



DEBATE PACK

Number CDP-0041, 16 March 2021

World Social Work Day 2021

By Aaron Kulakiewicz
David Foster

Summary

A Westminster Hall debate on the 'World Social Work Day 2021' has been scheduled for Thursday 18 March 2021 from 3:15pm. The debate has been initiated by Emma Lewell-Buck MP and David Simmonds MP.

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1. Background

1.1 World Social Work Day

Every year since 2007, World Social Work Day has been celebrated on the third Tuesday in March. This year, it was on 16 March 2021.

The initiative of celebrating World Social Work Day was approved by the member organizations of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) in 2004. The IFSW describes World Social Work Day as “a celebration that aims to highlight the achievements of social work, to raise the visibility of social services for the future of societies, and to defend social justice and human rights.”¹

Each year, World Social Work Day focuses on a ‘Global Social Work Agenda’ theme developed via the IFSW in which the British Association of Social Workers is the UK’s representative body. The theme for 2021 is “Ubuntu: I am Because We Are”, which is the first theme of the [2020 to 2030 Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development](#), agreed in November 2020.² Ruth Allen, CEO of The British Association of Social Workers, explained the theme as follows:

The theme for this year is Ubuntu: I am because we are

Ubuntu (Zulu pronunciation: [ùbùnt’ù]) is a Nguni Bantu term meaning "humanity". This over 2000-year-old philosophy, is found in every country of Africa south of the Sahara, using different cognate terms in the local Bantu language.

Ubuntu: ‘I am because we are’ is a concept and philosophy that aligns with the ethics of social work itself. It reinforces the importance of global solidarity and co-operation as a profession and as societies, particularly as we move through unprecedented and challenging times across the UK and across the world.³

Further information is available on the website of the [IFSW at: World Social Work Day 2021](#).

1.2 Social Work

There is no single, agreed definition of ‘social work’, but the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) describes the work as follows:

Social workers aim to improve people’s lives by helping with social and interpersonal difficulties, promoting human rights and wellbeing. Social workers protect children and adults with support needs from harm. From helping keep a family under pressure together to supporting someone with mental health problems, social work is a varied, demanding, often emotional and very rewarding career.

¹ International Federation of Social Workers, [HISTORY WORLD SOCIAL WORK DAY](#), 26 March 2020.

² International Federation of Social Workers, [2020 TO 2030 GLOBAL AGENDA FOR SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK: ‘CO-BUILDING INCLUSIVE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION’](#), 2 November 2020.

³ British Association of Social Workers, [World Social Work Day 2021](#), 2 December 2020.

[...]

If you are working in children and family services, you may work with children in care (also known as 'looked-after children'), young offenders, children who have experienced or are at risk of abuse, children with health and mental health needs - and with their families. This may include helping families experiencing difficulties to resolve their problems. You may work specifically to assess and intervene where there are child protection concerns within a family or from elsewhere. You may also manage the adoption and fostering processes, and support children with a disability.

If you are working in adults' services you may work with older people, people with learning or physical disabilities. If you work with people with mental health problems, you'll focus on promoting independence, wellbeing and having control over their lives, including accessing their entitlements to welfare support and/or to be in employment. You may also support adults who have substance abuse problems, have offended, are living with HIV or Aids, or are involved with the criminal justice system.⁴

Social workers work in a variety of organisations. Many work for local authorities in departments that provide services for children or adults. Some work in other public bodies (e.g. NHS Trusts and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) and others work in the voluntary and private sector.

'Social worker' is a protected title, so the routes to qualifying as a social work professional are regulated by UK regulators. Since 2003, The main qualification route into social work is via university education, with either an undergraduate or postgraduate degree in social work. There are also 'fast-track' routes into the profession aimed at other graduates and career changers.⁵

1.3 Number of social workers

As at 30 November 2020, there were 99,702 registered social workers in England. Of these, 82.3% were female, 17.7% were male and 0.04% preferred not to record a gender, or cited their gender as 'other'.⁶

Further statistics on children and family social workers in England is available in section 5 of Library Briefing 8543, [Children's social care services in England](#) and in the DfE's statistical release: [Children's social work workforce 2020](#).

Statistics on social workers within local authority adult social services departments in England as at September 2019 are available in Skills for Care's [Headline social worker statistics](#), published in March 2020.

The latest statistics for registered social workers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland give figures of:

- 10,925 in Scotland as at 28 December 2020.⁷

⁴ British Association of Social Workers, [What do social workers do?](#), last accessed 12 March 2021.

⁵ For example, [Step-Up to Social Work](#).

⁶ Social Work England, [Social Work in England: First Reflections](#), January 2021, p15.

⁷ Scottish Social Services Council, [Registration data](#), last accessed 15 March 2021.

- 6,293 in Wales as at 1 April 2020.⁸
- 6,357 in Northern Ireland as at 31 March 2020.⁹ ([Northern Ireland Social Care Council Annual Report 2019/20](#))

1.4 Commentary

Social Work England's "first reflections" report

Social Work England took over responsibility for regulating social work in England on 2 December 2019. Background information on the establishment of Social Work England is provided in Library Briefing 7802, [Social Work Regulation \(England\)](#).

In January 2021, Social Work England published the [first of two planned interim reports on social work in England](#), leading to a state of the nation report in 2023.

Among other things, the report presented findings from research conducted by You Gov in early 2020, which included:

- More than 80% of social workers described being motivated to enter the profession to make a difference to people's lives.
- 79% of social workers rated the quality of their education and training as either 'good' or 'very good.'
Concerns of "high caseloads and burnout were reported throughout the research". 85% of current social workers reported that the job makes them either very stressed or fairly stressed.
- Morale was reported as being substantially higher among men than women.
- Social workers ranked the public perception of their profession as the lowest when compared to 7 other professions, including bankers, civil servants and the police.

The report noted that the findings regarding how social workers ranked the public perception of their profession contrasted with other research around the public's perceptions of social work. In this research, undertaken with Crag Ross Dawson, 88% of public respondents agreed that social work was important for helping vulnerable people. This, the report stated "suggests that the public are more warmly disposed towards social work than is widely believed, including by social workers."¹⁰

British Association of Social Workers report on social work during coronavirus

In January 2021, the British Association of Social Workers published initial findings from a survey of 1119 social workers across the UK regarding social work during the Covid-19 pandemic. The survey's findings included:

- 78% felt that "that their experience of working under lockdown restrictions had increased their concerns about the capacity to safeguard/protect adults and children."

⁸ Social Care Wales, [Social workers on the Register – 1 April 2020](#).

⁹ Northern Ireland Social Care Council, [Annual Report and Accounts 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020](#), August 2020.

¹⁰ Social Work England, [Social Work in England: First Reflections](#), January 2021, pp16-17.

- 79% felt “they had encountered more difficulties in accessing essential support services for the people with whom they worked.”
- 51% felt they “they were able to carry out their role with the confidence and support they needed.” 31% disagreed or strongly disagreed.¹¹

DfE longitudinal study of children and family social workers

In 2018, the DfE commissioned a [longitudinal study tracking the careers of a cohort of local authority child and family social workers over five years](#). The [report on Wave One](#) of the study was published in August 2019. The [report on Wave Two](#) was published in July 2020.

The findings of the wave two report, which were based on survey responses from 3,300 social workers between September 2019 and January 2020, included:

- 73% found their job satisfying and most of those working in local authority child and family social work planned to stay there over the next 12 months.
- 75% reported working over their contracted hours “all the time” or “most weeks”.
- Workplace wellbeing was “of growing concern for social workers” and there had been an increase since Wave 1 in the proportion of social workers who felt stressed by their job (56%, up from 51%).

The report concluded:

Wave 2 of the study has revealed that the majority of child and family social workers plan to stay in the profession: most are satisfied with their jobs and with the opportunities they have for learning and development. Future waves of the study will explore the factors influencing job retention and career development over time.

The key drivers of satisfaction among front line practitioners include feeling proud to work in child and family social work, having positive relationships with line managers, and feeling valued by their employers. Conversely, factors such as feelings of stress and having too high a workload had a negative impact on job satisfaction. These are all factors that can be influenced by positive workplace culture and good quality line management.¹²

1.5 Relevant Library Briefing papers

The Library has published a number of Briefing Papers which provide information on the context within social workers operate, including the issues faced before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. These include:

- CBP 8543, [Children’s social care services in England](#), last updated 12 March 2021.
- CBP 7585, [The Troubled Families programme \(England\)](#), last updated 27 November 2020.

¹¹ British Association of Social Workers, [Social work during the Covid-19 pandemic: Initial Findings](#), January 2021, pp2-3.

¹² DfE, [Longitudinal study of local authority child and family social workers \(Wave 2\)](#), July 2020, pp12-16.

- CBP 7903, [Adult Social Care Funding \(England\)](#), last updated 11 December 2020.

2. Parliamentary Material

2.1 Debates

[Social Workers](#)

16 May 2018 | House of Lords | 791 cc746-760

To ask Her Majesty's Government, in the light of the report by Dr Jermaine Ravalier, *Social Workers —Working Conditions and Wellbeing*, published in July, what strategies they have considered to alleviate the workload demands faced by social workers.

[Social Workers](#)

13 Mar 2018 | House of Commons | 637 cc309-326WH

Motion that this House has considered the contribution to society of social workers.

2.2 Parliamentary Questions

[Coronavirus: Vaccination](#)

08 Feb 2021 | 136098

Asked by: Olivia Blake

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the priority for children's and adults' social workers is for receipt of the covid-19 vaccine; whether those social workers will be deemed to be under the category of social care workers in respect of the priority accorded to them for that vaccine; and what the timetable is for the receipt of that vaccine by (a) mental health professionals and (b) other such workers with higher-risks of covid-19 infection undertaking house calls to households with covid-19 positive cases.

Answering member: Nadhim Zahawi | Department: Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), advised that the priority for the current COVID-19 vaccination programme should be the prevention of COVID-19 mortality and the protection of health and social care staff and systems.

All frontline social care workers directly working with people clinically vulnerable to COVID-19 who need care and support irrespective of where they work will be a priority for phase one of the vaccine programme.

The Government will set out plans for phase two of vaccination, based on further advice from the JCVI. Phase two of the roll-out may include further reduction in hospitalisation and targeted vaccination of those at high risk of exposure and/or those delivering key public services.

[Social Workers: Pay](#)

23 Jul 2020 | 74422

Asked by: Ms Harriet Harman

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to increase pay for social care workers.

Answering member: Helen Whately | Department: DHSC

The Government does not set the levels of pay for social care workers; however, we are committed to raising the profile of the social care sector. Putting social care on a sustainable footing, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect, is one of the biggest challenges that we face as a society. There are complex questions to address, which is why we have invited cross-party talks. These will take place at the earliest opportunity in light of the current circumstances. The Government will then bring forward a plan for social care for the longer term.

[Social Workers: Coronavirus](#)

23 Jul 2020 | 73821

Asked by: Alex Cunningham

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the Social Workers Union's (SWU) Social Work's Six-Point Urgent Action Plan published on 9 July 2020, what assessment he has made of the SWU finding that social workers have faced traumatic experiences during the covid-19 outbreak; and if he will make a statement.

Answering member: Helen Whately | Department: DHSC

We are committed to providing ongoing support to make sure social workers feel safe, supported, valued and able to continue the exceptional work they do to support people who need care and support. We have provided a £5 million grant for leading mental health charities to fund additional services to promote people's positive mental health and emotional wellbeing.

The Chief Social Workers for Adults are in regular conversations with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, the British Association of Social Workers, Social Work England and Principal Social Workers across the country to ensure concerns are responded to as soon as they arise. In partnership with The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, they have developed dedicated guidance for the support and wellbeing of adult social workers during the COVID-19 outbreak.

[Social Workers: South Yorkshire](#)

14 May 2020 | 30771

Asked by: Dan Jarvis

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the financial effect of the outbreak of covid-19 on social care workers on zero-hour contracts in South Yorkshire.

Answering member: Helen Whately | Department: DHSC

We know social care will be a vital part of our response to COVID-19, with providers looking after some of the most vulnerable in society. On 15 April 2020 the government published 'Coronavirus (COVID-19): adult social care action plan' which can be read here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-adult-social-care-action-plan>

This document sets out the government's plan for:

- controlling the spread of infection in care settings;
- supporting the workforce;
- supporting independence, supporting people at the end of their lives, and responding to individual needs; and
- supporting local authorities and the providers of care.

We announced £1.6 billion funding for local authorities to help support adult social care providers and staff, including costs that may arise from needing to hire new staff quickly and costs to providers to support workers on zero-hour contracts.

As part of the Government's emergency legislation measures, Statutory Sick Pay will be available from day one for those affected by COVID-19. Anyone on zero-hour contracts who may not be eligible for Statutory Sick Pay will be able to claim Universal Credit or New Style Employment and Support Allowance, dependent on their circumstances.

It is vital we look after those employed in the care sector, and the Government is committed to ensuring that no care worker has to choose between doing the right thing and facing financial issues. Changes to the benefits regime and additional funding for adult social care will help to support workers.

Social Workers

24 Mar 2020 | 31464

Asked by: Jeremy Hunt

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many social care workers voluntarily left Social Work England's register in each of the last three years.

Answering member: Helen Whately | Department: DHSC

Social Work England (SWE) took over the regulation of social workers in England on 2 December 2019 from the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). The figures for 2020 are between the period of 1 January – 18 March 2020.

The number of social workers in England who voluntarily left the register of social workers in England since 2017 is shown in the following table:

Total	2017 HCPC	2018 HCPC	2019 HCPC	2020 (to 18 March) SWE
9,436	1,099	7,090	1,078	169

The number of social workers in England who were struck off the register of social workers in England in since 2017 is shown in the following table:

Total	2017 HCPC	2018 HCPC	2019 HCPC	2020 (to 18 March) SWE
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202 71 62 65 4

[Social Workers: Recruitment and Retention](#)

16 May 2019 | House of Lords | 797 cc1647-9

Asked by: Baroness Donaghy

To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their strategy for increasing the number of social workers and improving their retention rate.

Answered by: Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford | Department: DHSC

My Lords, the Government remain committed to supporting local authorities and other social work employers to meet their duties regarding social work workforce planning and helping them to understand best practice in recruiting, retaining and developing staff. We have invested over £1.2 billion since 2010 in supporting both mainstream and fast-track qualifying routes into the profession, and our improvements to the supervision and leadership that social workers receive support people to remain and progress in social work.

[Social Workers: Recruitment](#)

23 Apr 2019 | 244170

Asked by: Helen Hayes

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to support local councils in the recruitment of permanent social workers.

Answering member: Caroline Dinéage | Department: DHSC

The adult social work workforce is vital and local authorities, like any employer, need to ensure they have the right staff with the right skills. The Government has provided councils with access to up to £3.6 billion more dedicated funding for adult social care in 2018/19 and up to £3.9 billion for this year.

We have also invested £3 million in a national adult social care recruitment campaign during 2018/19 to raise the profile of the adult social care sector and attract more people to a range of jobs in adult social care.

Across Government, we are continuing our ambitious programme to improve the status and standing of the social work profession, including:

- Ensuring we have sufficient supply of social workers, through provision of the £58 million Social Work Bursary and £20 million Education Support Grant to support student placements;
- Introducing diverse entry routes for people wanting to qualify as social workers, including fast-track graduate programmes such as Think Ahead and Frontline and a new Degree Apprenticeship from 2018/19;
- Supporting the Assessed Supported Year in Employment for newly qualified social workers, providing them with valuable additional support during their first year in practice. The programme has benefitted over

20,000 child and family and adult social workers since 2012, helping to improve recruitment, retention and performance management;

- Funding assessment and development programmes for established social workers to enable them to progress into more specialist or senior roles;
- Supporting a Return to Practice programme for social workers who have left the profession and want to return; and
- Establishing Social Work England as the new specialist regulator for social workers, ensuring clear standards for the knowledge, skills, values and behaviours required to become and remain a registered social worker.

Thanks to these actions we have begun to see an impact - local authorities have been able to recruit an additional 3,000 jobs since last year, including 1,000 more professionals such as social workers and occupational therapists.

3. Press Articles

3.1 News Articles

The following is a selection of news and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or the accuracy of external content.

[History world social work day](#)

International Federation of Social Workers

26 March 2021

[Recognizing the essential role of the social service workforce for child protection](#)

UNICEF

10 March 2021

[‘I feel robbed’: the disruption, disorder and delays faced by social work students under Covid](#)

Community Care

5 March 2021

[Average pay for adult social workers up for first time in five years but salaries no higher than 2013 levels](#)

Community Care

26 February 2021

[World Social Work Day 2021](#)

BASW (The professional association for social work and social workers)

2 December 2020

[2020 to 2030 global agenda for social work and social development framework: ‘co-building inclusive social transformation’](#)

International Federation of Social Workers

2 November 2020

[‘It’s frustrating’: UK social workers say they lack time and resources to do their job](#)

The Guardian

1 September 2020

[Six reasons to celebrate World Social Work Day](#)

The Guardian

20 March 2018

4. Further reading

4.1 Reports

The King's Fund, [Stories from social care leadership: Progress amid pestilence and penury](#), 11 February 2021

BASW, [Social work during the Covid-19 pandemic: Initial Findings](#), 26 January 2021

Social Work England, [Social Work in England: First Reflections](#), 21 January 2021

Age UK, [Bring our careforce in from the cold](#), November 2020

Skills for Care, [The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England](#), October 2020

Care Quality Commission, [State of Care 2019/20](#), October 2020

Skills for Care, [The size and structure of the adult social care sector and workforce in England](#), July 2020

Social Care Workforce Research Unit, [Literature review of roles and issues within the social work profession in England](#), March 2015

4.2 Websites

[International Federation of Social Workers](#)

[BASW: The professional association for social work and social workers](#)

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