



Advice for newly-qualified social workers:

Finding employment

The jobs market for newly-qualified social workers is difficult – what can you do to increase your chances of getting a job?





The problem



- Newly-qualified Social Workers since 2010 have reported that it is difficult to find employment as a social worker
- It is impossible to know the numbers of students not finding work.
- It is undoubtedly true that there is a problem. Professor Brian Littlechild of Hertfordshire University and a member of BASW Learning and Development Reference Group says "I have never known it so bad"
- The situation is however a mixed picture and subject to regional variation.



What is the cause of the problem?

- The number of social work students increased by between 40 and 70 % between 2003 and 2009 (This was in response to a major shortage of social workers).
- Job freezes, cut backs and pressures on local authority social work departments. Have seen cuts of up to 25%. The Independent sector has also been hit by cuts in funding.
- It has become an [“employers” market](#). Given the choice between a NQSW and an experienced social worker many, but not all, employers will take the latter.
- There have been cut backs in the voluntary sector, another major employer of social workers.
- It is known that some social workers have taken redundancy and then signed on as social workers for agencies, increasing competition for jobs.
- The pressure on social workers has increased because of cut backs and therefore there is less capacity to take students on placement, thereby depriving students of statutory placements.
- Some local authorities are reluctant to employ people who have not had a local authority placement even though they have cut back on the number of placements they offer.



Improve your job chances

– advise from NQSWs in BASW

It is important to **stand out**

- BASW can help you develop a whole range of skills – including getting involved in running conferences, seminars and involvement on policy advisory groups and committees. BASW also offers you the chance to network, to keep up to date on policy issues and to be involved in campaigning. BASW gives you the chance to get involved in a supportive national and international community of social workers
- If you are a member of BASW you can get advice and backing to help you if you feel that you are being discriminated against in job applications (using equality legislation)
- Employers are impressed by applicants who are engaged with society. This could be voluntary work, including campaigning.





Are you restricting your options?

You need to think do you want to work for a local authority, or would you have more opportunities and job satisfaction in the voluntary sector, or provider sectors?

List the pros and cons for you regarding what sector you would like to work in.

In a nutshell

- Local Authority social work tends to have better terms and conditions of employment, but you may prefer the flexibility of voluntary organisations.
- As one social worker, who transferred to working for a carers organisation, said recently: "I love it – I am doing real social work".
- It is not impossible to transfer from one sector to another, but it can be difficult.
- There are promotion possibilities in both sectors, however you may be able to take on more responsibility more quickly in the voluntary sector.
- In both sectors there are a range of operational, management and policy jobs. Both the voluntary and local authority sector look favourably on the skills and knowledge of social workers and there are many Chief Executives of small and large organisations who are qualified social workers.
- Government policy is to increase the number of jobs in the independent sector, including developing social work social enterprises (which BASW are involved in).
- There are increasing numbers of social workers operating as independent practitioners.
- The social care provider sector has interesting jobs and career opportunities.





Advise from NQSWs in BASW

- Don't leave job hunting until the **last minute** – the best jobs, or all the jobs may have gone
- Attend the job fairs and talk to people there.
- **Get help with your application form** – you may have excellent pre-course experience that you are not portraying sufficiently well. [A useful article.](#)
- Applying for jobs is a skilled task; many applications get rejected because the application form is poor – don't be too proud to ask for help.
- **Interviews need a lot of preparation** – get help and advice in preparing for them.
- Have a plan – you may need to seriously consider that you won't get a job working for a local authority, but there are lots of alternatives.





Network, network, network

- Use Twitter, Social Networking, Facebook, LinkedIn
- Keep up contact with people on your placements and at universities.
- Network with current and former students, support each other.
- Keep in touch with people on your former placements – you may find out about job vacancies that way.
- Most people like to help.



Location

- Do think hard about whether you can be flexible regarding location. It is hard to uproot and for some impossible, but other professions have to consider doing this.
- The problems of shortage of jobs is countrywide, but some areas are recruiting more than others.
- It is no consolation, but newly qualified occupational therapists, nurses, psychologists, doctors and nurses are all finding it difficult to find jobs.



New roles and finding work

New jobs are emerging in social care. For example work in the personalisation arena, advocacy, and new types of worker in mental health and children's services. Some of these jobs don't stipulate that you have to be a registered social worker, but they may contain many elements of social work.

Some only advertise on their own web sites, many do not use the traditional big two – Community Care and the Guardian.

Find out about where social work and social care vacancies are advertised.



Some ideas re where to look for jobs

- The number of places that employers are advertising is increasing. Some only advertise on their own web sites, many do not use the traditional big two – Community Care and the Guardian. Also try: [Jobs Go Public](#), [Great Social Care](#), [Charity Jobs](#), [NFP](#), [BASW](#), [Total Jobs](#), [Blue Octopus](#), Colleges of FE and universities, individual councils, [NHS jobs](#), individual charities and private sector social care organisations.
- Do a regular trawl of job sites.
- Social networking sites such as [Linkedin](#), [Face Book](#), Twitter.
- Post your CV on various sites, including LinkedIn, Community Care (only give email address).
- Talk to as many social workers and HR and workforce people as possible, find out where they advertise, what jobs may be coming up.
- If you have a local authority placement find out who works in their workforce/learning and development department, who leads on student placements and NQSW work, find time to meet them.



Advantages and disadvantages of working for an agency

Advantages

- Gives you the chance to experience a variety of employers without committing yourself.
- Can give you a lot of experience quickly.
- It is a way to find out about job vacancies and to demonstrate your abilities.

Disadvantages

- Employers expect you to be able to hit the ground running.
- You may not get as much support and good quality supervision.
- It is difficult to access post qualifying qualifications.
- Agencies may not want you unless you have experience.

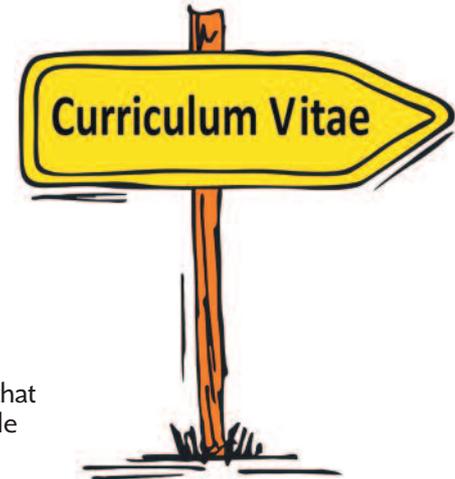


Your application form and CV

Always tailor your CV or application to a **specific job** and do your research about the job and the employer.

Concentrate on **demonstrating** that you meet the competencies, or requirements as set out in the person specification.

- Imagine that you are the employer reading the application form, think what they want to see – it will include: evidence that you have the skills to do the job, desire and passion and that you can convey information accurately and concisely.
- If you have been working in a job that doesn't have the title social worker since graduation, but can demonstrate competencies and experience then spell them out and give examples.
- Use your pre course experience, placements and any post-qualification work as evidence. The people shortlisting will have preconceptions in their head that they are only looking for someone with x amount of experience, you may be able to demonstrate that you have relevant experience, but over a period of time.
- Spell out some of the advantages of taking you on – your characteristics, that you are wanting to commit long term to a good employer.
- Don't make mistakes in your application form, make sure it is properly proof read and that you have not missed any sections. When there are a lot of applications for one post little things, such as spelling mistakes and punctuation can put the reader off.





Your interview

- First impressions count. Be positive, demonstrate your good communication skills. Try and be concise, but also demonstrate that you are reflective.
- In the past many employers did not encourage you to visit before the interview, some employers will allow this now – find out if it is allowed and if you can visit. If at all possible try and speak to someone about the job on the phone. The job advert may say 'Must have two years post qualification experience', but NQSWs report that when they phone up and say is it worth their while applying that some organisations say yes it is.
- Spend time thinking of what questions you may be asked and give thought to your responses.
- Give examples – again think of scenarios you may be asked. Scenarios could include:
 - illustrate your decision-making in relation to risk
 - evidence of knowledge of legislation.
- Evidence of experience of using assessment and recording systems is likely – find out what systems the employer uses beforehand if you can.
- You will be expected to be aware of national policy issues.
- You will need to demonstrate that you are a team player and that you know the importance of supervision.
- If you are working in a role that doesn't demand a social work qualification demonstrate the experience and knowledge that this is giving you – don't express this as a negative.
- None of the above will work, however, if you pretend to be something or someone you are not.



Presentations

- If you are asked to give a presentation you have been given a great opportunity to sell yourself.
- If you are a NQSW you may well be more used to giving presentations than more experienced social workers. That is an advantage.
- Whatever medium you use for your presentation practice and practice (see [BASW guide to presentations](#)).
- Remember that although your presentation will be important don't put all your effort and emotional energy into the presentation, it is only part of the interview. You will still need to prepare for the questions.
- If relevant, link information from your presentation to the questions that you are asked.





Assessment exercises



Assessment exercises

Part of the interview may consist of exercises, for example an “in tray exercise” or case scenarios which you write notes about, or you may be asked to comment on in the face-to-face interview

Interview feedback

- If you are not successful ask for feedback.
- Remember this is a tough jobs market, so don't be downhearted, but learn from your interview.
- Discuss with friends, careers advisors, mentors what you can do to improve your chances next time.



Should you hold out for a social work job, or try for a social care, or related job?

This is a difficult question and you will need to think carefully about your situation. Be realistic, in the present jobs climate those with most experience will be at an advantage.

Work where a degree in social work is not a requirement

- If you cannot find a social work job then seriously consider applying for related social care, education, youth justice, health, housing, probation jobs etc. This could provide a platform to get to the job you want.
- If there are aspects of the job that don't enable to get essential experience volunteer. Some Local Authorities are developing volunteer posts in social services. Contact your nearest ones. Other sources of volunteering are probation, youth services, Councils for Voluntary Services.
- Get help and advice from your university careers department, [PROSPECTS](#) or [National Careers Service](#). Some jobs, particularly in the voluntary sector see a social work qualification as desirable not essential. It may be worth considering such work.
- Don't forget that there are lots of career opportunities in the social care "provider sector". Many people say that they get more contact with service users and carers be it day services, residential care, home care, or services that are developing to support people with individual budgets.



Keep your CPD up-to-date



- Whether you are working as a social worker or in a social care or related work, or not working keep your CPD up-to-date. This does not have to be expensive. Getting involved in BASW offers great opportunities – many conferences and seminars are free or minimal cost and BASW looks for volunteers to attend events. Also you can offer to get involved in policy work.
- Read the trade journals.
- Use CPD tools to record your learning ([BASW](#) have a [CPD tool](#) on their web site) or [National Careers Service Tool](#).
- Attend consultation events, or to contribute to consultations e.g. SCIE, HPC, Skills for Care, NICE, etc.
- Consider blogging, twittering or writing articles – they involve research, which is real evidence for CPD.
- Campaign on social work and human rights issues.



Case examples

- Sophie qualified as a social worker in summer 2010. She had gone straight from school to university. She applied for quite a few social work posts, but didn't get short listed. She took stock of her situation and realised a) she lacked experience and b) she came to realise that she wasn't ready to go into a social work post. Sophie decided she would aim to get relevant experience for two years and worked as a family support worker. As her experience and confidence grew she was given the more complex child protection cases. Wisely Sophie kept up her CPD record in detail. Sophie sought advice and mentoring regarding her application forms. After 18 months Sophie obtained a social work post and is now very happy in the role.
- John was interested in social work with adults. He had some pre course social care experience and kept up part time support work during his degree. He had no success in applying for the few social work posts available. He received mentoring support from BASW and obtained a senior support role in a provider organisation. The provider organisation are delighted with him and are pulling out all the stops to keep him. He has now decided for the foreseeable future to stay in the provider sector , is applying through his employer to do ASYE and envisages a good career.
- Yasmin qualified in 2011, wanted to work as a social worker for adults. She failed to get a post, but was attracted by a post as a case officer working with a carers organisation. The case officers undertake carers assessments and provide one to one support to carers. She says that compared to her friends who obtained "social work" jobs in a local authority she has more face to face contact and feels that she is employing her social work skills.

*Some names have been changed to protect confidentiality.



ASYE

- You will be aware that the Assessed and Supported Year of Employment has been introduced. It is not compulsory, but if possible do try and do it.

[See BASW Q and A fact sheet](#)





Keep positive

- Social work is a great profession and although it is going through difficult times there is a good future and it is a very important profession. It is an exciting time to be taking a social work degree.
- Have a written plan, you may not get the job you want straight away, a lot may depend on your experience, flexibility and location. Your plan may need to be for a year or two.
- Be prepared to be flexible, creative and to stand out. Don't be shy about asking others for help and advice.
- Don't get isolated when you leave university.
- Good luck and don't forget as a BASW members you will get support and advice – don't be afraid to ask.

Contact: j.godden@basw.co.uk or england@basw.co.uk

Are you a social work student?

Why not start your career in social work from a position of strength?

JOIN BASW NOW



Student benefits include:

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- **Professional Social Work** magazine each month.
- Free and discounted **professional development** events.
- A free confidential **Advice and Representation Service** (BASW members of 3 months standing).
- **Discounts on books and journals**, including the world-leading British Journal of Social Work.
- An **Ethical Code** and policy guidelines.
- Access to **MyBASW**, offering exclusive content and a social workers forum.

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