

Corporate Parenting Panel

19 May 2023

Routes into Social Work



Report of Rachel Farnham, Head of Children's Social Care, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

None.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report aims to share information about routes into social work with members of the Corporate Parenting Panel for information.

Executive summary

- 2 Holding a degree in social work was made a requirement to work as a social worker by the Care Standards Act of 2000.
- 3 There are 3 categories of qualification which enable graduates to work as social workers on successful completion. These are:
 - (a) Traditional routes offered by universities. These are publicly available routes where applicants pay fees, and potentially receive a small bursary to contribute to costs. Employers provide work-based placements to students on the programmes.
 - (b) Fast track routes which are run in partnership between employers and providers. These are very intensive programmes aimed at recent graduates and graduates changing careers. Tuition is rapid and supported by significant time in practice. These programmes are free to participants, and normally attract a bursary for living costs.
 - (c) Social work apprenticeships which allow employers to fund the fees for the social work degree for their employees through the apprenticeship levy. Employees complete a 3-year social work degree while they work with approximately 1 day of their time protected for study. Employers provide work-based placements to the apprentices.
- 4 We support all three types of route with the aim of supporting as many child and family social workers as possible to join the workforce.

Recommendation

- 5 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to note the contents of this report.

Background

- 6 Holding a degree in social work was made a requirement to work as a social worker by the Care Standards Act of 2000. The same Act made 'social worker' a protected title, which means that it is illegal for a person to use the title in England unless they have completed the required training and are registered with the social work regulator (currently Social Work England).
- 7 Social work qualifications which were recognised before the change in legislation are still recognised, but no new social workers can qualify through those routes. Our most experienced social workers often hold qualifications like the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW), Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW) and Certificate in Social Service (CSS).
- 8 Social Work England also assess the qualifications of social workers who have qualified overseas to enable social workers from overseas to register and work in England.

Routes to social work qualification

- 9 There are 3 categories of qualification which enable graduates to register with Social Work England on successful completion. These are traditional routes, fast track routes and apprenticeships. We support all three types of route with the aim of supporting as many child and family social workers as possible to join the workforce.
- 10 All these programmes:
 - (a) Are approved by Social Work England.
 - (b) Require include significant experience of practice during the programme (a minimum of 170 days).

Traditional routes

- 11 Universities offer traditional routes to social work qualification. A list of programmes available in the North East is attached as **Appendix 2**.
- 12 These are normally publicly available routes. Anyone who is able to meet the entry requirements, demonstrating their fitness to undergo social work training, and pay the fees can attend. The Open University has 1 further requirement, that applicants have the support of an employer to provide the practice placements required.
- 13 Fees for these programmes range from £8,260 to £27,750.

- 14 A contribution to the cost of these programmes is often available through means tested social work bursaries administered by the NHS Business Services Authority. Undergraduate students in the North East are most likely to receive £4,862 for undergraduates plus a placement travel allowance in years 2 and 3 of the course. Post graduate students are likely to receive £3,362. Additional allowances can be available for students with adult dependents, childcare costs, and for students with disabilities.
- 15 We are active members of the North East teaching partnership (North East Social Work Alliance), a partnership which brings together all the local authorities in the North East and all of the Universities in the region which offer social work qualifying programmes. The partnership aims to ensure the quality of these programmes is high. A key piece of work for the partnership currently is to carry out an analysis of supply and demand for qualifying social workers in the region.
- 16 We normally offer over 50 practice placements of 70 and 100 days to students on these programmes each year.
- 17 We are currently working on adjusting our recruitment processes so that it is much easier for final year students on placement with us to take up social work roles in Durham on completion of their programmes.

Fast track routes

- 18 Fast track routes are very intensive programmes which lead to rapid social work qualification aimed at recent graduates and graduates changing careers. A list of programmes available in the North East is attached as **Appendix 3**. Step Up to Social Work and Frontline are programmes which aim to develop child and family social workers and Think Ahead is a similar programme which aims to develop adult mental health social workers.
- 19 These schemes are run in partnership between employers and providers, and high-quality teaching is paired with a significant amount of time in practice.
- 20 These programmes do not require participants to pay any university fees, and there is a small bursary for living expenses. However, participants in recent cohorts are finding it more challenging to manage on the bursary due to the rising cost of living.
- 21 These routes are currently experiencing a lower level of interest than in previous years, and all have recently lowered their entry requirements from a degree at 2.1 to a degree at 2.2.

- 23 We are currently part of a partnership between the North East local authorities and Manchester Metropolitan University to deliver the Step Up to Social Work programme. We guarantee the participants we support a social work post on successful completion, and of the 7 we supported in the last cohort who completed in March 2023 all have taken up posts in Durham. 6 are now working in social work teams in Children's Social Care and 1 is in working in the Navigation team in Adult and Health Services. We are aiming to support up to 10 participants on the next cohort of the programme commencing in January 2024 and ending in March 2025.
- 24 We have previously partnered with Frontline. However, we found that few participants continued to work as social workers in Durham on completion, and as a result our last partnership arrangement ended in 2018.
- 25 Our colleagues in Adult and Health Services have an active partnership with Think Ahead.

Social work apprenticeship

- 26 The social work apprenticeship standard was approved in 2018, and the first programmes commenced in 2019.
- 27 The standard allows employers to use the apprenticeship levy (0.5% of our annual pay bill which we can only use to support apprenticeship training) to cover the tuition fees of employees working towards the social work apprenticeship.
- 28 Employees working towards the apprenticeship complete a social work degree while they work with approximately 1 day of their time protected for study. Employers also provide work-based placements to the apprentices.
- 29 To date the standard has supported apprentices to complete a 3-year social work degree, but we expect shorter masters level programmes to become available from 2024.
- 30 We have until now supported a small number of our own practitioners to complete the programme annually. 4 of our employees qualified in 2022, and a further 6 are expected to qualify in Summer 2023, 3 in Summer 2024 and 5 in Summer 2025.
- 31 Apprentices who successfully complete the programme are guaranteed a social worker role in Children's Social Care. In our initial cohort of 4 who completed in 2022, 2 have taken up social worker roles, and 2 have remained in their original services. In our cohort of 6 completing in 2023, all have social worker roles in place for the time they graduate.

- 32 We have invested in a new way of supporting apprentices for 2023 to allow us to increase the number of social work apprentices we can support. We are currently expecting to support 12 people employed as social work trainees funded from a mix of our staffing underspend and potential additional funding from the Department for Education. These new posts are proving very attractive, 3 weeks into a 4-week job advert we have already received 217 applications.

Raising awareness of routes into social work

- 33 Our web pages focusing on working in child and family social work are available at: <https://www.durham.gov.uk/childrensocialwork>. The pages are still being actively developed, and we expect to publicise them through social media when we think they reflect work in Durham sufficiently well.
- 34 To support people with an interest in a career in social work, a section on routes into social work is expected to be added to the web pages by the end of May 2023.

Routes into social work/social care for our care experienced young people

- 35 We are keen to do more to support our care experienced young people who would like to develop careers in social work and social care.
- 36 A task and finish group has been set up to progress this work, which is at a very early stage. The group is expected to consider:
- (a) How we can better support our young people studying health and social care, and those considering and undertaking traditional routes into social work, for example by providing shadowing, work experience or mentoring.
 - (b) How we can better support young people who are not yet ready for university or study at that level, and want to gain greater work experience and/or qualifications linked to social care/social work.
- 37 Working with our young people will be a key part of this work.
- 38 We are also exploring the creation of a staff network for care experienced people of any age working for Durham County Council. Other groups have found this approach supportive.

Conclusion

- 39 There are 3 categories of qualification which enable graduates to work as social workers on successful completion. These are:

- (a) Traditional routes offered by universities. These are publicly available routes where applicants pay fees, and potentially receive a small bursary to contribute to costs. Employers provide work-based placements to students on the programmes.
- (b) Fast track routes which are run in partnership between employers and providers. These are very intensive programmes aimed at recent graduates and graduates changing careers. Tuition is rapid and supported by significant time in practice. These programmes are free to participants, and normally attract a bursary for living costs.
- (c) Social work apprenticeships which allow employers to fund the fees for the social work degree for their employees through the apprenticeship levy. Employees complete a 3-year social work degree while they work with approximately 1 day of their time protected for study. Employers provide work-based placements to the apprentices.

40 We support all three types of route with the aim of supporting as many child and family social workers as possible to join the workforce.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

There are no legal implications.

Finance

Financial implications linked to all routes to social work qualification have been well explored and there are good oversight arrangements in place.

Consultation

Consultation arrangements with students on all routes to social work qualification, and the experienced social workers who support them are in place.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

There are no equality and diversity / public sector equality duty implications.

Climate Change

There are no climate change implications.

Human Rights

There are no human rights implications.

Crime and Disorder

There are no crime and disorder implications.

Staffing

By supporting routes to social work qualification, we hope to increase the number of child and family social workers in the workforce in Durham and in the North East region.

Accommodation

Accommodation implications for the students we support on all routes have been considered.

Risk

By supporting routes to social work qualification, we hope to reduce the risks created by challenges recruiting and retaining child and family social workers in Durham and in the North East region.

Procurement

There are no procurement implications.

Appendix 2: Traditional Routes into Social Work Available in the North East

| University | Programme | Level | Length of Course | Total Fees |
|--------------------|----------------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|------------|
| Durham | MSW | Postgraduate | 2 years full time | £17,000 |
| New College Durham | BA (Hons) | Undergraduate | 3 years full time | £27,750 |
| Northumbria | BSc (Hons) | Undergraduate | 3 years full time | £27,750 |
| | MA | Postgraduate | 2 years full time | £13,500 |
| Sunderland | BA (Hons) | Undergraduate | 3 years full time/6 years part time | £27,750 |
| | MA | Postgraduate | 2 years full time/4 years part time | £10,000 |
| Teesside | BA (Hons) | Undergraduate | 3 years full time | £27,750 |
| | MA | Postgraduate | 2 years full time | £13,420 |
| Open University | BA (Hons) | Undergraduate | 3 years full time/6 years part time | £20,772 |
| | Postgraduate Diploma | Postgraduate | 17 months | £8,260 |
| | MA | Postgraduate | 2.5 years | £11,980 |

Appendix 3: Fast Track Routes into Social Work

| | Step Up to Social Work | Frontline | Think Ahead |
|------------------------------|---|--|--------------------------------------|
| Target group | Graduates with a degree at 2.2 or above | | |
| Delivery | Teaching and placements | Short residential programme followed by teaching and learning in a unit model | |
| Length of programme | 14 months | 1 year to qualification 1 further year employed as a social worker | |
| Qualification | Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work | Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work in year 1 Masters following qualification in year 2 | |
| Bursary paid to participants | £19,833 over 14 months | £18,000 in year 1 Paid a salary in year 2 | |
| Funded by | Department for Education | Department for Education and donations | Department of Health and Social Care |
| Frequency | Every 2 years | Annual | |
| Delivered by | Regional partnership of employers with a University | Frontline | Think Ahead (Middlesex University) |