



Subject Benchmark Statement: Social Work

The Basics

This summary is designed to provide a short and accessible overview of the Subject Benchmark Statement for **Social Work** for students, employers and academics. It is not intended to replace or alter the Statement, which should be referred to in the design and approval of courses and when any further detail is required.

Subject Benchmark Statements describe the nature of study and the benchmark academic standards expected of graduates in specific subject areas, and in respect of particular qualifications. They provide a picture of what graduates in a particular subject might reasonably be expected to know, do and understand at the end of their course or programme.

Subject Benchmark Statements are presented in four sections. Section 1 outlines the contextual information - providing the operational landscape, and boundaries, of subject discipline.

This includes consideration of the ways in which the discipline addresses wider social goals, specifically in relation to: equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI); accessibility and the needs of disabled students; education for sustainable development (ESD); enterprise and entrepreneurship; and the impact of generative artificial intelligence on the subject.

Section 2 covers distinctive features of the course, including curriculum design, partnership arrangements, flexibility of delivery, progression and ongoing monitoring processes. Section 3 explains any features relevant to teaching, learning and assessment activities for the subject. Section 4 describes the benchmark standards of achievement reached by all graduates with a bachelor's degree with honours in the subject, with some subjects also including achievement at master's level.



Why study a degree in Social Work?

As an academic discipline applied through professional practice, social work is distinguished by its focus on navigating complex social situations to promote and safeguard both individual and collective well-being. A key characteristic of social work education is to encompass the integrated study of specialised knowledge, skills, and values, along with the critical application of research to inform understanding and to guide action, reflection, and evaluation. The curriculum and practice continuously evolve and adapt in response to social, political and economic challenges, demands of contemporary social welfare policy, practice, and legislation, and in response to research findings.

Social work is practised in a diverse range of settings, reflecting the diversity and complexity of contemporary society. The dynamic relationship between society, the state, and the profession remains fundamental to social work's role in supporting individuals affected by trauma and those in need or at risk. Operating in contexts marked by uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, social workers must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to navigate these challenges effectively. The administration of social work in some sectors includes the development of social policy and legislation. Social workers are also expected to engage critically with ongoing debates concerning the nature, scope, and purpose of the profession, and to demonstrate the capacity to analyse, adapt to, manage, and ultimately lead processes of change.



What are the main teaching and learning approaches in Social Work?

The learning processes in Social Work courses can be categorized into five inter-related themes: awareness raising, skills and knowledge acquisition, conceptual understanding, practice skills and experience, and reflection on performance (these are reflected in the benchmark standards set out in Section 4). The themes are operationalised in various learning and teaching methods, including lectures, reading, independent study, workshops, problem-based learning, simulations, peer activities, technologies, role play, and practice-based learning. Teaching sessions may occur synchronously, asynchronously, or in a blended format, depending on the specific context.



How are students assessed?

A diverse range of assessment methods is encouraged to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion, including assessments of practice-based learning. The choice of assessment methods is closely related to the learning outcomes they aim to develop and measure. These methods may include practical skills sessions, dialogical assessments, self-assessments, digital products, written work, presentations, portfolio creation and examinations. Formative and summative assessments can involve a range of stakeholders, including self-assessment, peers, practice educators, and people with lived or living experience. Assessments can take place in various environments, including online and in practice-based settings.



Benchmark Standards

The minimum threshold standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours and/or Master's degree in **Social Work** are outlined on **pages 21-25** of the Subject Benchmark Statement. The vast majority of students will perform significantly better than the minimum threshold standards. Each higher education provider has its own method of determining what appropriate evidence of this achievement will be and should refer to [Annex D in The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#). This Annex sets out common descriptions of the four main degree outcome classifications for bachelor's degrees with honours - 1st, 2.1, 2.2 and 3rd.

The full statement was developed by subject experts drawn from across the sector. Details of the Advisory Group can be found on page 29 of the Statement.

Subject Benchmark Statements are published in QAA's capacity as an expert quality body on behalf of the higher education sector.

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