

### Do you know your rights?



The Social Workers Union offers our wholehearted support to colleagues in large public sector trade unions who are considering voting and being part of industrial action in relation to pay issues. SWU is equally committed to supporting

where possible the main issues around pay levels. The starting point is that any ballot regarding Social Work pertains to Local Government and Health Employees, and we cannot advise our members to take strike action. For workers in local government and schools, pay and other terms and conditions are determined by a negotiating body called the National Joint Council (NJC) for local government services.

SWU is not currently part of the NJC negotiations on main pay issues. Indeed, we have previously been blocked re Collective Bargaining applications and Trade Union Congress membership by three large generic trade unions who object to our social work specialism. Nonetheless, an employee can consider the ACAS guidance re strike action for non-bargaining unions. If you are not sure if you are allowed to strike, you can check with the employer and/or the trade union who called the strike. ACAS is an independent public body that receives funding from the government. ACAS provides free and impartial advice to employers, employees

and their representatives on employment rights, strike action and best practice and policies. <https://www.acas.org.uk/strikes>

I am delighted to introduce our new Assistant General Secretary (see page 2). Welcome to Calum who will bring a variety of personal, work and union skills to the new role. I am looking forward to working with Calum.

The recent 'Talk to SWU' session was another success this month and the recording will be shared soon with some great questions and answers from the panel. Please do share the SWU 'Assignment' Comp (see page 8) and the topic of 'Diversity' is an excellent question to address.

Alongside BASW England we had our regular spot at the Compass Jobs Fair in Birmingham on 20<sup>th</sup> March. It was great to meet lots of students and newly qualified social workers and hear their enthusiasm for their chosen career. It was also heartening to hear their understanding of the importance of trade union membership when chatting with social workers, and to meet a new generation of activists in the making! We look forward to welcoming them to SWU.

I am pleased that SWU has had our two motions accepted for the forthcoming General Federation of Trade Unions Annual Conference in May and this will be covered in detail next month.

**John McGowan**  
**General Secretary**

[j.mcgowan@swu-union.org.uk](mailto:j.mcgowan@swu-union.org.uk)

# Introducing Myself

## Meet Calum Gallacher, SWU's newly appointed Assistant General Secretary



### Socio-political Awareness

I grew up on a council estate in Glasgow in the 1980's and fondly remember, with nostalgia, the freedom we had then in the absence of saturation with technology. Born in 1979 I am what was then termed one of *Thatcher's children*.

In early life my greatest role models and constant carers were my grandparents. Both survived The Blitz in Glasgow and even in early childhood I was fascinated with their starkly different experiences because of contrasting family structures and religion. I loved listening to my gran tell stories of her mischievous antics as a child, centred around the room and kitchen in a Glasgow tenement she shared with her parents and 12 siblings. My grandfather, a more privileged one of two, was a great raconteur who would tell wild tales of his travels with the Navy. Mostly I remember their kindness to others, especially neighbours and complete strangers. I realise this came from their experiences of the war and having to pull together in order to rebuild their homes, communities, social and working lives. During the long periods spent together in air raid shelters class, status or beliefs did not affect the collective experiences amongst people who shared: conversation, song, food, fear, hope, strength.

It was instilled in me from an early age to be kind to others, and share, even if this might not be instinctive. I learned to show respect and listen regardless of opinion, to help others without expectation, to be honest, not to judge and never to speak ill or gossip a most fervent message. From an early age I learned about the fragility of life and circumstances, and the spirit of altruism. These are foundational experiences which I carry with me in Social Work practice, and everyday life.

### My Road to Social Work and Trade Unionism

Personally, I was an underachiever who did not attend school from the age of 13. I was allocated a Social Worker as was *outwith parental control*. In hindsight I feel I have done remarkably well, I certainly did not *die in the gutter* as a teacher once told me (because my dissent and rebellion were a challenge to others).

As a young adult I continued to be anarchistic in my outlook and ideals, mostly regarding societal inequalities, however I found a harness for my energy through political activities with the Scottish Socialist Party. I began to absorb life learning from the comradeship I discovered with more experienced socialists and trade unionists, who I listened to speaking about ideologies and actual community needs and issues. I was encouraged and inspired to more decisively challenge oppression and inequalities faced by those socio-economically disadvantaged, often because of personal characteristics to include status. I found a sense of belonging, strength and focus, and solidarity in campaigning for equalities with others irrespective of personal backgrounds or beliefs.

Throughout my working life I have always been affiliated with a trade union. I have been a workplace rep for two larger generalist unions however in 2018, I decided I needed to belong to a specialist professional union for Social Workers and joined SWU. Soon after I became a SWU Union Contact and sought to inform other practitioners, and direct them to the Advice and Representation service when needed.

## **Career and Development**

In the late 90's I fell into health and social care work and began contemplating becoming a Social Worker whilst working with Action for Children. I spent 5.5 years as a Project Worker in an outreach and respite service for Children and Young People aged 4-18 diagnosed with learning disabilities or difficulties. Our team provided dedicated support for social inclusion, learning and development, and carer breaks. I discovered my ability to tune in to the emotions of others, to listen and observe and be empathic. I became skilled in sensitively interpreting non-verbal cues and using augmentative communication to interact so to include children and young people in developing their own assessments of needs and care planning. We worked closely with parents, Social Workers, Education, and Health colleagues as an MDT and even at this pre-integrated service point, I understood the need to embrace interagency work so as to achieve best outcomes for individuals. This role enabled me to become a highly dedicated person-centred practitioner, and advocate. I was inspired to become a Social Worker and cannot express how crucial this job was to my development in to being an effective and resilient Social Worker. A number of more experienced colleagues were absolutely right when they said if you can do this job and thrive you can do anything.

Since qualifying in 2008 I have worked in many roles mainly in adult services, with several dedicated teams supporting people experiencing mental health difficulties. All services I have worked in have provided support to people marginalised because of biological factors such as learning disability, age or health conditions. The majority likely disadvantaged and at greater risk of being subjected to prejudices, discrimination, and extreme poverty. Sometimes hardships have been compounded by institutions or organisations tasked with helping.

In all QSW roles I have been a strong advocate for the people I am working with and supported them to achieve their personal goals, which has at times brought me in to conflict with organisational policy objectives and managerialist approaches. At such times I have drawn heavily on past experiences of working challenges, working under inordinate pressures with insurmountable risks sometimes with limited support, and the positivity of some of the most creative and talented leaders and colleagues who directly influenced me. Their words of wisdom and inspiration still resound in my ears.

Retrospectively, looking back at my early qualified career, I know I was incredibly fortunate to work with teams like Manchester Assertive Outreach, or Blackburn with Darwen Complex Care and Treatment Team, and more laterally Rotherham Vulnerable Persons Team. These teams provided me with invaluable support and nurturing from experienced dedicated professionals and set the benchmark for good practice in inter-agency work. They maintained cultures which supported and encouraged the creativity of multi-disciplines of workers, where leadership set examples of challenging unjust government and organisational policies and promoted staff spending time with people in need of support and safeguarding so as to personalise interventions and achieve good outcomes. These working experiences have enabled me to be an effective and skilled Social Worker, leader, and Trade Unionist.

## **On Becoming Assistant General Secretary**

To loosely quote Martin Davies, Social Work should be a vehicle for change and accomplishment not an instrument of oppression. In my view Trade Unionism and Social Work are markedly intertwined as social movements, both are concerned with the challenge of inequalities while seeking change and improvement by redress of power imbalances. Both effort to empower people individually and collectively, pursuing social

justice and equality through challenge or campaign for fairer policies and legislation. Suddenly my teen dissent, rebellion and anarchy seem purposeful. As a Social Worker I am committed to improving living conditions for people marginalised and impoverished in society.

As Assistant General Secretary I will actively work with SWU, BASW and contemporary professional bodies to seek address of issues such as impact of austerity and poverty. I am eager to work with and learn from much respected General Secretary John McGowan, all of SWU and BASW staff.



Calum Gallacher (right) joins John McGowan on the SWU stand at the recent Compass Jobs Fair in Birmingham

# Becoming a Phase 2 Union Contact

## This month we are promoting our Phase 2 Union Contact Role for current SWU Union Contacts



We welcome and encourage feedback from our growing team of SWU Union Contacts and have been pleased to hear that several of you would like to develop your role to include some lower-level representation work to support your colleagues and fellow social workers.

You may be aware that, prior to the pandemic, training was developed and delivered by SWU's Advice & Representation Team for a small group of Union Contacts to become **Phase 2 Union Contacts** to assist and support A&R. This is an advanced role and open to inducted Union Contacts who have been in the role for twelve months or more (this may be waived if there is previous trade union rep experience).

We are currently in talks to redevelop this training post-pandemic and will be delivering further Phase 2 training online in June of this year (date to be confirmed). If this is something you would be interested in, please let me know as we are now compiling an expression-of-interest list.

### What does a Phase 2 Union Contact do?

As a result of several of our Union Contacts expressing an interest in undertaking additional tasks within their role, SWU & BASW have devised the additional Phase 2 Training programme which will be completed virtually using online tools and training sessions. Phase 2 enables Union Contacts to support SWU & BASW members by accompanying them to meetings such as (but not exclusive to) those described below:

- **Stage 1 Sickness absence meetings** - largely information-sharing meetings triggered when an employee has been on sick leave for a given period.
- **Short notice meetings** - when an employee is going to be suspended or advised about other action that is being proposed against them.
- **Investigation meetings** - when a SWU/BASW member has been asked to attend as a 'witness' in an action against a colleague.

This workplace support is vital to SWU members, particularly when they know that the Union Contact assisting them is also a qualified social worker who is fully aware of the complexities and demands of the job. Moral support and reassurance are invaluable to our members, and an important part of this role.

**Once a Union Contact has completed their initial Induction training and has been a Union Contact for a minimum of 12 months, they are able to apply to undertake Phase 2 training (this may be open to negotiation if the Union Contact has previously gained sufficient union rep experience).**

Phase 2 Union Contacts will receive an hourly remuneration for representational work completed on behalf of SWU.

If you are currently a SWU Union Contact and would like further details about expanding your role to Phase 2, please contact:

[carol.reid@swu-union.org.uk](mailto:carol.reid@swu-union.org.uk)

### Not yet a SWU Union Contact?

*If you've been reading this and thinking that the role of SWU Union Contact in your workplace or amongst your university cohort is appealing, please contact Carol for further details. The role can include as much or as little as you are able to undertake. Simply sharing information with colleagues is invaluable, but if you'd also like to be involved in campaigning, research, activism, or eventually become a Phase 2 Union Contact, the option is there, and the choice is yours. We look forward to hearing from you!*

*In solidarity.*

**Carol Reid**  
**National Organiser &**  
**Union Contact Manager**  
[carol.reid@swu-union.org.uk](mailto:carol.reid@swu-union.org.uk)

## SWU Campaign Fund Scotland update: MSPs back student-led social work bursaries petition

### MSPs back student social workers' petition for **better bursary support for social work students in Scotland.**



### **A powerful cross-party committee of MSPs has agreed to take action to support the need for social work university students to be provided with bursaries during the final years of their courses in Scotland.**

The Scottish Parliament Petitions Committee considered the campaign after more than 2,000 people signed the call for bursaries for all third and fourth year undergraduate social work students in Scotland - as well as reform of post-graduate bursary funding.

Social work students, backed by the Social Workers Union (SWU) and Scottish Association of Social Work (SASW), argue that this would ensure equality with other students who work in the public sector in front-line roles during their studies.

Currently the total for nursing, midwifery and paramedic bursaries is a non-repayable £37,500, but for social work students the [basic support available](#) is between £20,400 and £32,400, mostly in the form of a repayable loan and depending on household income.

Agreeing to put the petition to Scottish Government Ministers and the Scottish Social Services Council, Convenor **Jackson Carlaw MSP** (Conservative, Eastwood), said:

*"We need students on social work courses to be focussed on delivering their best and getting their best on that work placement. If it is on a nine-month secondment then encouraging them to try and find alternative income streams through employment is not really a healthy route in those circumstances."*

**Carol Mochan MSP** (Labour, South Scotland) commented:

*"This is a really important area. Having met with social work students and organisations, they are at a crisis point... and it is incredibly difficult for them to finance themselves."*

**Alexander Stewart MSP** (Conservative, Mid Scotland & Fife) added:

*“There is definitely a gap in the bursary provision within this process and to try and encourage someone to go into the social work sector is tough enough in reality, but putting extra burdens in front of them is going to make it much more challenging.”*

### **The Committee will consider the petition again once further responses from Ministers and officials have been received.**

**Lucy Challoner**, one of the lead petitioners, commented:

*“MSPs have clearly seen the light that action needs to be taken to provide more support to social work students. The Committee heard that while we are pleased to have met the Minister, we have not had any concrete promise of action yet. Indeed, the defence that social work students can access discretionary funding doesn’t stack up - I for one was refused this support!”*

**John McGowan**, General Secretary of the Social Workers Union, commented:

*“I’m so proud of Lucy, David and the [300 social work students](#) who came together to launch this campaign. The ball is now back in the Scottish Government’s court and we expect them to confirm how they will take forward the call for equality.”*

A spokesperson for the Scottish Association of Social Work added:

*“We welcome the Committee’s decision to take action for social work students today. To address the workforce challenges in the profession, social work students, who are holding individual caseloads, and providing support to the social work workforce, must be supported meaningfully. This is a positive step in the right direction, and we look forward to seeing how the Scottish Government will respond.”*

The discussion can be watched online here:

[www.scottishparliament.tv/meeting/citizen-participation-and-public-petitions-committee-march-22-2023](http://www.scottishparliament.tv/meeting/citizen-participation-and-public-petitions-committee-march-22-2023)



Many social workers are facing hardship from the rising cost of living, alongside many of those they seek to support. They may face debts from increased heating costs, through disability to themselves or their children or because of coercive or controlling relationships.

The Trust is the only charity dedicated to offering grants to qualified social workers and their dependants. We try to support our professional colleagues in their financial difficulties, family crises or sudden emergencies.

We consider applications bi-monthly and make small grants, sometimes with advice about other sources of support. Applicants need to complete a form available online at [www.swbt.org](http://www.swbt.org)

Our funds are limited and we would greatly appreciate any donations, however small, so we can help more of our fellow professionals. Details of how to do this are given below.

### **HOW TO MAKE DONATIONS:**

#### **JUSTGIVING**

Donations can be made at:  
[www.justgiving.com/socialworkers-benevolent-trust](http://www.justgiving.com/socialworkers-benevolent-trust)

#### **STANDING ORDER**

Download the form SWBT-Gift Aid and send to:  
The Treasurer,  
SWBT c/o BASW,  
Wellesley House,  
37 Waterloo Street,  
Birmingham  
B2 5PP

#### **PAYPAL**

Donate to: Social Workers' Benevolent Trust

#### **LEAVE A LEGACY**

[www.swbt.org/how-to-donate/how-to-leave-a-legacy](http://www.swbt.org/how-to-donate/how-to-leave-a-legacy)

#### **CHEQUE**

Cheques should be made out to SWBT and send to:

#### **BANK TRANSFER**

Account Name: Social Workers Benevolent Trust  
Sort Code: 08-90-01  
Account No: 50358304

The Treasurer,  
SWBT c/o BASW,  
Wellesley House,  
37 Waterloo Street,  
Birmingham  
B2 5PP

More details are available on the website:

[swbt.org](http://swbt.org)

Charity No. 262889

# SWU Assignment: World Social Work Day 2023 Essay Competition now open for entries

**Social work students and apprentices: submit your best argument for this year's question for the chance to win one of four grants of £500.**

The Social Workers Union (SWU) has announced the theme for our annual essay competition for World Social Work Day and we are excited to see what social work students and apprentices have to say!



The SWU Assignment question for this year is:

***“How can social workers best support the diverse communities across the UK who are making change through joint social action?”***

The SWU Assignment competition is open to undergraduate and postgraduate social work students and social work apprentices across the UK. **The competition opened for entries on World Social Work Day (March 21<sup>st</sup>).**

All completed assignments will be judged by a Panel. Up to four of the most compelling arguments within the word limit of 750-1000 words will win a grant of £500 each.

[Click here to see the flyer with further competition details.](#)

You can also visit the [SWU Assignment webpage](#) to see winning essays from previous years.

**John McGowan**, General Secretary of SWU, said, “Last year’s World Social Work Day Assignment Competition was a great success and I am happy that this will be continuing this year. The quality of entrants last year was excellent and hopefully interest will remain high once more. Please share with as many Social Work Students and Apprentices as possible.”

Please be sure to forward your completed assignment before the closing date with a covering letter giving your name, address, university, year of study and academic tutor (if appropriate) to: [joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk](mailto:joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk)

The assignment should be typed, have your full name, the assignment question as the title, and must follow an academic process; such as word count and Harvard Referencing System.

**The closing date for the competition is Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2023 at 5pm.**

# SWU and BASW England at the Birmingham COMPASS Jobs Fair 2023

Thank you to everyone who stopped by the stand to say hello - it was brilliant to chat with so many members and to meet new people.

The Social Workers Union (SWU) was pleased to attend the COMPASS Jobs Fair in Birmingham on March 20th in which we presented joint research findings on stress and working conditions and saw so many of you at the stand we shared with BASW England. We hope to also see our members and new faces at the COMPASS events later this year in Manchester and London!



## New SWU Assistant General Secretary announced

An exciting announcement was made during the event and through SWU's social media channels. SWU General Secretary John McGowan introduced the new SWU Assistant General Secretary Calum Gallacher. Calum has worked in health and social care for 24 years and is a practicing social worker, a SWU Union Contact, and he recently participated in the [SWU webinar "Stepping stones towards decent working conditions"](#) that explored key topics such as part-time work, tackling racial discrimination, neurodiversity, tackling burnout, and menopause support.



Throughout the event SWU National Organiser and Union Contact Manager Carol Reid engaged attendees who were interested in [becoming SWU Union Contacts](#) and more involved with the union. Carol works with every Union Contact to support them in their role of being the face and voice of SWU in workplaces, universities, and placements.

## “How in 2023 do we improve on stress and working conditions for UK social workers?”



Professor Jermaine Ravalier of Bath Spa University, Liz Howard of BASW England and SWU General Secretary John McGowan’s workshop “How in 2023 do we improve on stress and working conditions for UK social workers?” discussed how over the past 5 years there has been a distinct change in how social workers undertake their role and how juggling home/work life has become an ever-increasing issue.

Stress isn’t necessarily a bad thing in itself, but when it’s constant and daily then chronic work induced stress can have a significant impact on our physical and psychological health and wellbeing. Social workers will deal with about 10 stressful work situations a day, with an average of 50 interactions a week. This, combined with poor working conditions, is causing problems for our members. Sources of stress include:

- Working conditions not fit for the social work task
- A worrying increase in case loads
- A large percentage of Social Workers looking to change career
- Limited focus on recruiting more qualified permanent members of staff and over use of agency staff
- Social Workers are working, on average, 11 extra hours per week
- Social Workers having to work while ill to clear workload
  - Cost of agency staff and overuse
    - Social Work Managers should have adequate training

The joint research by BASW, SWU, and Bath Spa University has produced the [Social Worker Wellbeing and Working Conditions Good Practice Toolkit](#) to help practitioners, employers, and leaders achieve better working conditions. It is free to download and the toolkit includes a practical guide and a supported self-assessment and planning tool/approach.

The results of the joint BASW, SWU, and Bath Spa University 2022 re-launched survey on 'Social Work Working Conditions and Wellbeing' have highlighted significant ongoing concerns including:

- In 2019-2020, we shouted that 35% of social workers were looking to leave the job in the next 18 months.
- We are now experiencing the highest turnover in 5 years - up 16% in a year.
- The social work profession is experiencing the highest number of vacancies in 5 years.
- Employers are using the highest number of agency workers in a couple of years.

Social workers have told us that their sources of stress are related to caseloads, resources, workload, respect, and payment. However, despite shocking working conditions, there is some good news. Social workers are engaged with their jobs, only want the very best for service users, and want to support and encourage colleagues and the profession more widely.

What do we do next? After talking to thousands of social workers over surveys, 50+ interviews, and 4 focus groups we are taking a three-pronged approach to support social worker wellbeing: individual, group, and organisational. Team-level approaches include peer supervision, peer support, wellbeing guardians, and praise and celebration events. Organisational approaches include manageable workloads, reflective supervision, and a learning culture (not a blame culture).

A social worker asked what else we can do to influence and bring about change and John McGowan answered, *"We can't take our foot off the pedal. It's a hard task to get a voice for social work. The key is to be constant and to keep rattling doors, and to affect change we need to keep trying and gathering allies. As part of this I'm a member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Social Work and the Cross-Party Group on Social Work."*

BASW Professional Officer Liz Howard, who joined us to answer questions, also said, *"It's important to not wait for policy makers to decide - keep pressuring and creating change."*

A [Social Work Professional Support Service \(SWPSS\)](#) volunteer coach who was in attendance highlighted the free BASW coaching service that is available to all members.

John and Jermaine have also recently contributed a research paper to the British Journal of Social Work that focuses on what works, why, and the implications of both good and poor reflective supervision. ["A Rapid Review of Reflective Supervision in Social Work"](#) can be accessed for free by our members.

BASW England presented two engaging sessions at COMPASS Birmingham: BASW Policy and Campaigns Officer Josh Dixon's session discussed the [cost-of-living crisis](#) and what BASW England is doing to support social workers through this crisis. BASW Professional Officer Liz Howard's seminar "Homes not Hospitals: Supporting people to avoid admissions to hospital" focused on the activity from this [BASW England campaign](#) and the good practice guidance developed for social workers supporting autistic people and people with learning disabilities.



## Whatever legal help you need, we're there for you.

We are friendly, professional and affordable. And we work across the Trade Union movement.

In addition to our **free personal injury service**, SWU members receive **exclusive benefits** including:

- ▶ **10%** discount for wills and probate services
- ▶ **10%** discount for residential conveyancing and commercial property services
- ▶ **10%** discount for family and matrimonial law services
- ▶ **10%** discount for criminal/motoring offences and court litigation services

Visit [morrishsolicitors.com/socialworkersunion](https://morrishsolicitors.com/socialworkersunion) to find out more  
or call **033 3344 9600**



## The “Hormotional” Social Worker

SWU Executive Committee UK Representative Chrissie Beatty writes about her experience of menopause and the importance of workplace support and inclusion

As someone who has been a slave to my hormones, I was rather relieved when I first started experiencing the early signs of perimenopause - I thought the end was in sight! But any relief was short lived as the symptoms really kicked in. And it wasn't just hot flushes and night sweats; my waistline began to resemble a tree trunk, my skin was dry, my hair was breaking, I couldn't sleep, my once sharp brain and memory had been replaced with cotton wool and I sprouted a magical chin hair that could grow an inch between leaving home and getting to the office. It wasn't just physical changes; my emotions climbed aboard a rollercoaster Alton Towers would be proud of and I'd find myself sobbing over a McCain chips advert, or feeling pure rage because my Tesco trolley had a wobbly wheel.

At home, I could walk around in my big pants and baggy t shirt, with a family size Galaxy bar in each hand, while my teenage children would give each other knowing looks and keep out of my way. However, despite the steely resolve of social workers, this behaviour would probably raise some eyebrows in the office.

### **There is no ‘one size fits all’ menopause experience**

Everyone experiences menopause differently and while the average age to start having symptoms is between 45 and 55, it can occur at any age, as a result of surgery, illness, or an issue with the function of the ovaries. 8 out of 10 people have noticeable symptoms, and 1 in 4 experience severely debilitating symptoms. This can cause major and embarrassing problems for some, effecting personal relationships and leave them at odds with their professional image. The main symptoms causing problems at work include:

- hot flushes
- anxiety
- dizziness
- fatigue
- memory loss
- depression
- headaches
- recurrent urinary tract infections
- joint stiffness, aches and pains
- reduced concentration
- heavy periods

Before writing this, I asked my colleagues if they wanted to share their experiences of menopause with me. One told me she had been 35 when she first had symptoms and experienced such heavy bleeding that she was spending £70 a month on sanitary products and would regularly pass out at work. Another had been convinced that she was mentally ill and it nearly led to her marriage breaking up.

There were 2 recurrent themes in our conversations: one was difficulty in getting their GP to agree it was menopause and the second was that they felt they were the only one going through it - they all felt alone and isolated and too ashamed and embarrassed to talk about it, especially with their managers or colleagues.

I am so fortunate because I have found the holy grail in social work - I have an amazing manager! He asks us how we are, and he genuinely cares and will do all he can to support us. And while I can talk to him about anything, he is the first to say he doesn't know a great deal about menopause. We all know that the social work profession has a majority female work force; in the UK, only 14% of social workers

are men, but they hold 27% of management positions. That's a lot of men managing a lot of women, so it is vital for the wellbeing of the work force that they have an understanding of menopause and its impact at work.

## Menopause 'support' can be more well-meaning than helpful

A couple of years ago, I was delighted when the local authority emailed all staff about webinars they were running for "Menopause Awareness Month", to explore the subject and to offer advice on practical steps to manage symptoms. One called "Managing the Menopause with Style" caught my eye; I thought it might tell me how to breeze through the working day, whilst enduring the chaotic myriad of symptoms I was experiencing. I eagerly clicked on the link and read in disbelief that it was in fact, a webinar with a "colourist and stylist" who would offer advice on how to create a suitable wardrobe for this stage of life. I was hoping for sound, practical advice but instead I was going to learn what colour top would go best with my sweaty, aging skin.

As an optimist, I hope the thought behind it was well intentioned, after all, we can lose a sense of who we are and feel invisible, but this had a ring of "come on love, treat yourself to a nice top and you'll feel better." Maybe a webinar called "How to manage when your uniformed GP suggests you need anti-depressants rather than HRT" might have been more beneficial. To add insult to injury, the next event was titled "Planning for a Positive Retirement" because obviously once our ovaries dry up, we may as well give up. I took to the Women's Staff Network group chat to express my incredulity and found I was not alone. One colleague suggested they may have well just told us to cuddle a cat.

## Creating an open culture of menopause support in the workplace

I am pleased to say that things in my local authority have moved on in a short space of

time, probably as a result of the increased media attention that menopause is now getting, spear headed by the patron saint of menopause, Davina McCall. The staff intranet now has advice and policies relating to menopause and the reasonable adjustments that can be made for employees.

Legally, those experiencing challenges relating to menopause are protected under the Equality Act 2010. Menopause is largely covered under the three protected characteristics of age, sex and disability discrimination. And the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 covers safe working, which extends to working conditions when experiencing menopausal symptoms. There are simple changes that can be made by employers, including:

- Provide options for flexible working (e.g. working from home, temporary or permanent part time working or an adjustment to the employee's hours)
- the option to take rest breaks within the day
- providing a fan
- moving the employee's desk closer to a window that opens
- providing a private, quiet rest area
- allowing people to attend medical appointments during the working day
- being accommodating over the employee's start and finish times
- easy access to drinking water
- providing sanitary products in toilets
- provide storage to keep a change of clothes
- provide stationary to allow staff to keep notes to support their memory
- provide noise cancelling headphones to aid concentration

It is estimated that 14 million working days are lost to menopause each year and a survey last year found one in 10 people who worked during the menopause, had left a job due to their symptoms, while others had reduced their hours, gone part-time, or not applied for

promotion. A proposal was recently put forward by MPs for a trial of paid menopause leave, as a way to stop women being forced out of work by rigid sickness policies. However, the government rejected the plans, claiming it was unfair to men. I would counter that by saying it is unfair for women to have their life turned on its head by menopause.

For every organisation that adopts a menopause policy, makes reasonable adjustments and raises awareness of menopause, it is a step in the right direction. But to truly overcome ignorance and destigmatise menopause in the workplace, all companies, local authorities, health care trusts etc, need to commit to education and creating an open culture where menopause is openly discussed.

In the UK, the highest rate of suicide among women is between the ages of 45 and 49. Perhaps this is the ultimate hidden cost of menopause stigma, so opening up this conversation matters.

## **Inclusive menopause support**

I can't finish without expressing how important it is for employers to be trans and non-binary inclusive in the support they offer. Menopause

is often solely framed as something experienced by cisgender women, but members of the trans and non-binary community also experience menopause. Trans and non-binary people can encounter additional barriers to accessing menopause support for a number of reasons, including being unable to access support as they do not feel safe enough in the workplace to disclose or discuss their gender identity.

We can help all our colleagues achieve better outcomes by using inclusive language that welcomes people of any gender and focusing on individual needs rather than gendered assumptions. Inclusive language can be as simple as using correct pronouns for individuals (e.g he and him; they and them) and referring to 'women and anyone else experiencing the menopause' when talking in general about the menopause. As the discussion around menopause grows, let's make sure everyone's voice is heard.

Now where did I put that chocolate.....?

**Chrissie Beatty**  
**Social Worker**  
**Older People's Mental Health Team**

## **Social Media**

If you have not done so then please follow us on Social Media - we post and tweet regular updates about the work and developments of the Social Workers Union.

### **Monthly Newsletter**

Monthly newsletters are emailed to all SWU members. If you are not receiving this then please check what email address we have. The newsletters are also published on the web site.

### **SWU can be found on the following:**

Internet: <https://swu-union.org.uk>

Twitter: [https://twitter.com/SWU\\_UK](https://twitter.com/SWU_UK)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/socialworkersunionuk/](http://www.facebook.com/socialworkersunionuk/)

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@socialworkersunion>

Instagram: [www.instagram.com/socialworkersunion](https://www.instagram.com/socialworkersunion)

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/social-workers-union>

# SWU Honorary President releases new book

## Social Work and Proud 1850 - 2022

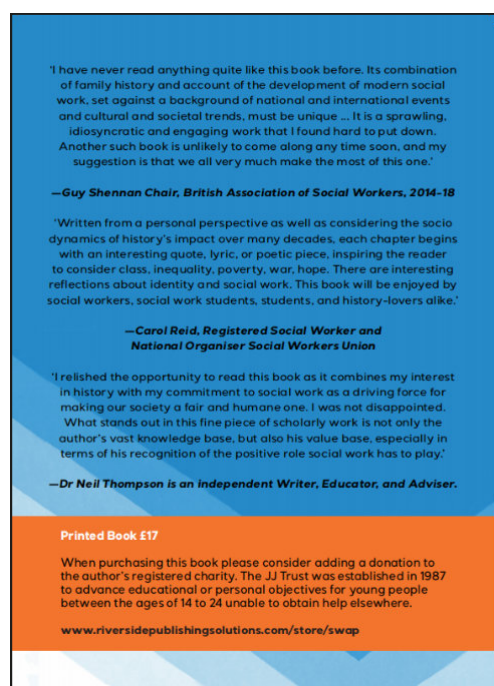
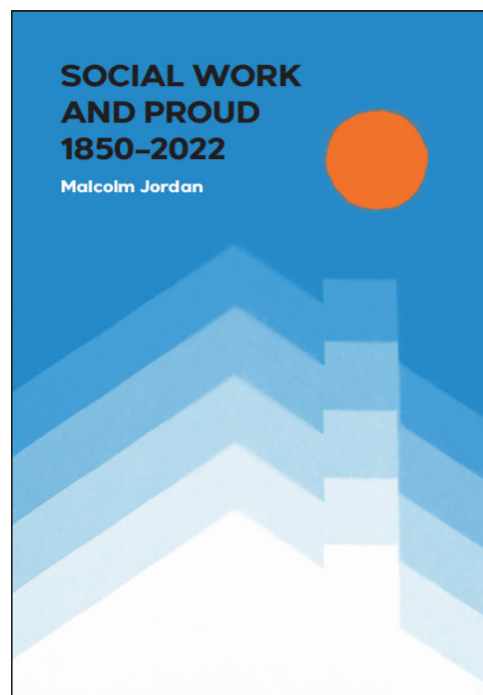
The call from my publisher announcing that *Social Work and Proud* was on its way to the printers was a wonderful shock. I had started working on the book thirty years ago, in my mid-fifties, and I have been writing it, on and off, since then. The realisation that this work was now finished and that there would soon exist an actual, physical book, took me a moment to grasp.

The idea for the book had begun when, whilst reflecting on my wild time as an evacuee during WWII; my post-war return to a school and a structure that I hated; National Service in both Egypt and Sudan; some weird jobs; my long service in social work and the changes within the profession over the years, I had felt there was an interesting personal and professional journey to share.

My family's photographs, documents and oral histories dated back to the 1850s. As professional social work began to appear around that same era, it seemed a good place to begin. I started work, charting the development and practice of social work, relating my own career experiences and telling the stories of family history, but I soon realised that the various factors that impinge on social work, the associated political and cultural changes and events, both national and international also needed inclusion. *Social Work and Proud* has been crafted over time, written with a great deal of thought and love and is laced with humour throughout.

Every book needs a cover and I was put in touch with the artist Alberta Jones. How to brief her? How to encapsulate the book's spirit? I referred her to two works of art that inspire me. The first, from Verdi's opera *Nabucco*, is the uplifting, chorus of the Israelites who bemoan their captivity whilst yearning for freedom. The second is the inspirational mural hanging at the United Nations and painted by Per Krohg. At the bottom of this piece is a dark place, where figures seek to escape from war and slavery but from which a white Phoenix rises, heading towards hopeful lands.

Priced at £17 plus p&p, customers are invited to add a contribution to the JJ Trust. Established by the author in 1987 to advance personal objectives for young people between 14 to 24, who are unable to obtain help elsewhere.



Available on this link: [www.riversidepublishingsolutions.com/store/swap](http://www.riversidepublishingsolutions.com/store/swap)

# Special BASW NI Community of Practice meet with the Social Workers Union (SWU) to learn about the SWU Campaign Fund



**Communities of Practice**

## Meet with the Social Workers Union

Thursday, 27 April, 12:30pm – 1:30pm

**MEMBER ONLY EVENT — REGISTRATION FREE**

**BASW**  
Northern Ireland  
The professional association for social work and social workers

**SWU** Social Workers Union

The General Secretary of the Social Workers Union (SWU), John McGowan, will visit BASW NI on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> April to discuss the work of the Union and how the [SWU Campaign Fund](#) could help social workers raise awareness of issues which they see in their work and among the vulnerable people they support.

The SWU Campaign Fund currently supports a range of activities from campaigning for more part-time social work roles through to improving bursaries for social work students. A key example of work supported by the SWU Campaign Fund is the successful campaign for the [creation of guidelines on media reporting of social workers](#).

Speaking about the event, John McGowan commented: *"Our Campaign Fund is there for social workers to help get their voice heard. No matter how big or small the challenge, if social work professionals think that having a campaign will help address the challenges that they see everyday, we are happy to receive applications for support from them."*

Simon Francis, founder member of [Campaign Collective](#) which has partnered with SWU to deliver the Campaign Fund, explains: *"We have now helped over ten groups of social workers through the Fund, but there is room for more and we would urge social workers in Northern Ireland to get in touch."*

SWU NI Rep Gerry Madden commented: *"SWU is looking forward to meeting online with NI members who are interested in joining the SWU and BASW NI together"*.

The event, which will be hosted online from 12:30pm - 1:30pm on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> April will feature a Q&A session with John McGowan, Gerry Madden and BASW NI Chair Orlaith McGibbon.

The event is also an opportunity to find out more about the [SWU Assignment Competition for Social Work Students](#).

For members unable to attend you can get in touch with SWU to discuss ideas by emailing [campaigns@swu-union.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@swu-union.org.uk). More information is available at <https://swu-union.org.uk/swu-campaign-fund>



**SWU** Social Workers Union

## Austerity Action Group

To Stand Side by Side we as social workers should always be looking for ways that enable the people we work with to understand their rights as Citizens to Participate (especially) in the democratic process of Voting in Local and General Elections. To that effect we have, over the last 5 years run a social media campaign '**Register to Vote**' & '**Use Your Vote**'. So simple, yet so effective and so empowering.

It's now over 50 years since Paulo Freire first published *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* a book that is as relevant today as it was then. He explains how people can be taken from disenfranchisement to enfranchisement through teaching people to read and to use those skills to read about the systems that govern them and to use that knowledge to effect change.

This year a change in the law has seen the Government run a proactive campaign to inform people that they will need to take PHOTO ID with them to the Polling Station. The Electoral Commission have produced an excellent leaflet that guides people through what to do and also recognises that some groups of people may need extra support.

Time for you to stand shoulder to shoulder and support the people you work with to exercise their right to vote.

[www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/voter-id?gclsrc=aw.ds](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/voter-id?gclsrc=aw.ds)

[www.gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote)

## Register to Vote & Use Your Vote

The Austerity Action Group is often found standing beneath the SWASUAA Banner - Social Workers and Service Users Against Austerity - its motto is Side By Side For Social Justice.

The #BootOutAusterity walkers say

**REGISTER to**

Register by 17 April it takes 2 minutes - then USE YOUR VOTE!

[www.gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote)

The #BootOutAusterity walkers say

**USE YOUR**

LOCAL ELECTIONS 4th May 2023

[www.gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote)



**Fuel Poverty Action**  
@FuelPovAction

## Energy For All Manifesto

<https://actionnetwork.org/forms/sign-the-energy-for-all-manifesto>

The Austerity Action Group is a member of FUEL POVERTY ACTION group whose campaigning has had some great successes over the last few weeks. Notably the recent changes in government (energy companies) policy on pre payment meters:

- the ceasing of automatic access to properties to change the meters, and
- the reducing of the cost of having a PPM to the same costs as a direct debit account.

On March 23<sup>rd</sup> it launched its ENERGY FOR ALL MANIFESTO to which SWU has added its name. We ask readers to forward the link to other organisations for them to sign.

FVA ask: *If you want to support e4a as an individual, please pass the Manifesto onto any groups, organisations or prominent figures you know and lobby your political representatives and union branch to sign! You can also sign the [Energy For All petition!](#)*



**SWU** Social Workers Union

Austerity Action Group

## Boot Out Austerity Marches On

Tuesday 18 April 6.30pm Wolverhampton

Pete Unwin & Angi Naylor will be joining up with **The Blakenhall Writers** once again at this **BASW Black Country Branch Event**. Do come along and support the event and learn what you can do to Boot Out Austerity

### Time

Tuesday, 18 April 2023 - 6:30pm to 9:00pm

### Location (see map)

The Lych Gate Tavern  
44 Queen Square  
Wolverhampton  
WV1 1TX  
United Kingdom

### Cost

FREE for members // £4.80 admin fee for non-members (free taster session available)

### Contact

BASW England

BASW

## BASW England Black Country Branch Event. Poverty: A Black Country Perspective

Poets and speakers will talk in an informal environment about poverty and the effects in the Black Country

Wolverhampton's poet laureate Kuli Kohli and the Blakenhall writers will be sharing poems, flash fictions, mini dramas, to stimulate discussion about poverty and inequality in the Black Country.

**BASW members who are unable to view a personalised message above are encouraged to [log-in](#) prior to booking for this event to ensure professional development is recorded within your membership record and attend the event for free.**

**Taster session available for non-members of BASW.\*** Non-members of BASW keen to learn more on the benefits of membership and receive updates on the valuable work we do are welcome to sign-up to our communication updates [here](#). When you sign-up, you'll automatically receive a registration code that can be used to waive the admin fee.

# The BASW Social Work Journalism Awards are open for nominations until April 28<sup>th</sup>

These awards will recognise outstanding reporting of social work and build on the new guidelines on media reporting of social workers launched by the Social Workers Union.



The [BASW Social Work Journalism Awards](#) are now open for entries! This is the UK's first award scheme that seeks to recognise journalism that shows an outstanding understanding of social work and the role of social workers. This could include the complex issues practitioners and the people they work with face, the challenging context in which they work, and the difference social workers make to people's lives.

The awards are supported by SWU which, together with Campaign Collective, published the new [Guidelines on media reporting of social workers](#). The guidelines were developed through the [SWU Campaign Fund](#) in 2022 after members of SWU came forward with harrowing stories about the impact of poor media reporting about the profession. This guidance and advice was approved by press regulator IMPRESS and supported by Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) and the National Union of Journalists (NUJ).

SWU General Secretary **John McGowan** said, *“Positive reporting covering the complex world of social work ensures accurate, fair and balanced reporting and not just a negative narrative. We need more balanced reporting covering the role that social workers play in all media outlets to ensure more people know about what social workers can do or have done to help the most vulnerable in our society.*

*“Positive reporting can build trust and it's vital to our profession. We all know that social work continues to be an incredibly challenging profession with high stress levels in the workplace and excessive caseloads, but social workers love their actual jobs and are highly engaged professionals.*

*“I would encourage journalists to enter the competition and to share it with friends and other journalists. I would also encourage social workers to nominate good journalism they think deserves recognition over this past year.”*

## Who can enter or be nominated for these awards?

Any UK journalist working in print or broadcast in the national, regional, and specialist media can enter or be nominated. The awards are for any report published or broadcast during 2022 up until the entry closing date of April 28<sup>th</sup>.

Nominations can come from individual journalists, media organisations, social workers, and members of the public. **Nominations can be received until 6pm on April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023.**

## How do I enter or nominate someone?

All nominations should be sent to [awards@basw.co.uk](mailto:awards@basw.co.uk). Entries need to be made digitally which includes PDFs, URLs, or using a download link created on WeTransfer. URLs must be available until the end of June 2023 by non-subscription. File download links are acceptable. Please include a short description of no more than 250 words briefly explaining why you think the piece deserves to be recognised. If you have any queries email [awards@basw.co.uk](mailto:awards@basw.co.uk)

The awards are split across the three categories of mainstream print journalism, mainstream broadcast journalism (including podcasts), and specialist trade print. Each category contains two awards: one for news reporting and the other for more in-depth feature pieces.

Shortlisted winners will be informed on May 19<sup>th</sup> and invited to an award ceremony at BASW's annual conference in Birmingham on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The winners will be announced at an evening awards reception.

---

## Working together to rise to the challenges

### Dr Neil Thompson discusses the importance of maintaining a stable workforce

There is a strong emphasis these days on the recruitment and retention of staff. A number of factors have combined to create a situation where filling all available vacancies is proving difficult, if not impossible. And, in some settings, as soon as vacancies are filled, new ones are created.

I have spoken to a number of managers over the past couple of years who have told me how much of a strain it has become to get the work done. It is very easy for a vicious circle to develop in which staff shortages place immense pressures on existing staff, those pressures can lead to staff leaving, which then exacerbates the initial problem. It has become clear to me from these conversations that there has been a major focus on recruiting staff to fill the vacancies.

While such an emphasis makes sense, there is a danger that it squeezes out of the picture the significance of retention. That is, if we are not careful, we spend so much time and effort focusing on gaining new staff that we don't pay enough attention to why staff were

leaving in the first place. It's a bit like devoting so much time and effort to bailing out the water from a leaking boat that we have little time or energy left to fix the leak.

The growing body of SWU research has highlighted how poor working conditions are a key factor, and so there is much that we can learn from this. A common response to this has been the claim that there is not enough money available to improve the working conditions. But what this line of argument fails to recognise is just how expensive it is to tackle the staff shortages issue. On the one hand, there are significant costs involved in recruiting staff: advertising, organising or attending recruitment events, shortlisting, interviewing, onboarding and training. Investing in better conditions could actually save money.

On the other hand, there is the growing use of agency staff. While I am aware that there are many agency staff who do a great job and are often essential for keeping the ship afloat, the cost to the employing organisation is significantly higher than through a conventional employment arrangement.

There are also human costs in terms of the strain put on staff as a result of the instability and constant change of personnel. Teamwork can then suffer and another vicious circle can be created. Teams have a key role to play in terms of health and well-being, in the sense that a supportive, empowering and nurturing team can be a huge boost to morale, energy levels and a sense of feeling valued, supported and safe. A lack of teamwork brought about by considerable uncertainty and instability can, by contrast, not only fail to provide those positives, but also actually add to the pressures and contribute to a sense of helplessness that can lead to burnout.

And, of course, these negatives make the job more challenging by making it much more difficult to develop high-quality well-thought-out practice delivered with confidence and assurance.

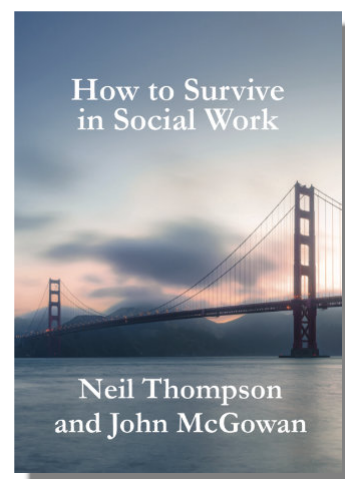
There are, of course, no easy answers to this far from satisfactory situation, but there are things we can do - individually and collectively - to move in the right direction. Through SWU we can continue to campaign for better working conditions and more support, while

also seeking to support one another through better teamwork where we do our best to create a united front in rising to the significant challenges we face. Unfortunately, significant pressures will often push people apart, just at the time when we need the solidarity and strength to pull together and help one another through the storm.

### **Dr Neil Thompson**

is an independent writer, educator and adviser and a visiting professor at the Open University. His contributions to tackling the challenges we face include co-writing, with John McGowan, *How to Survive in Social*

*Work*, contributing to the development of the Vigoroom health and wellbeing platform ([www.vigoroom.co.uk](http://www.vigoroom.co.uk)) and acting as an ambassador for SWU. His website, with his acclaimed *Manifesto for Making a Difference*, is at [www.NeilThompson.info](http://www.NeilThompson.info).



## **Would you like access to Neil Thompson's range of e-learning courses?**

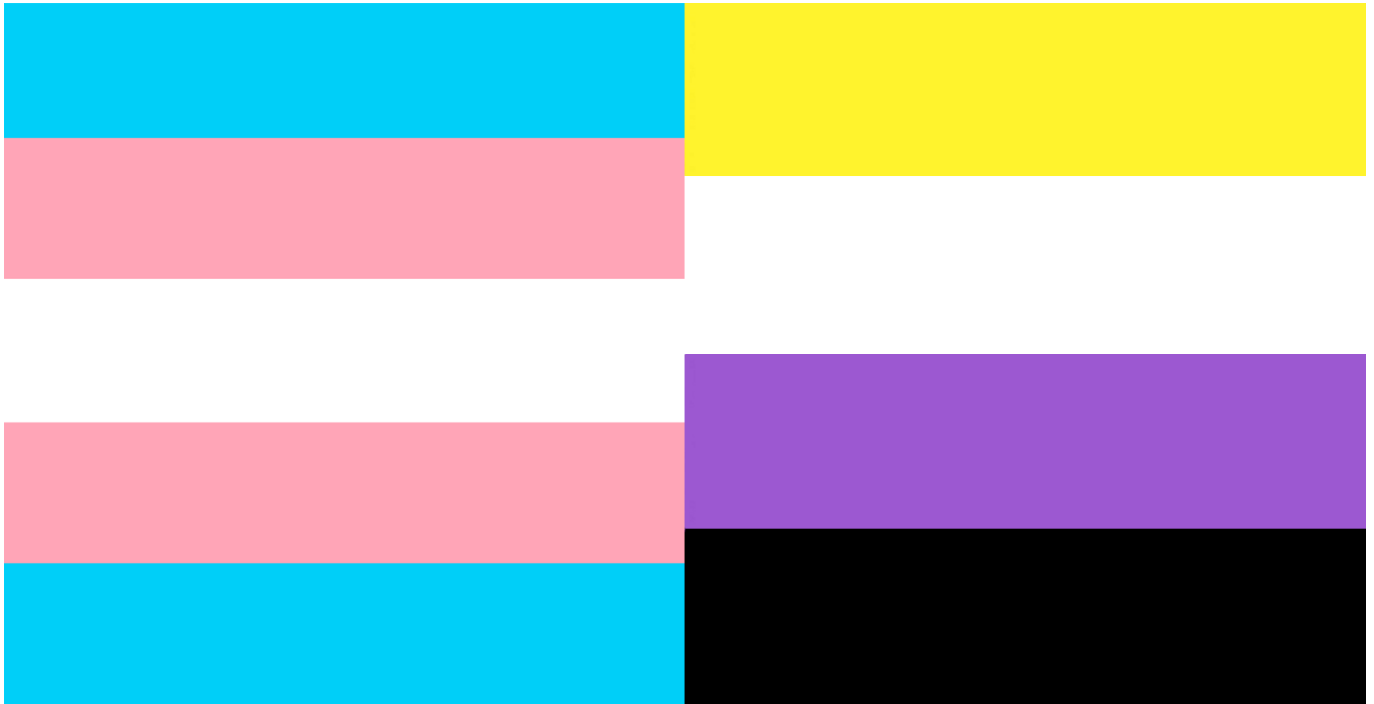
Over the past ten years SWU ambassador Neil Thompson has developed a total of 60 e-learning courses on a variety of subjects. He has recently launched a subscription service whereby employing organisations can give up to 300 of their staff unlimited access to all the courses over a 12-month period for a fee that makes this extremely good value.

If having access to these courses appeals to you, then direct your workforce development team to:

[www.NeilThompson.info/subscription-service/](http://www.NeilThompson.info/subscription-service/)

where they can find out more about how valuable a resource this is.

# SWU statement in support of the transgender and non-binary community



The SWU Executive Committee were deeply saddened by the tragic murder of Brianna Ghey, whose family described her as “a much loved daughter, granddaughter, and baby sister. She was a larger than life character who would leave a lasting impression on all that met her. Brianna was beautiful, witty and hilarious. Brianna was strong, fearless and one of a kind.”

Before her death, Brianna was bullied and beaten at school, simply for being herself. This is not an isolated incident; it occurred within the context of transphobic narratives being perpetuated by the media and senior politicians and a [sharp increase in transphobic hate crime](#). The [Trans Lives Survey 2021](#) found that 85% of trans women reported being subjected to transphobic street harassment from strangers, with 71% of trans men and 73% of non-binary people saying the same. Official statistics from the Home Office show that Transphobic hate crimes have increased by 56% over the last year, although the [National LGBT Survey](#) found that more than nine in ten of the most serious incidents went unreported, suggesting the true figure is much higher.

In the workplace, 80% of non-binary people reported having experienced transphobia from colleagues, compared to 73% of trans men and 73% of trans women. Trade Unions have an essential role to play in tackling all forms of discrimination, including [transphobia](#), which is defined as but not limited to:

- Attempting to remove trans people’s rights
- Misrepresenting trans people
- Abuse
- Systematically excluding trans people from discussions about issues that directly affect them
- Other forms of discrimination

The consequences of transphobia and the increasingly hostile environment in the UK mean that trans and non-binary people are struggling to live safely and openly in our society. The central social work principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities compel us as social workers to stand in opposition to oppression, social exclusion, and stigmatisation of the transgender and non-binary community.

SWU and those who represent it are committed to acting with integrity and principles in line with the [BASW Code of Ethics](#). SWU recognises [the BASW Position Statement on Social Work with Transgender People](#) as an important step in supporting social work practice, and is committed to work in partnership with the transgender and non-binary community to promote respect and dignity for diversity and challenge oppression and social exclusion.

SWU Chair Dave Callow said, *“I’m delighted that SWU has coproduced this statement of solidarity with the transgender and non-binary community*

*and give it my full support. Voices from marginalised communities need to be heard and their lived experience must inform our work towards a more caring and inclusive society. Solidarity, now and across future generations of social workers, is key to developing partnerships and relationships with marginalised communities to ensure that no one is left behind.”*

We will continue to offer support for our trans and non-binary members who may be experiencing harassment or discrimination work. SWU stands in solidarity with the transgender and non-binary community.

## The Future of Children’s Care

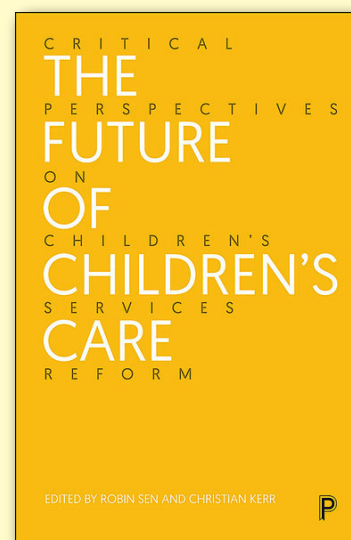
This coming July sees the release of a new book, *The Future of Children’s Care: Critical Perspectives on Children’s Services Reform*, edited by social work academics Robin Sen of Edinburgh University and Christian Kerr of Leeds Beckett University. The collection brings together the perspectives of a range of contributors with different experiences and expertise, lived and professional. Each of the chapters shines a light on aspects of children’s services reform. The chapters also adopt, to varying degrees, a critical lens on the recent MacAlister Review of Children’s Social Care in England.

Covering children’s rights, race, perspectives from direct experiences of the family courts and the care system, the influence of policy networks and an emerged ‘social work industrial complex’, kinship care, adoption, the social model and the importance of dissent as countervailing force against hegemonic control of public policy, the chapters are united in advocating for how children’s services policy and practices can and should be different, with a diverse group of authors proposing a variety of views on what those changes should be.

Ahead of the book’s publication, the editors are hosting a series of podcasts with chapter authors in which they discuss themes and issues explored in the book. The first, with therapist, children’s residential care worker, writer and campaigner, John Radoux, who initiated and led an open letter to government calling for a review of children’s social care which gathered several hundred signatories prior to the announcement of the MacAlister Review, is available now: <https://soundcloud.com/future-of-childrens-care/future-of-childrens-care-podcast-ep-1-john-radoux>. Further episodes with chapter authors are scheduled and will be released in the near future.

*The Future of Children’s Care: Critical Perspectives on Children’s Services Reform* is available to pre-order from the publisher, Policy Press, and will be available from the usual outlets.

[Policy Press | The Future of Children’s Care - Critical Perspectives on Children’s Services Reform, Edited by Robin Sen and Christian Kerr \(bristoluniversitypress.co.uk\)](#)



# SWU Campaign Fund update: Secretary of State questioned on England social work bursaries



Emma Lewell-Buck MP

"To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to take steps to help improve (a) the equality of distribution of and (b) access to bursaries for student social workers."

House of Commons  
written question 6 March 2023

## A new front in the fight for fair treatment of social work students was opened in March.

**Emma Lewell-Buck MP** (Labour, South Shields) laid down a challenge to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to set out what steps the Government will take to improve the equality of distribution of - and access to - bursaries for student social workers.

In a response, Health Minister **Helen Whately** (Conservative, Faversham & Mid Kent) said the Government has "*no plans*" to assess the adequacy of student bursaries in the coming year.

Emma Lewell-Buck MP said, "*As more and more public and support services are crumbling, social workers are needed more than ever. Bursary support is vital to grow the profession and ensure the most vulnerable in society get the help they need. Instead of recognising this, once again the Government are disrespecting the profession.*"

Student bursaries for social workers in England are currently distributed unequally and only around one in six students benefit from them as they are limited in number. Where bursaries are available, the funding for them has been frozen for over eight years resulting in a real-terms cut in support for many students.

In addition, bursaries available have been capped at the same numbers (1,500 postgraduate and 2,500 undergraduate) since 2013.

Students on social work courses often complete front-line work as part of their courses, helping the most vulnerable in society. This means many social work students face unique levels of financial hardship as they are unable to work part-time while completing their studies.

One of the students involved in the campaign, **Sarah Harrison**, commented:

*"I was fortunate that I was accepted on the 'Step Up To Social Work' programme, which comes with a bursary. However, the year I applied there were over 4,000 applications and there were just 66 spaces. There's no way I would have studied had it not been for this programme as I could not have the uncertainty of income for my family."*

**John McGowan**, General Secretary of the Social Workers Union (SWU), commented:

*"These questions in Parliament are the first step in our campaign and are designed to understand the Government's position on bursaries in England. It is disappointing that the Government will not look at this structural unfairness, but from here we can now start to campaign for change to the existing system."*

Currently undergraduates on social work courses can get a £4,862.50 bursary which is not means tested (£5,262.50 for study in London). This includes an allowance towards placement expenses.

Postgraduate funding offers £4,052 per year towards tuition fees, a basic bursary of £3,362 (£3,762 in London) plus a means-tested element of up to £2,721 (£4,201 in London).

Students can also get income-assessed grants for childcare or if they support another adult financially. Some students may only be eligible for tuition fee support, depending on their residence history.

Unsuccessful bursary applicants are also awarded support, with a placement travel allowance of £862.50 per year and students can still currently access financial support from student finance through maintenance loans.

**Rebekah Pierre**, BASW Professional Officer, added:

*"At a time of a recruitment crisis in social work, [with 8.6% having left the profession in 2020-2021](#) in England, the government must act quickly to attract and retain practitioners.*

*"That must start with action to level up the bursary system for all. In a profession which aspires to be anti-oppressive, it beggars belief that students are prevented from completing - let alone entering - their courses due to policies which are entrenched in austerity.*

*"How can social work students be expected to support others, when they themselves are desperately struggling to survive the cost-of-living crisis?"*

*"Students are the future of social work, and without investing in them, the profession as a whole is put at risk. The time for well-meaning words is over - it is time for politicians to put their money where their mouth is."*

Activity in England is the latest in a series of campaigns by the [SWU Campaign Fund](#) to push for better bursaries for students across the UK. In early 2022 the Fund supported Welsh students in successfully calling for the Welsh Government to [increase funding for student support by 50%](#).

In Scotland, students had their petition for bursaries for third and fourth year students [heard in the Scottish Parliament on 22<sup>nd</sup> March](#).

## Recent SWU Blogs

- <https://swu-union.org.uk/2023/02/swu-and-basw-sign-together-through-this-crisis-open-letter-calling-for-government-action-to-stop-this-cost-of-living-crisis>
- <https://swu-union.org.uk/2023/02/swu-statement-in-support-of-the-transgender-and-non-binary-community>
- <https://swu-union.org.uk/2023/03/social-work-students-set-for-their-day-in-parliament>
- <https://swu-union.org.uk/2023/03/swu-announces-theme-for-2023-world-social-work-day-essay-competition>
- <https://swu-union.org.uk/2023/03/secretary-of-state-questioned-on-england-social-work-bursaries>
- <https://swu-union.org.uk/2023/03/gftu-history-questions-answers-with-dr-edda-nicolson>
- <https://swu-union.org.uk/2023/03/what-has-ziggy-stardust-got-to-do-with-social-workers-learning>
- <https://swu-union.org.uk/2023/03/msps-to-debate-social-work-petition-on-march-22>
- <https://swu-union.org.uk/2023/03/msps-back-social-work-bursaries-petition>
- <https://swu-union.org.uk/2023/03/swu-and-basw-england-at-the-birmingham-compass-jobs-fair-2023>
- <https://swu-union.org.uk/2023/03/learning-to-deliver-affirmative-care-to-lgbtq-people-in-later-life>
- <https://swu-union.org.uk/2023/03/special-basw-ni-community-of-practice-with-the-social-workers-union-on-april-27>

## Recent Press re the Bursaries campaigns

- <https://www.sundaypost.com/news/scottish-news/social-work-students-accuse-ministers-of-failing-to-understand-bursary-calls>
- <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2023/03/23/msps-agree-to-raise-campaign-for-social-work-student-bursaries-campaign-with-ministers>
- <https://therooftop.news/2023/03/13/social-work-students-set-for-their-day-in-parliament>
- <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2023/03/15/government-has-no-plans-to-review-level-of-social-work-bursaries-despite-nine-year-freeze>
- <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/politics/4207906/social-work-students-accuse-ministers-of-failing-to-understand-bursary-calls>
- <https://www.socialworktoday.co.uk/News/Student-social-workers-in-Scotland-to-have-petition-for-better-support-heard-by-MSPs>
- <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/b/social-work-bursaries-be-debated-holyrood>
  - <https://therooftop.news/2023/02/27/charities-unite-to-help-households>

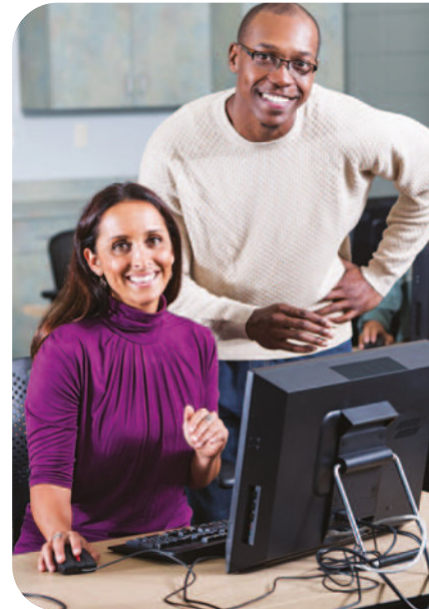
Only **£25** a year with your present BASW membership (**£10** a year for students)

Every year, the Social Workers Union skilled TU Officers help Social Workers with a range of different situations, from the small and easily resolved, to more significant and prolonged conduct issues. Disciplinary and grievance procedures, including representation at internal hearings - this is only guaranteed if you are a SWU member.

Remember - investigations into professional social work practice and allegations of misconduct - where this is done by your employer, representation is only guaranteed\* if you are a member of SWU.

SWU sits on the National Executive of the General Federation of Trade Unions. Have a look at the access you get as a member of GFTU training and development. SWU is one of the fastest growing unions in the UK - be part of the progress.

Being part of a strong growing trade union is a vital and recognised way of successfully being part of the Trade Union movement. Help us campaign for better working conditions, pay and professional recognition. If you want to join SWU or learn more about becoming actively involved as a Union Contact get in touch: carol.reid@swu-union.org.uk or email SWU Admin: joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk



### Belong to a Social Work union that:

- is lobbying MPs and Peers to improve working conditions for social workers.
- partners with organisations to support good working conditions and with opportunities to be active as a SWU Union Contact.
- campaigns to change legislation bills.
- collaborates with external unions and continue to be active through membership of General Federation of Trade Unions and ongoing union campaigns.
- funds the Austerity Action Group and opportunities to get involved.

### As a SWU member you get:

- Full guaranteed employment representation\*
- Free advice and support from A&R and Union Contacts
- Free financial health check from Lighthouse Group
- 10% off Morrish Solicitors
- General Federation of Trade Unions free training courses
- Discounted training from Avenue Professional Group (Dr Neil Thompson)
- Opportunity to be active as part of the trade union movement
- Monthly Newsletter

*\*Terms and conditions apply regarding new members and levels of representation*

Please check your membership to continue or opt in to being a SWU Member through BASW membership

Find SWU on the following:



<https://swu-union.org.uk>



<https://www.facebook.com/socialworkersunionuk>



<https://www.linkedin.com/company/social-workers-union>



<https://www.youtube.com/@socialworkersunion>



[https://twitter.com/SWU\\_UK](https://twitter.com/SWU_UK)



<https://www.instagram.com/socialworkersunion>



[swu-admin@swu-union.org.uk](mailto:swu-admin@swu-union.org.uk)