicant already holds a qualification at HE level in a similar subject, they may be exempt from K102. Credit transfer still needs to be applied for.

Only previous study which is five years or less will be considered.

There is a useful self-assessment tool on the Credit Transfer website to see if a Credit Transfer application would be appropriate: <http://www.open.ac.uk/study/credit-transfer/>

Q. Is there an age limit for applicants?

A. No. We encourage all ages to apply for the programme.

Q. Is there any study I can undertake before starting the Social Work Degree Programme?

A. You can undertake K102 and K113 independently. You can undertake the Certificate in Health and Social Care, as detailed above, or K102 and K113 as stand alone modules. This does not guarantee a place on the Social Work Degree programme, you have to meet entry requirements and have a sponsor.

Q. I have already completed K102 and K113. Will these allow me to transfer directly to the Social Work Degree Programme.

A. You cannot transfer from these modules to the Social Work Degree programme, you must be employed in social work or social care organisation and have sponsorship from an employer in the sector.

In order to apply for the BA programme, it is important in the first instance to check whether your employer is a Designated Practice Learning Site or an Associate provider for placements. Your employer can check about becoming a Designated Practice Learning Site directly on the NISCC website and speak to NISCC who can advise. Once this has been confirmed, your sponsor would then need to request an Expression of Interest form in the first instance form Ireland-Social-Work@open.ac.uk. The Social Work Team would then make contact with you sponsor to discuss the requirements of the programme. Once your sponsor and the OU are happy to proceed, an application pack would be sent to you to complete. A shortlisting and interview process would then follow.

Q. I don't work in Social Care, what can I do?

A. You can undertake K102 and K113 independently. You can undertake the Certificate in Health and Social Care, as detailed above, or K102 and K113 as stand alone modules. This does not guarantee a place on the Social Work Degree programme, you have to meet entry requirements and have a sponsor.

Questions about the (Hons) Degree in Social Work

Q. How long does it take to complete the Open University Social Work Degree Programme?

A. The Social Work Degree can be completed in 3 years (full-time equivalent study). Most students will complete the programme in 3 years. This may extend up to 7 years.

Q. What is expected of me on the programme?

A. You should expect to study for 16-18 hours per week per 60 credit module. Attend skills days and tutorials, communicate with your tutor and fellow students through on-line forums and access support as required. It is mandatory that you are available for practice placements and submit assignments when they are due.

All students undertaking social work training in Northern Ireland are required to register with NISCC before they commence their training. NISCC Standards of Conduct and

Practice describe the standards of professional conduct and practice required of social workers and social work students.

There is useful information about the standards on the NISCC website, see link below:

<https://niscc.info/app/uploads/2020/09/standards-of-conduct-and-practice-for-social-work-students-2019.pdf>

Q. How is the programme assessed?

A. The programme is academic and practice based. Students must pass both elements. Students on the NI Degree Programme are assessed against the Key Roles and National Occupational Standards, that specify the skills, knowledge and performance criteria, (learning outcomes), to be achieved throughout a social worker's career. Each module on the programme is assessed in a variety of ways and these include, assignments, observations of skills and practice by both Tutors and Practice Teachers.

Q. What will I study on the programme?

Stage 1: K101/2 An introduction to Health and Social Care
K113 Foundations for Social Work Practice

Stage 2: K271 Social Work Law
K216 Applied Social Work Practice

Stage 3: Optional module – K313 (Leadership and Management) , K314 (Approaches to Mental Health), K323 (Investigating Health & Social Care), KE322 (Young Lives, Parenting & Families)

K315 Critical Social Work Practice

Practice Learning

Throughout their time on the Degree in Social Work Programme, students will be required to undertake 10 work experience days at level 1; 85 days at level 2 and 100 days at level 3.

Q. Can I choose where I go on placement?

A. No, placements are allocated according to availability by the regional allocation system and with due regard to each student's learning needs. Placements are offered across all settings and programmes of care, including the five Health and Social Care Trusts, Voluntary Agencies, Department of Justice, (including Probation Board NI and Youth Justice) and the Education Authority.

Students are allocated to suitable PLOs throughout the course of the Degree in Social work and will be notified of these at the relevant time. They cover a wide geographical area and students will need to be prepared to travel to their PLO destination.

Q. How many places are available at the Open University each year?

A. This a new programme that has just commenced in October 2020, the OU are currently working with the Department of Health regarding funded places.

Q. What support will I receive while undertaking the programme?

A. Students are allocated specific Module Tutors for each module. Students also have a Programme Tutor when on placement in Year 2 (K216) and Yr 3 (K315), as well as a

Module Tutor. They will visit them on placement on at least three occasions to support and quality assure the learning experience.

They will also have access to the Student Support Team (SST), contactable by phone 6 days per week or web based contact.

NI has its own Student Support Team in Belfast office.

Ireland-Social-Work@open.ac.uk

OU Study is accessible to all, whether you have a disability, health condition, mental health difficulty, or a specific learning need

Questions about funding arrangements

Q. What funding options are available?

A. The main funding options are listed below:

- Student is fully funded by the employer/DOH
- Costs are shared between the employer and the student.
- Student is fully self-funding

Up to date information on fees for each module is available on our website or by contacting the social work team.

Q. Does sponsorship mean that an employer pays the fees?

A. The Social Work Degree programme is currently available only to individuals who are working/or volunteering with social care agencies and are supported/sponsored by their employer. Sponsorship does not refer to how a student is funded on the course, it means that the agency/employer agrees to provide two practice learning placements for the candidate during the 2nd and 3rd year of the BA

When sponsoring a student, an agency/employer may agree to pay all or part of a student's fees or alternatively one of the above funding options may be used.

Q. Are there grants to help towards the cost of tuition?

A. Yes, there are possibilities for students who are not in receipt of DOH funded places. Depending on individual circumstances, details of the main grants available are listed below:

- **Fee grant**

A means-tested grant of up to £1,230 to help towards the cost of module fees. The amount you get depends on how much you earn and how many credits you're studying. (Can access once per year of study)

- **Course grant**

A grant to help towards the cost of your studies, for example a laptop, internet access or travel to tutorials.

- **Students can apply for a Tuition Fee Loan**

The loan is: awarded by Student Finance Northern Ireland. Students must apply through them. It is available for undergraduate qualifications that are at a higher level than any qualifications students may have, not means tested, so students are eligible to apply regardless of your income.

Q. I am interested, but not definite that I want to pursue a career in social work, what should I do?

A. It can be challenging to make decisions about your future career and many people are not totally clear about what social workers do and what kind of work that they are involved in.

However, there are great options available for you to learn more about the profession.

The Open University offers a **FREE** Introductory course, that introduce you to the social work role and develop your understanding of some of the knowledge and theory associated with social work practice.

You can also learn more about a career in social work from the NI Social Care Council website.

**** The number of places available on the BA (Hons) Social Work programme each year are determined by the DoH.**

The Open University support students with disabilities and if you are successful at interview we will endeavour to provide the necessary reasonable adjustments you require.

For more information, contact our Social Work Team

Email: Ireland-Social-Work@open.ac.uk