



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Social Work

School of Social and Political Science

BSc1 and BSc2 (Pre-Honours)

2026-2027

Programme Handbook

Programme Director: Dr Eve Mullins
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Welcome to Social Work

Welcome to the University of Edinburgh and to the Social Work subject area. This handbook has been designed mainly to guide you through the first two years of your undergraduate degree although some details are also given about years three and four.

As your Programme Director, I am very keen that your four years at university are happy and productive. Starting university can be confusing and our job is to ensure that you settle into your studies here as quickly and as easily as possible.

Social Work is about people. Here are some of the key people you will be getting to know during your first two years as a social work student. Social Work staff are based in the Chrystal Macmillan Building (CMB), 15a George Square.

Head of Subject: Dr Steve Kirkwood

E-mail: s.kirkwood@ed.ac.uk

Room 2.22, Chrystal Macmillan Building

Steve is the Head of the Social Work Subject Area which includes the 4-year Undergraduate degree programme, the 2 year postgraduate MSW programme, post qualifying programmes and PhD students

Programme Director: Dr Eve Mullins

E-mail: eve.mullins@ed.ac.uk

Room 2.26, Chrystal Macmillan Building

Eve's job is to manage the four-year UG degree programme

Year 1 Cohort Lead: Karen Armstrong

E-mail: Karen.Armstrong@ed.ac.uk

Karen is the cohort lead for the 1st year social work programme. She will support first year students' academic development e.g., helping with course choices. Autumn and Will (Student Adviser) are the main contacts for 1st year social work students.

Year 2 Cohort Lead: Dr Autumn Roesch-Marsh

E-mail: A.Roeschmarsh@ed.ac.uk

Autumn's job is to support second year students' learning and to guide their course choice and progression over the second year of their degree.

Student Adviser: Will Rennie

E-mail: student.sps@ed.ac.uk

Will, alongside his colleagues in the Student Advice and Support Office, provides pastoral and academic support to students. Will can advise on university procedures and regulations and can also advise students who may be struggling with their academic studies because of personal or health reasons. Students should contact either their Student Adviser or Cohort Lead with any concerns or problems they are facing during their time at the university.

Telling your Student Adviser about any **Exceptional Circumstances** (e.g., physical or mental health crises, bereavement, serious illness) which may have impacted upon your academic performance is very important so these can be fully considered, within University policy, in relation to your assessments and for appropriate support.

Details about Exceptional Circumstances can be found here:

<https://registryservices.ed.ac.uk/exceptional-circumstances>

Together, we make up a team whose job it is to support your learning and to guide you through your degree. Our aim is for you to enjoy and benefit from your time at the university and we are confident that your experience of studying here will be positive and constructive.

Course Organisers

Students will also have contact with Course Organisers from Social Work and from other subject areas. The Course Organiser's role is to manage the delivery of the specific course, set the essay/assignment title, prepare and mark the exam papers and moderate all assessed work.

Each course has its own Course Secretary who deals with all the administrative elements of the course (e.g., information about assessment submissions). Details can be found on each course Learn Ultra page.

Course Tutors

Students will be taking part in tutorials led by Course Tutors, including staff and PhD students from within the School. Their role is to lead and facilitate the tutorial discussions and to mark the essays/assignments. You will need to enroll in course tutorials once your course choice and overall timetable are confirmed.

I hope that this handbook provides useful information to guide you through the first two years of your Social Work degree. We look forward to getting to know you and working with you throughout your undergraduate studies.

Dr Eve Mullins
Programme Director

What is Social Work?

Social workers are professionals who work with people experiencing difficulties in their lives. They deal with many different issues arising, for example, from poverty, deprivation, substance misuse, offending behaviour or relationship problems. Social Workers undertake sophisticated assessments in relation to vulnerable individuals who are struggling to manage their own lives independently. Social Workers become involved with children, families, adults of all ages and people who have offended. They work alongside a range of other professionals in supporting people in the community, in hospitals or in care settings.

Many social workers are based in offices and see service users in the office or visit them in their homes. Some work in day centres, residential units or in specialised projects. Social workers are employed by local authorities, voluntary or independent organisations. Some social workers specialise in community work, social education or social reform rather than in direct service to individuals.

Social work is a job for creative, practical and resourceful individuals who really enjoy working with people. Social workers have to combine ingenuity and optimism with honesty and realism in the face of the demanding situations which some service users experience. It is social workers who represent society's response to the challenges of poor parenting, offending, long-term illness, mental illness and other serious problems. Social workers need stable well-integrated personalities and must be able to see beyond the immediate issues presented by service users, the general public and policy makers. Good social work combines an interest in people, a rigorous scientific attitude and the constant search for better methods of helping, supported by research and development.

Social Work Education at the University of Edinburgh

The University of Edinburgh started providing training for social workers in 1918 and came to be recognised as a leading institution in social work training. In the 1960s, Social Work at Edinburgh played a major role in advising the Scottish Office about the future shape of social work services in Scotland, contributing to reports that led to the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, still a core legislative basis for Scottish social work. In 1998, the University merged with Moray House Institute of Education, an institution which had a 30 year history of providing qualifying and post-qualifying social work education and training for non-graduate and undergraduate students. Today Social Work at Edinburgh is part of the School of Social and Political Sciences, a constituent of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Science. We seek to meet the demands of a changing profession, and to contribute to the understanding of and developments in public policy and professional practice. We collaborate with a range of agencies to promote understanding of best practice in social work services. Partner agencies provide practice learning opportunities for our students and their staff contribute to course planning and curriculum content.

Becoming a Social Work Student

Your admission to the social work degree is dependent on being registered as a student social worker with the professional body, the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). You will also need to be a member of the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) scheme.

Your ongoing place on the degree is dependent on your continued registration with the SSSC. It is your responsibility to communicate any change of circumstances including change of address to the SSSC. Omitting to advise the SSSC of any change can jeopardise registration as can allowing registration to lapse or failing to pay the annual registration fee.

The university has an obligation to inform the SSSC of any conduct issue which might call into question a student's suitability for registration. The university also has Fitness to Practise procedures which relate to students studying on professional programmes:

<https://cahss.ed.ac.uk/taught-students/student-conduct/fitness-to-practise>

Social work students, from the start of their studies, should view themselves as professional practitioners. This involves certain responsibilities and as registered social work students, you have agreed to adhere to the SSSC Codes of Practice:

<https://www.sssc.uk.com/standards/codes-of-practice/>

Social media plays an important part in the presentation of the professional self and care should be taken with all use of internet and online communication. The SSSC has provided the following guidance about the responsibilities of registered social work personnel in relation to social media (See Appendix 1: SSSC Guidance on the use of Social Media).

Change of Address/ Name

It is each student's responsibility to inform Student Services immediately of any change of address/name. All student contact information is held by Student Services.

Please follow this link for full details of how to change your details:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-systems/support-guidance/students/change-your-student-record>

It is each student's responsibility to inform the Scottish Social Services Council if they have a change of name/address:

<http://www.sssc.uk.com>

The Programme Team

Social Work Staff

The staff group is made up of lecturers, tutors, teaching fellows, practice learning team, student adviser and administrative staff. Sessional teachers and tutors also make a contribution to teaching as do staff from other subject areas. In addition to their general social work background, teaching staff have specialist knowledge in particular areas of policy and practice; for example, work with children and families, older people, mental health, and criminal justice.

Practitioners and managers from the statutory, voluntary and independent social work agencies in the South-East of Scotland contribute to our teaching, drawing on their substantial specialist knowledge in ways which complement the expertise within the University.

A brief outline of the teaching and research interests of staff members is available on the Social Work website: <https://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/subject-area/social-work/people-intro>

* Please note that the Undergraduate Teaching Office is responsible for all course assessment submissions.

Academic Staff		
Dr Anna Chiumento	Lecturer	achiumento@ed.ac.uk
Dr Georgia Cole	Chancellors Fellow/ Senior Lecturer	georgia.cole@ed.ac.uk
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Dr Sumeet Jain	Senior Lecturer	sumeet.jain@ed.ac.uk
Dr Steve Kirkwood	Head of Subject Area, Senior Lecturer	s.kirkwood@ed.ac.uk
Dr Franziska Meinck	Senior Lecturer	franziska.meinck@ed.ac.uk
Dr Mary Mitchell	Senior Lecturer	m.a.s.mitchell@sms.ed.ac.uk
Dr Eve Mullins	Lecturer	Eve.Mullins@ed.ac.uk
Karen Armstrong	Director of Practice Learning; Lecturer	karen.armstrong@ed.ac.uk
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Dr George Palattiyil	Professor	g.palattiyil@ed.ac.uk
Dr Autumn Roesch-Marsh	Senior Lecturer	a.roeschmarsh@ed.ac.uk
Dr Robin Sen	Lecturer	r.sen@ed.ac.uk
Administrative Staff		
Will Rennie	Student Adviser	student.sps@ed.ac.uk
Lee Corcoran	Student Development Officer	lee.corcoran@ed.ac.uk
Course Secretaries	Undergraduate Teaching Office	sspsugts@ed.ac.uk

BSc in Social Work Requirements and Structure

The BSc (Honours) degree in Social Work renders successful students eligible for full registration as social workers with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). Student registration with the Council is a condition of entry and continuance on the programme. Information about pre-entry registration will be provided.

Principal Aims of the Programme

1. to co-create/co-produce a University of Edinburgh Social Work graduate who will be curious, concerned about social justice, research-minded, a critical thinker who is able to exercise practical judgment; someone with good people skills, who understands change, is reflexive and committed to advocacy.
2. to enable students to act in an increasingly complex world and complex work environments where frameworks for understanding and effecting change are contested and uncertain.
3. to provide a curriculum in which principles of learning, teaching and assessment are constructively aligned.
4. to provide a curriculum that builds upon students' professional development needs from the stage of becoming a social work student to the point of entering the world of professional practice.

Programme Outcomes

(a) Knowledge and understanding

- the contexts and domains within which social work is practiced
- the social science knowledge base that informs social work practice
- evidence and research as it applies to social work
- legislation and policy in relation to social work
- concepts of risk, trust and complexity as they apply to social work
- the ethical base underpinning social work practice
- research and evaluation theories, methods and approaches
- competence in assessed social work practice

(b) Intellectual skills

- the application of analytical, conceptual, critical and empirical methods to the study of professional practice in social work
- using, and later undertaking own, research into aspects of social work theory and practice
- structuring and presenting analysis and argument

(c) Professional/subject-specific/practical skills

- articulating and maintaining a professional social work identity within multi-disciplinary and interagency contexts
- using theories to inform practice in a professional context
- awareness of and adherence to appropriate ethical codes and frameworks
- achieving competence in assessed social work practice

- numeracy skills as required by Scottish Social Services Council
- reflective practice
- reflexivity

(d) Transferable skills

- oral communication skills
- written communication skills
- oral and visual presentation skills
- independent learning
- teamwork
- interpersonal skills: engagement, empathy, tolerance and open-mindedness, negotiation
- problem formulation and solving
- information retrieval and research skills
- self-evaluation
- international understanding
- time management
- working under pressure

Programme Structure

The BSc in Social Work is undertaken on a full-time basis over four years.

In year 1, students are required to complete two Social Work courses and two Social Policy courses as well as two elective courses to achieve the required 120 credits for the academic year.

In year 2, students are required to complete three core Social Work courses: 'Human Rights and Social Justice: Social Work and the Law', 'Transforming Lives: Applying Evidence from Social Research' and 'Working and Relating: Developing Your People Skills'.

Students will also study elective courses in year 2 to achieve the required 120 credits for the academic year.

The first two years of the degree are intended to provide a basic grounding in social work knowledge and theory, as well as providing students with the opportunity to develop their education in social science and beyond.

Years three and four focus on developing the student as a professional practitioner and applying their knowledge, skills and values in direct practice in each of the two Honours years. Students complete programme specific courses equivalent to 120 credits in each year. During the Honours years, undergraduate social work students are taught alongside post graduate, MSW students. This longstanding arrangement has proved effective and enjoyable for both cohorts.

All courses are reviewed on an ongoing basis by staff, students, practitioners and service users and by external professional bodies and other stakeholder interests such as the Scottish Social Services Council.

Year 1		
Course	SQF Level	Credit Points
Social Work: Making a Difference (Compulsory)	8	20
Creative Social Work and the Arts (Compulsory)	8	20
Social Policy and Society (Compulsory)	8	20
Politics of the Welfare State (Compulsory)	8	20
Two other non-compulsory elective courses	8	40

Year 2		
Course	SQF Level	Credit Points
Human Rights and Social Justice (Compulsory)	8	20
Working and Relating: Developing your People Skills (Compulsory)	8	20
Transforming Lives: Applying Evidence from Social Research' (Compulsory)	8	20
Three other non-mandatory, 'outside', courses (2 in sem1 and 1 in sem2)	8	60

Whilst 120 credits must be achieved in both first and second year (240 credits in total), the marks during the pre-Honours stage of the degree **do not** count to the final degree classification. It is only the marks for years three and four which are calculated.

Students who wish to proceed to the third year of the Social Work degree must successfully complete the first two years of the degree. Evidence of work in the field of social welfare (either in a paid or unpaid capacity) and an ability to reflect on this is also sought at this stage (for further information see p16-17).

Year 3		
Course	SQF Level	Credit Points
Social Work in Communities	10	20
Social Work with Individuals and Families	10	20
Working with Self & Others: Skills Theories & Methods	10	20
Understanding Care and Control in Social Work	10	20
Professional Practice in Social Work 1	10	40
Social Work Dissertation Preparation	N/A	0

Year 4		
Course	SQF Level	Credit Points
Working with Risk, Trust & Complexity in Social Work	10	40
Professional Practice in Social Work 2	10	40
Dissertation in Social Work	10	40

Information about each course will be available on Learn.

Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Courses are taught through a combination of lectures, tutorials and small group work. In the first two years of the degree, social work lectures take place once or twice per week together with weekly tutorials. Other courses follow a similar model. In years three and four, teaching and learning is more intensive, incorporating placements and our Enquiry and Action Learning (EAL) model of learning in which students work in peer groups on specific projects, skills practice and presentations.

You will be assessed by coursework and exams in first and second year. In third and fourth year you will be assessed by coursework and by your performance in two periods of direct practice in service provision agencies.

Details of semester dates for the year 2026/27 can be found at: [Academic year 2026/27 | The University of Edinburgh](#)

Degree Regulations

Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study Undergraduate Degree Programme Regulations 2026/27 and details of the BSc in social work can be found at

<http://www.drps.ed.ac.uk/26-27/dpt/utsowrk.htm#dpt-year-1>

Progression to Year 2

Students should normally have achieved a total of 120 credits in order to progress to the second year of the programme.

The BSc Social Work Progression Board meets each June and September to confirm progression to second year.

Choosing Year 2 Courses

Course pre-selection will open at the end of the semester 2 exam period. At this time, returning students will receive an email inviting them to pre-select their courses to allow for allocations over the summer period. The link below will take you to the pre-selection section of our website, where you will find the relevant information closer to the time. We strongly advise you submit your pre-selection choices by the deadline stated to ensure you have the best chance of receiving your preferred choice of course.

Pre-selection link: <https://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/students/undergraduate/your-studies/choosing-your-courses>

Progression to Year 3: Criteria, Requirements, Process and Procedure

To progress into year 3 of the Social Work Degree, students are required to meet the following criteria:

- to have achieved the requisite number of passes in years 1 and 2, specified in the regulations for the degree. The degree regulations can be accessed at: <http://www.drps.ed.ac.uk/26-27/dpt/utsowrk.htm#dpt-year-1>
- to have achieved 240 credits over years 1 and 2.
- to continue to be registered with the SSSC and to hold current membership of the PVG scheme.
- to have paid or voluntary work experience in a social care or social work-related setting that involved direct engagement with people
- to provide a 500 word personal statement (details below)

Experience Requirement

Social Work students are required to undertake relevant voluntary or paid work experience. This experience is required for the course 'Working and Relating: Developing your People Skills', which is in the second semester of year 2, and also to inform the progression Personal Statement. The work experience needs to be regular and ongoing, should be in a social care or social work-related setting and needs to involve direct engagement with individuals who are disadvantaged and/or vulnerable. It is not intended that this requirement be extensive nor encroach upon study commitments.

Students will be provided with advice and guidance on how to access relevant experience.

Students are expected to provide written verification of having undertaken the experience requirement. (See below)

Process

During the second semester of year 2, students should write a personal statement of 500 words. Here they should outline their academic learning over years 1 and 2 and demonstrate how this has impacted upon their understanding about social work. They should also discuss how their work experience and other relevant factors have impacted upon their personal development and their commitment to the profession.

The Personal Statement will be emailed to the Cohort Lead.

The student must also provide written evidence of their SSSC registration, PVG membership and verification of relevant employment/ voluntary work. The evidence of work experience should be a written statement from the relevant employing agency on headed note paper, briefly confirming the date of commencement of the student's involvement and outlining the frequency and nature of the work undertaken. It is the student's responsibility to seek this written verification.

The Progression Board will meet before the next academic year to confirm that the progression criteria have been achieved.

Attendance

The Undergraduate Social Work degree is a full time, professional training programme and it is expected that students attend all aspects of the course. There is an 80% attendance requirement across the programme, stipulated by the SSSC. This means students are required to attend a minimum of 80% of the teaching inputs. Attendance is monitored across all teaching inputs (e.g., lectures, tutorials, workshops).

Where a student's attendance falls below 80%, the Student adviser and Programme Director will meet with the student in the first instance to discuss the issues around attendance and any supports that may be needed. Students who fail to meet the attendance requirement may put their progression on the programme at risk. As such it is essential students contact the relevant person (e.g., Course Organiser, Tutor, Academic Supervisor or Student Adviser) if there are any concerns about attendance, for example if you are unable to attend a tutorial due to illness. If you are unsure who to contact please contact the Programme Director or Cohort Lead. Medical certificates are required for absences of over seven days (or five working days). If a student misses substantial parts of any component of the programme, this will be regarded as a serious matter that will need to be discussed with the Programme Director.

It is important to note that students are required to complete a minimum number of days in assessed practice learning service delivery settings (see Professional Practice in Social Work course handbooks). It may also be necessary to report absences to grant giving bodies or to sponsoring authorities and to impart such information to prospective employers when references are requested.

Appendix I: Fitness to Practice

This Programme of study is accredited by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), and as it leads to a professional qualification, students are obliged to abide by the SSSC Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers (referred to as the Codes): <http://www.sssc.uk.com/the-scottish-social-services-council/sssc-codes-of-practice/>

The social work profession and the SSSC expect that students on programmes of study leading to professional social work qualifications meet the standards of character, conduct and competence necessary for them to do their job safely, and in ways which instill public confidence about the profession and professional standards: <https://www.sssc.uk.com/fitness-to-practise/>

An individual's fitness to practise may be impaired by one or more of the following:

- misconduct (including, e.g., plagiarism)
- deficient professional practise
- a health issue
- a decision about them by another specified regulatory body
- a criminal conviction
- any matter deemed relevant to the student's suitability to continue studying towards a professional social work qualification

The University of Edinburgh has regulations in place to ensure that any concerns about a student's fitness to practise are dealt with in a timely and fair manner: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/arts-humanities-soc-sci/taught-students/student-conduct/fitness-to-practise>

The standards against which a student will be assessed are the relevant Codes. Within the School of Social and Political Science the Fitness to Practise contact to whom any concerns may be initially addressed is Dr Steve Kirkwood, who can be contacted at: s.kirkwood@ed.ac.uk

Students must be aware that it is an individual responsibility to ensure that the university is aware of any matter which may call into question an individual's fitness to practise, either before commencing a programme of study, or when on the programme, such as:

- a deterioration in physical and/or mental health
- being charged with or found guilty of any criminal matter
- involvement by statutory services in relation to a safeguarding issue relating to a child or adult

Such matters should be raised with your Cohort Lead or Programme Director in the first instance, and as soon as possible.

By commencing the programme you have given permission for the university to share relevant information with practice learning agencies, practice teachers, assessors and employers if a fitness to practise concern is raised about you. This will ordinarily be discussed with you in advance.

If a matter is referred to the School about any student, the student will be informed and the matter will ordinarily be considered within 28 working days. If an initial concern is deemed a Fitness to Practise issue, it will be considered by the Fitness to Practise contact in conjunction with the Head of School. There are a series of outcomes:

- a) find that there is no impairment to fitness to practise, and dismiss the case.
- b) find that there has been an impairment to fitness to practise, but that the student has taken action to address the impairment and no further action is required. The student will be issued with a warning and advised of the consequences of any further similar behaviour.

- c) find that there is an impairment to fitness to practise, and permit the student to continue, subject to review, under certain conditions – for example additional mentoring by an appropriate member of staff, compliance with a requirement to engage with remedial learning or assessment, or addressing health concerns
- d) find that there is an impairment to fitness to practise, and require a student to repeat certain parts of the programme of study. For students close to the end of their prescribed period of study, this may require an extension to their period of study
- e) refer the student to the College Fitness to Practise Panel who have a fuller range of outcomes at their disposal

The outcome of any deliberation between the Fitness to Practise contact and the Head of School will be communicated to the student in writing.

Appendix II: SSSC Guidance on Use of Social Media

Social Media Guidance for Social Service Workers

Many of us use social media to communicate with others both personally and in our working lives. It helps us to connect with people with shared interests, keep in touch with friends and colleagues and more and more we use social media in our working lives too. It is a great way to bring together groups of people working on the same project, for example, and to share views and opinions.

While there are many benefits in using social media, it is important that you use it within the standards set for social service workers in Scotland. This guidance helps you to identify potential risks in your personal use of social media.

What do we mean by social media?

For the purpose of this guidance, social media means the online platforms you use to engage – to create relationships, have conversations and communicate with others. It's the content that you upload to platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, WhatsApp, Snapchat etc. It could be posting a comment, video or photograph or replying to other people's posts or a blog, video, podcast, for example.

The SSSC Codes of Practice

Please read this guidance alongside the SSSC Code of Practice <https://www.sssc.uk.com/the-scottish-social-services-council/sssc-codes-of-practice/>

As a registered worker, you must work to the **SSSC Code of Practice for Social Service Workers** (the Code) and follow the same standards with your online presence as you would in any aspect of your life.

The same professional expectations and guidelines apply online as in the real world. Here are some examples from the Code that are relevant and there may be more:

- I will respect and maintain the dignity and privacy of people who use services.
- I will be truthful, open, honest and trustworthy.
- I will communicate in an appropriate, open, accurate and straightforward way.
- as a social service worker, I must uphold public trust and confidence in social services.
- I will respect confidential information and clearly explain my employer's policies about confidentiality to people who use services and carers.
- I will not abuse, neglect or harm people who use services, carers or my colleagues.
- I will not abuse the trust of people who use services or carers, or the access I have to personal information about them or their property, home or workplace.
- I will not form inappropriate relationships with people who use services or carers.
- I will not behave, while in or outside work, in a way which would bring my suitability to work in social services into question.

Sharing Information

When you post information online think about whether it is something you should be sharing. If the information is confidential and is about a person who uses social services, their family or carers, don't share it online. Nor should you post any information or views that reflect negatively on you, your employer or the social service profession.

Maintaining Boundaries

Using social media can create risks, particularly where personal and professional boundaries become unclear.

Think carefully before accepting friend requests from people who use your service. If you only know someone because they use your service you shouldn't become friends with them.

If a person who uses your service, their family or carer contacts you about their care or other professional matters through your private profile tell them that you cannot mix social and professional relationships.

Do not use social media to discuss people who use social services or their care with them or anyone else.

Protect Yourself

Other people can easily find and see your personal information and profiles as well as the posts on your social media. Think about how accessible you are online. For example, you can limit who can read your posts and turn off the ability for your profile to appear in online searches. You can also make some accounts private like Instagram and Twitter.

However, social media sites do not guarantee confidentiality whatever privacy settings are in place. Remember to update your privacy settings regularly.

But above all, remember that everything you post online is public. People can easily find, copy and share your posts without you knowing. Everything you post online can be traced back to you and there is a permanent record, even after deleting it.