

Pathways to social work qualifications with The Open University in Scotland



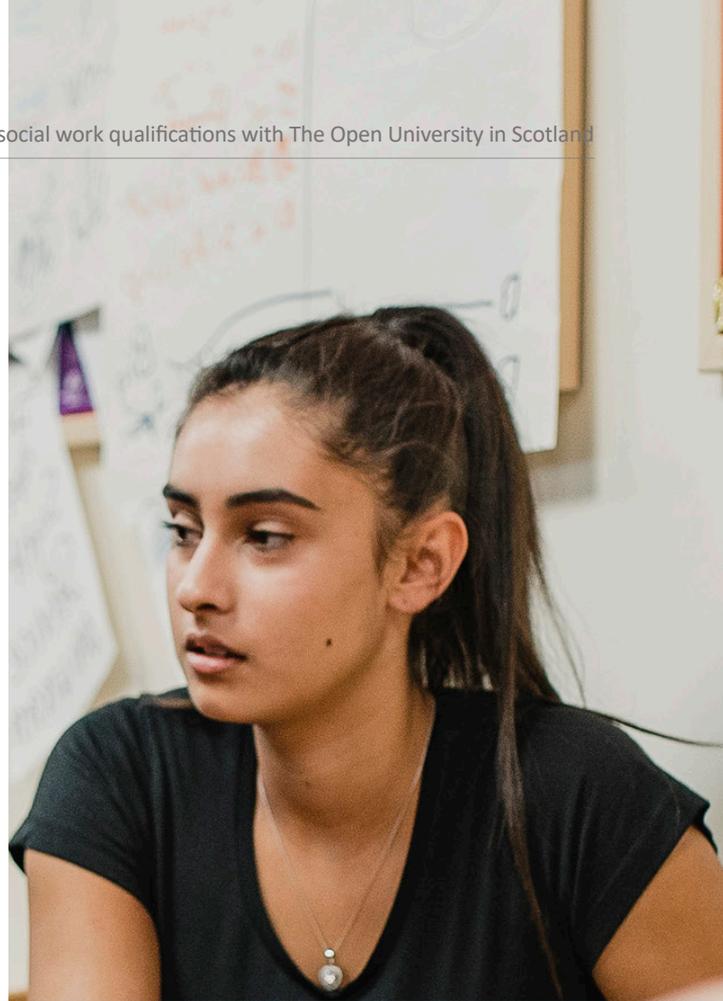
The Open University (OU) is one of the largest providers of social work training in the UK, with around 250 graduates every year. Our flexible study arrangements fit in with work and home life, so that students can continue to earn while they learn. The Open University in Scotland has been offering work-based social work education for over 20 years and is particularly relevant for employers who wish to provide their experienced social care and support staff with a pathway to a social work qualification.

Social work in Scotland

Employers across Scotland have faced considerable challenges in the past 10 years as austerity has reshaped services and staffing, and integration has demanded a revised understanding of the social work role. Many employers have struggled to maintain their commitment to learning and development with significantly less capacity to meet the needs of social work when staff are redeployed within larger integrated learning and development teams. As services adapt to the integrated world and the strictures of austerity, many authorities have had to use agency staff to manage the increasing number of social work vacancies with the consequent impact on budgets and service delivery. At the same time, demand for social work intervention is increasing, social workers are required to prioritise child and adult protection whilst experienced social care workers (e.g., community care assistants, family support workers, reviewing officers) undertake increasingly complex support of vulnerable people. Many authorities, in particularly those in rural areas, face increasing recruitment costs as retention of newly qualified social workers can be difficult along with their initial recruitment. Yet most social work employers have a pool of experienced, skilled, local and committed social care workers who have limited career progression options beyond achieving their HNC. Scottish Government have recognised the needs of this workforce in part two of the National health and social care workforce plan and highlights the importance of developing career pathways¹. In addition, The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) produced a report on the demand for social workers in 2019 and indicated that there was a deficit in social workers across Scotland, highlighting the need for further recruitment².

¹ Scottish Government (2017) National health and social care workforce plan: part two

² Scottish Social Services Council (2019) The Demand For Social Work report



Partnering with The Open University in Scotland

The Open University offers an opportunity to address many of these factors and provides a programme of work-based flexible study that utilises the skills and experience of the social care workforce and enables employers to have a ready-made, committed social work workforce that they have grown and supported.

- Develop a career pathway for existing staff
- Widen access and support a diverse and inclusive workforce
- Nurture your talent pool of skilled and experienced social care staff
- Reduce recruitment costs and those associated with hiring agency staff
- Foster workforce morale as pressure on services are reduced and staff increasingly feel valued
- Improve retention as staff loyalty is enhanced
- Promote a lifelong learning culture



"I have been supporting our Trainee Social Worker programme since it started in 2008 in partnership with The Open University, to grow and develop our own social workers. This has been a hugely successful workforce strategy enabling our experienced support workers/social care officers to remain in paid employment whilst studying for their social work degree and at a pace that suits both employer and staff.

We have had an excellent success rate over the last decade as all of our trainees have achieved their professional social work qualification – BA (Hons) Social Work (Scotland) from The Open University – and we were able to match the Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) into suitable vacancies across our organisation: in Children & Families, Justice Services, and Angus Health & Social Care Partnership without the time delay and cost of external recruitment processes. The other benefit is our retention rate for our 'grow our own' social workers – we have retained ALL of our trainees beyond the contract commitment of 3 years, which is incredible given the pace of change and transformation across Public Sector organisations.

Many of our former trainees are now in promoted posts across Angus Council as senior practitioners, practice educators, and mental health officers, and show a genuine commitment to lifelong learning – and supporting the learning of others.

I believe our traineeship career pathway has been a long-term investment that has paid dividends for individual staff whom we have sponsored by creating a new post as Trainee Social Worker. Staff have appreciated the opportunity to qualify as Social Workers and are loyal, remaining with us as their employer. Thus, the organisation benefits with higher than average retention rates and excellent practitioners starting their career as NQSWs with significant statutory experience, knowledge and skills."

Karen O'Donnell

Organisational Team - Assessment Centre, Angus Council



Pathways to qualification

The Open University offers two routes to a qualifying award to apply for entry to the SSSC register as a Social Worker;

- one at undergraduate level through BA (Honours) Social Work (Scotland)
- and a fast-track option at postgraduate level through Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work

BA (Honours) Social Work (Scotland)

The Open University's modular approach to a social work degree enables students to continue working whilst accumulating knowledge and credits towards their qualification. Many social care workers have existing relevant HNCs and SVQs which can be assessed and accredited towards the first stage of our four-stage degree through our credit transfer process, and thus accelerating qualification.

Credit Transfer

Individuals who have already gained a degree (or part of a degree) or other relevant qualifications elsewhere may be able to apply for credit transfer and therefore, may be eligible to enter at Stage 2 if successful at selection.

Further information regarding credit transfer can be found at open.ac.uk/study/credit-transfer

		Module	Accredited Learning/ Credit Transfer	Funding	Fees 2020/21
Stage 1	DD102	Introducing social science - open module	HNC Social Services SVQ3	PTFG*	£1,032
	K102	Introducing health and social care - open module			£1,032
Stage 2	K113	Foundations for social work practice - open module		PTFG plus top-up	£1,592
	KE206	Making a difference: working with children and young people - open module		PTFG	£1,032
Stage 3	K271	Social work law - open module		PTFG	£1,032
	K216	Applied social work practice (incl. 100-day placement) - closed module - selection required		PTFG plus top-up	£2,625
Stage 4	K323	Investigations into health and social care - open module		PTFG	£1,032
	K314	Approaches to mental health - open module			£1,032
	K315	Critical social work practice (incl. 100-day placement) - closed module - selection required		PTFG plus top-up	£2,625

*Part-time fee grant



Funding

Given the budgetary constraints facing many employers, it is increasingly important that these are supplemented through effective use of existing sources of funding. The Scottish Government generously supports part-time students via the Students Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS). All individuals who earn £25,000 per annum or less are eligible for a part-time fee grant that can cover up to 120 credits study each year. The salary of many social care workers is within this threshold therefore, employers are enabled to support their social care workforce to access this funding to undertake the 'open' modules that form the social work degree at The Open University. 'Open' modules allow students to register directly onto the module without prior selection therefore, students can study whilst they work and fund most modules using the part-time fee grant. Employers can then focus their budget on supporting students on the practice learning modules at Stages 3 and 4, after recruiting and selecting employees onto their own trainee scheme.

Note that the fees for the practice learning modules are higher than those for the 'open' modules and if the part-time fee grant is being accessed, there will be a top-up required to cover the full fee.

Further information regarding the SAAS part-time fee grant can be found at open.ac.uk/scotland/news/applying-your-part-time-fee-grant

Grow your own

There are currently a broad range of schemes across Scotland that encompass full financial support from Stage 1 to financial support for module fees only at Stages 3 and 4 in relation to undertaking our degree – BA (Honours) Social Work (Scotland). There are four key elements to sponsorship: payment of tuition fees, salary, backfill and responsibility for placements.

Option A	Select employees to trainee scheme from Stage 1 and fully fund employees' study including tuition fees and full salary whilst studying. Backfill agreed for all posts or rotation of trainees around range of posts decreases requirement for backfill. Arrange both practice learning placements.
Option B	Select employees at Stage 2 with expectation that employees receive credit transfer utilising existing HNC and SVQ for Stage 1 or come as a graduate entrant. Fully fund employees' study including tuition fees and full salary whilst studying. Backfill agreed for all posts or rotation of trainees around range of posts decreases requirement for backfill. Arrange both practice learning placements.
Option C	Select employees at Stage 3 with expectation that they receive credit transfer for Stage 1 or come as a graduate entrant and have undertaken independent study for Stage 2 utilising part time fee grant. Fully fund employees' study including tuition fees and full salary whilst studying. Backfill agreed for all posts or rotation of trainees around range of posts decreases requirement for backfill. Arrange both practice learning placements.
Option D	Select employees at Stage 3 with expectation that they receive credit transfer for Stage 1 or come as a graduate entrant and have undertaken independent study for Stage 2 utilising part time fee grant. Fund tuition fees for practice learning modules only (K216 and K315). Employees use part time fee grant to fund additional modules. Employees receive full salary whilst studying. Backfill agreed for all posts or rotation of trainees around range of posts decreases requirement for backfill. Arrange both practice learning placements.
Option E	Any combination of the above with selected employees on a reduced trainee salary whilst on scheme. Backfill agreed for all posts or rotation of trainees around range of posts decreases requirement for backfill. Arrange both practice learning placements.
Option F	Any combination of the above with selected employees required to salary sacrifice to fund part of their studies. Backfill agreed for all posts or rotation of trainees around range of posts decreases requirement for backfill. Arrange both practice learning placements.

All schemes will require fair and transparent recruitment and selection processes agreed with staff from The Open University in Scotland. Most employers require trainees to sign a contract of commitment to ensure that the employer continues to benefit from fully qualified trainees. Many schemes include a requirement that the employer deploys the fully qualified worker according to the needs of the agency. As employers have responsibility for all placements, partnership agreements need to be negotiated with neighbouring authorities to ensure contrast of learning for students in accordance with SSSC requirements.



David is a Team Leader in Social Work at a Scottish Local Authority. He completed The Open University's BA (Honours) Social Work (Scotland) (graduate entry) to prepare him for a challenging role and was sponsored to do his degree by his employer.

"The Open University degree in social work is a great way to progress your career as it opens lots of opportunities to go on to work in different fields, everything from adult social work to mental health, to community education and even strategy, where you're actually involved in developing the services.

The Open University degree really does open more doors to you, and because The Open University is designed for people with busy lives, and busy jobs, I found it worked really well, and it was great having the tutor support there when you needed it."

Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work

Employers told us that we could help deliver their workforce development objectives by introducing a postgraduate-level social work qualification, which will offer experienced candidates who already hold a first degree in a relevant discipline the opportunity to qualify more quickly. Through our SSSC-approved Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work, students will typically be able to qualify as a social worker in less than 18 months.

The qualification comprises 120 academic credits, including two practice learning placements:

	Module	Module start	Module end	Practice learning	Fees 2020/21
K832	Developing social work practice	January	September	80-day placement (normal attendance pattern 4 days per week for 20 weeks)	£3,780
K833	Advancing social work practice	October	June	90-day placement (normal attendance pattern 4 days per week for 23 weeks)	£3,780



For further information

For further information about how The Open University can support employers to develop their workforce and address the challenges facing social work, please contact:

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