

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Questions about Qualifications and Entrance Criteria

#### 1. Who can apply to study the OU Northern Ireland social work degree?

Individuals who are interested in studying this degree cannot apply directly to the Open University and require sponsorship by an employer. This degree is an employment-based sponsored programme. This means that the social work degree is restricted to applicants who are employed in posts that deliver direct social care services. This programme is not open to individuals from non-social care positions, such as administration roles.

Your social care employer/sponsor must be a Designated or Associate Practice Learning Provider for social work placements (DPLP/APLP). If they are not yet a DPLP or APLP, they should contact the Northern Ireland Social Care Council for further information.

Please note there are a limited number of places on the degree, and this is a competitive process. Even if you meet the entry requirements and your employer states that they will sponsor you, there are usually more applicants than there are available places on the course.

#### 2. What are the entrance criteria to study social work at the Open University?

The Open University have essential criteria that prospective students must meet to apply for the Social Work degree. These include:

- UCAS tariff threshold of 96 points or equivalent, OR successful completion of OU module K101/K102 An Introduction to Health and Social Care (within the last 5 years)
- GCSE Grade C or above in English **and** Maths, or equivalencies
- Successful performance at interview
- Sponsorship by an approved social work/social care employer
- Access NI Enhanced Disclosure Check as a Student Social Worker
- You may need to evidence medical fitness to practice
- Completion of a Declaration of Suitability for Social Work Training form
- Successful registration as a Student Social Worker with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.

Click [here](#) to access a helpful tool to help you check whether your qualifications meet the 96 UCAS points.

### **3. How do I apply?**

The first stage of the application process is called the 'nomination' stage. This is where you speak with your employer and discuss if they will nominate you and put you forward for shortlisting with the Open University. With permission from your employer, you should complete a nomination form and ensure that all sections are fully completed. Your employer may have their own internal criteria and selection process (which could include an interview) which they may apply, in order to inform their decision about who they will nominate. Employers will provide the Open University with the nomination forms of candidates who they have selected for shortlisting.

The Open University will then conduct a shortlisting process to ensure candidates have met all the entry criteria. If you are successful at the shortlisting stage, you will be invited to attend an interview with the Open University and another employer representative. At this point you will be asked to provide evidence of meeting the qualification entry criteria and also asked to complete an equal opportunities monitoring form. Individuals who are successful at the interview stage will be given a **conditional offer** and will then be asked to complete an application pack.

Further details about the admissions process are available from your employer. Your employer needs to meet certain criteria to ensure they can fulfil the functions of sponsorship. Employers can find further information in the Employer Handbook (click [here](#) for link to handbook) which explains how to implement the degree into a work setting, or request a frequently asked questions document from us.

### **4. When do applications open and what is the deadline to apply?**

Applicants do not apply directly to the Open University. The timeline for applications being processed is arranged collaboratively with employers and the university. The recruitment process for the social work degree typically begins December/January each year, with students commencing the programme in the following October. The first step involves your employer undertaking a selection process to nominate staff members to apply to the degree. You should speak to your employer to find out their internal closing date for staff nominations, as it is your employer who sets this first deadline.

For the October 2023 intake, the employer nomination process will likely conclude Spring 2023, with the OU offering places on the programme by the Summer of 2023.

### **5. Is there an age limit for applicants?**

No. We encourage individuals of all ages to apply for the programme.

## 6. Can I apply if I work part-time or volunteer in social care?

You need to speak with your employer about their criteria for sponsoring staff to undertake the social work degree. Please note that placements in year 2 and 3 require full-time attendance.

## 7. What evidence do I need to demonstrate I meet the qualification criteria?

Applicants need to provide proof of **completed** qualifications to demonstrate how they meet the academic entry criteria. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure qualifications are recorded accurately on the nomination and application form, and that they can provide **original** certificates or certified statement of results from examination boards, to evidence attainment of qualification, upon request by the OU.

Please ensure that any missing certificates are ordered from awarding bodies as soon as possible and prior to you requesting nomination from your employer. These certificates can be obtained by contacting your school or the relevant examining body, who should hold a record of your qualifications. If your certificates are issued in a name different to that which you currently use, you must submit evidence to the OU of your former name (e.g., marriage certificate, deed poll document).

You will be required to produce these certificates if you are shortlisted for interview and should be provided to the University **prior to interview. Failure to provide copies of certificates may result in your interview invitation being revoked.** If you have requested a replacement certificate and this will not arrive prior to your interview, please contact us as soon as possible to discuss further – [Ireland-SW-applications@open.ac.uk](mailto:Ireland-SW-applications@open.ac.uk).

**Please note the qualification provider must be on the Register of Regulated Qualifications: <https://register.ofqual.gov.uk/>. If qualifications were awarded overseas or are of non-UK origin, applicants may need to obtain a UK ENIC statement of comparability: <https://www.enic.org.uk/>.**

## 8. I have completed other OU modules or other relevant study – do they count towards credit for the degree?

As this Social Work Degree is a professional programme, restrictions on credit transfer and credit migration apply. If an applicant already holds a qualification at Higher Education level in a similar subject, they **may** be exempt from the first module, K102. If you are successful at the interview stage, you may make an application for credit transfer, if appropriate. Further details will be provided at that stage. Please click [here](#) to access the self-assessment tool on the Credit Transfer website to see if a Credit Transfer application would be appropriate. Only previous study which is

five years or less will be considered. **Please note there is a deadline for applications for credit transfer.**

If you have previously completed K101/K102 (within the past 5 years) and K113 (since February 2021), you may automatically be given credit for this previous study. This means that these modules can be migrated to the social work degree, so you do not need to complete these again. If this is relevant to you, you may be permitted to join the degree at year 2. Please note that if you have previously completed K102 and K113 as an independent student, this does not automatically mean you can commence the social work degree. Selection processes, entry criteria and gaining sponsorship apply to all, regardless of previous OU study.

### **Questions about the (Hons) Degree in Social Work**

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

Although all OU students are categorised as undertaking study on a part-time basis; due to the nature of our programme, placement requirements and funder regulations, almost all of our students' study at full-time intensity. Exceptions to the study intensity are usually only granted based on certain individual circumstances and with agreement of the OU, the funder and/or the employer. As all NI OU social work students are sponsored and funded either by their employer or the Department of Health, the requirement, at present, is that students' commit to completing the degree in 3 years (studying 2 modules per year).

In years two and three, there is a placement module, where students' undertake an assessed practice learning opportunity (PLO) in a social work setting. Currently, the placement arrangements follow a full-time pathway. In year two in January, students undertake a 85-day placement and in year 3, again beginning in January, there is a 100-day placement. Both of these placements are on a full-time basis.

The Social Work Degree has 6 modules (360 credits) to be completed. The vast majority of students complete 2 modules per year (120 credits) and will therefore complete the programme in 3 years. If you commence the degree in October 2023 and complete 2 modules per year, you will complete your study and be eligible to register as a qualified social worker in November 2026.

#### **10. What academic commitment is expected of me on the degree?**

Students at the Open University are classified as part-time students, however almost all social work students study at full-time intensity. Undertaking the degree will usually mean studying between 16-18 hours per week, per module, plus practice learning opportunities in years 2 and 3.

However, as study at the OU is distance learning and flexible, students are largely able to manage academic commitments at their own pace and at a time that suits them.

It is mandatory that students are available for practice placements and submit assignments when they are due. Students must also attend workshops and tutorials, which take place on some evenings and Saturdays. There are typically 7 tutorials/workshops per module and these take place approximately once per month. Dates for these events are not available until the beginning of each module presentation. Please note that you may be required to travel to Belfast to attend face-to-face workshops. Students do not need to attend any other lectures, but are expected to contribute to discussions on the online forums, on a regular basis.

Study at the OU is largely self-directed, with support from tutors which provides flexibility for people wanting to undertake this degree. However, students may request additional support from tutors, should they require it.

All students undertaking social work training in Northern Ireland are required to register with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (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. Click [here](#) for more information about the standards.

### **11. How is the degree assessed?**

The programme is academic and practice based. Students must pass both elements. Each module on the programme is assessed in a variety of ways and these include, a number of assignments throughout the module presentation, an end of module assessment, roleplays with service users and observations of skills and practice by both tutors and placement practice teachers. 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.

### **12. What support will I receive while undertaking the degree?**

Students are allocated specific Module Tutors for each module. Students also have a Practice Tutor when on placement in Year 2 (K216) and Year 3 (K315) alongside a placement practice teacher and supervisor. Practice Tutors will visit students on placement on at least three occasions to support and quality assure the learning experience.

Students will also have access to the Student Support Team (SST), available via phone, email, or Webchat, 9am-5pm Monday to Friday.

The social work degree is also managed by staff based in NI, including a Professional Lead, staff tutors, a faculty co-ordinator and faculty assistant. As the OU offers a social work degree across all four nations of the UK, the NI degree also has input from wider module teams and programme leads from outside of NI. However, it is unlikely students in NI will receive much contact from them.

### 13. Can I continue working while I study for this degree?

As this degree is an employment-based programme, students continue to work in their social care posts while they study. This is a distance learning programme, so students mainly study in their own time. Students also attend a combination of online and face-to-face skills workshops which are normally delivered at weekends or evenings. This allows for flexible learning around work and family commitments. This programme can, however, be intense at times and therefore you should carefully consider your personal and work circumstances, to ensure you can meet the demands of this degree.

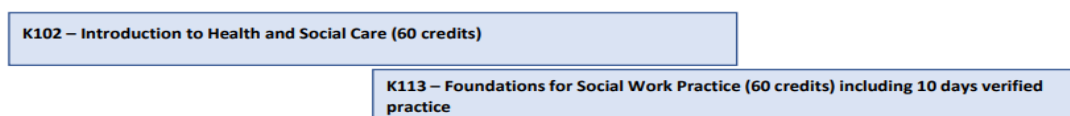
### 14. What will I study on the degree?

The diagram below shows the structure of the degree and the modules studied for almost all students who follow the three year pathway. You should note that there is a period of time each year when students study 2 modules at the same time. In years 2 and 3, placement also begins in January and lasts 85 (year 2) or 100 (year 3) days. At this time you will be on placement and undertaking placement work set by the onsite supervisor and practice teacher, while also completing other academic work for the module.

#### OU BA (Hons) in Social Work – 3 year pathway (360 credits)

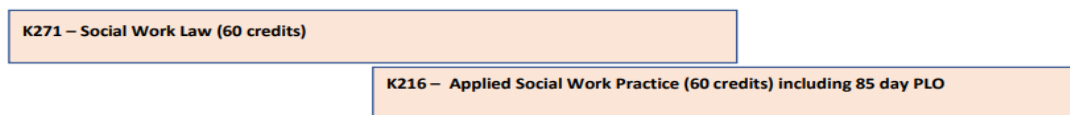
##### Level 1

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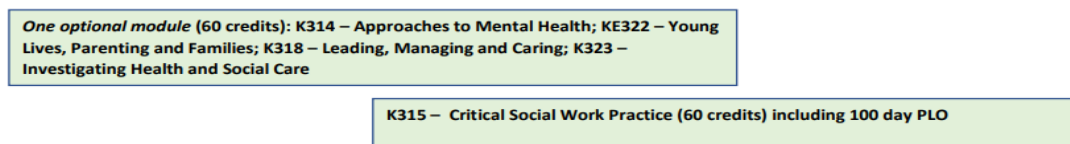
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## **Practice Learning**

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. Practice learning for level 1 and 2 typically take place in students own workplaces. The level 2 placement will be in students own teams/workbase if it can offer sufficient learning opportunities and meet practice learning requirements and standards. In Level 3 students undertake a practice learning placement in an external team or organisation.

**You should specifically discuss placements with your employer to ensure that they are aware that they will need to backfill your post when you are undertaking placement. Discussions regarding salary while on placement should take place prior to applying to this degree.** You should also consider how you will manage any annual leave entitlement as it is likely you will be unable to take leave while on placement.

### **15. Can I choose where I go on placement?**

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 placements 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 placement destination.** Students should also be aware that not all placements follow a Monday-Friday, 9-5pm work pattern.

## **Other questions about the BA (Hons) Degree in Social Work**

### **16. Am I entitled to any financial support while I am a student at the OU?**

Students at the OU are not entitled to the Department of Health Social Work Student Incentive Scheme. This is because OU students remain in paid employment whilst studying and also have their tuition fees paid by the Department of Health or their employer. Furthermore, as OU students are classified as studying part-time, they are not entitled to apply for any student loans or grants through Student Finance NI. However, at the OU, students can apply for some limited financial support through our hardship grants and our student advisors can provide further information on this.

### **17. If I get a place on the degree, when will I finish and what happens next?**

If students begin the degree in October 2023 and follow the three-year pathway, they will complete their studies in September/October 2026 and will be awarded a degree in social work in November 2026. Graduation ceremonies at the OU take place across the UK and throughout the year and graduands can choose to attend any that suit them. The NI graduation ceremony typically takes place around Spring/Summer each year, however you do not need to wait until graduation before you can work as a social worker.

Once you have accepted your degree award you will then be permitted to apply and register with NISCC as a qualified social worker. You will not be allowed to undertake work as a qualified social worker until you have completed the degree and your registration has been confirmed. It may be possible to apply and interview for social work positions prior to completing the degree in year 3, however you will need to check you meet entry criteria with the relevant recruiting organisation.

All newly qualified social workers in NI must complete an Assessed Year in Employment (AYE). Further information regarding this can be found [here](#). If you commence employment as a social worker within one of the HSC Trusts, you will begin this post as band 5, irrespective of any previous banding. You should discuss future job prospects and employment related issues with the employer who is sponsoring you to undertake this degree.

### **18. What do current students say about this degree at the OU?**

The social work degree can at times be challenging due to the study intensity while continuing to work alongside this. However, at the OU, we offer as much flexibility as possible and are committed to supporting students to reach their goal and obtain their qualification. The social work degree in NI provides people with a fantastic opportunity to achieve a professional qualification, while continuing to earn their salary and undertake their studies through a distance learning approach. We are proud that in this degree in NI, we have a very high student progression and retention rate, with many students now completing this programme and joining the social work workforce in NI. Below are some quotes from current students completing the social work degree:

***“I was worried about how I would manage to keep working full time and get all of my assignments done and keep on top of studying and going to tutorials. But because most of the studying can be done in your own time, I was able to make a study plan that worked around my job and my personal life. The flexibility at the OU is so important to me and has allowed me to work towards a degree while still managing a busy life.”***

*“It can be tough at times and you need to put a lot of hard work and effort in, but it will all be worth it in the longrun when you get to become a qualified social worker.”*

*“Although this degree is distance learning, you still have chances to meet with other people in your class and get a lot of support from the tutors. So I like the balance of being able to study at home at a time that suits me, but also getting to attend some tutorials and link in with other students.”*

*“Being able to continue getting a salary each month and work towards getting a degree was what made me interested in applying to the OU. I wouldn’t be able to study this degree at another university as I wouldn’t be able to come out of work and it would not suit my home circumstances either.”*

*“I have just finished the social work degree and I am now working as a qualified social worker. It has been a really busy and challenging 3 years while studying, but always keep the end goal in your head. My top tips would be to create a study plan so that you can work out when you need to go to tutorials, submit assignments and read the study materials – and be strict with yourself to stick to this plan! You will definitely find aspects of the degree tough, but get support from your tutors, people you work with and other students. You will learn so much over the 3 years and at the end of it you will be ready to work as a social worker!”*

## Questions about other options to social work

### **19. I am interested, but unsure about a career in social work, what should I do?**

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** course, *An Introduction to Social Work* that introduces you to the social work role, key ideas, values, and the skills needed for social work practice. Click [here](#) to access the course.

You can also learn more about a career in social work from the [NI Social Care Council](#) website.

## **20. What other health and social care courses can I study at OU?**

The Open University provides a range of health and social care degrees, diplomas, and certificates. You can find information about them [here](#).

For example, you could study a [Certificate in Higher Education in Social Care](#) (T39), or K102 and K113 as individual modules. A lot of students complete the Certificate, and it is a good opportunity for them to test their academic ability first. This is also a great way to introduce yourself to the Open University. Having the Certificate does not guarantee direct entry onto the social work degree, as all entry and sponsorship criteria need to be met. However, if you are successful in getting a place on the social work programme, you may be able to use the Certificate as credit towards the degree.

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### **For further information about the BA (Hons) Degree in Social work:**

**Website:** [R61 | BA \(Honours\) Social Work \(Northern Ireland\) | Open University Degree](#)

**Web form:** [Contact Us | Open University](#)

**Telephone:** 02890 323722

**Email:** [Ireland-SW-applications@open.ac.uk](mailto:Ireland-SW-applications@open.ac.uk)

You should also speak directly with your employer and/or your training department who can provide further information on sponsorship and the application process.