

Warm words from your General Secretary

I do hope you enjoy this bumper July / August edition of the newsletter, and we will be back in September. Once more it reinforces a lot of activity from the union.

Currently, I am at the General Federation of Trade Unions in my capacity as Vice President, preparing for the pre-launch of the 2025/2026 Training/Education Booklet. This booklet will offer a variety of courses available at no cost to all SWU members. The courses will be shared on Monday, 14th July.

I enjoyed attending the BASW AGM and Conference last month and the launch of the new Working Conditions 2025 Campaign. It is very important to spend time on our stall and meeting with members.

This is important as the success of the union is based on listening to members and being genuinely interested in member engagement. I was pleased to hear about the impact our successful campaign fund is having as we reach out and support member led campaigns. At the BASW Conference I was pleased to attend the Journalist Awards which once more

builds on the relationship between Professional Association and Specialist Trade Union. Thanks to everyone who participated in the ITV study, and I was pleased that this work from ITV and SWU won a main award for the respected journalist Daniel Hewitt.

The union continues to grow in strength and from all at SWU and the SWU Executive your ongoing support



ITV News journalist Daniel Hewitt (right) and producer Isabel Alderson-Blench (left), receive their award at the 2025 BASW Social Work Journalism Awards with SWU General Secretary John McGowan (centre)

is important. As a SWU member, you will know that Employment Representation from a knowledgeable person who knows the profession inside and out is important. The Trade Union A&R Team are at the forefront of these organisations and if you ever need their services then you can be assured of professionalism from a staff team who understand the profession. In addition, SWU remains active with BASW, the Austerity Action Group, General Federation of Trade Unions and the SWU Campaign Fund - promoting activism and there are always opportunities to be involved with the union through being a Union Contact in the workplace.

The planning for the SWU AGM is starting now and once more this will be a virtual AGM. Further details will be emailed to members late August on how you can access the AGM and joining instructions. I am delighted to say that we will be having a free to attend 'in -person' SWU conference in Manchester on Saturday 6th September. The conference planning group will be meeting soon to firm up the details and we will share once available with details on how to book your place.

The SWU Assignment Competition has been successful once more and the entries were all high quality. The judges were busy with reading and trying to come up with the winning 4 entries but managed it well.

Feel free to contact us for any additional information. We have arranged 'Meet the SWU Team' on Thursday 21st August 12.30 - 1.30pm. Please book your free place here: <https://basw.co.uk/events/meet-swu-team>. We look forward to meeting you, and if you have any issues with booking please contact joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk.

Finally, as we move towards the hotter weather it's important to get your working conditions right, although there is no official legal maximum (or minimum) working temperatures in the UK, which makes it difficult to say when it is too hot to work. However, the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 or (NI) 1993 place a legal duty on employers to provide a 'reasonable' temperature in the workplace. What is reasonable will depend on the workplace, the type of work, whether workers have any disabilities, medical conditions and other factors.

Employers are required by law to make a suitable assessment of the risks to the health and safety of their employees. Heat is classed as a hazard and comes with legal obligations like any other hazard.

Hope you all have a lovely summer and enjoy this edition of the newsletter.

John McGowan
General Secretary

j.mcgowan@swu-union.org.uk



Social Media

If you have not done so then please follow us on Social Media - we post 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

Facebook: www.facebook.com/socialworkersunionuk/

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

Instagram: www.instagram.com/socialworkersunion

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

Bluesky: <https://bsky.app/profile/swu-uk.bsky.social>

Talk to SWU at our free workplace issues webinar on 11th August 2025: Disability and your rights at work

Our Advice & Representation (A&R) Service has been receiving a high volume of calls from members experiencing disability discrimination in the workplace, so we will focus on this topic as well as any other workplace issues attendees are experiencing.

In the UK several pieces of legislation protect workers' rights and provide a legal basis for challenge. The Equality Act (2010) specifies the protected characteristics people have a right to protection from discrimination, harassment, and unfair treatment at work.

It is illegal for employers to discriminate against employees when they are aware of protected characteristics. There is a duty for organisations to individually risk assess with staff and to consider where appropriate the required reasonable adjustments so as to input supports where needed for the individual to be able to achieve their potential at work. Feeling recognised, valued, and supported at work can have a significant impact on our overall health and well-being – both professionally and socially. It undoubtedly contributes to positive working environments, achieves more for people accessing support, and contributes to overall greater efficacy and retention of staff within the team or organisation.

Despite there being expectations and duties, how reasonable adjustments are implemented in workplaces can be inconsistent. If you have informed your employer about any challenges you are having at work which are linked to a protected characteristic and they have not acted to assess or support this could be discrimination.

Talk to SWU about workplace issues

We invite all social workers and social work students in the UK to talk directly with the Social Workers Union (SWU) on **Monday, 11 August 2025** from **6:00pm to 7:00pm**.

This online advice and representation session is **free** to attend and will focus on the on the intersection of disability and your rights at work. A panel of Advice & Representation (A&R) Trade Union Officers will answer your live questions about this and any other workplace issues you are experiencing. This webinar is a safe space where **questions can be asked anonymously**.

You have until 2pm on August 11th to register your place for this Talk to SWU webinar:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScaVmVbBOLQPXGUR4uPouO-dfCFTcR7gRAYhwYgYIQOnUPn_w/viewform?usp=header



Talk to SWU Social Workers Union
workplace issues webinar

Can I submit a question ahead of time?

If you would like to submit a question in advance you may include it when you fill out the registration form for the webinar. Please ensure that questions are concise and avoid going into very specific details.

If you are a member with a complex workplace issue that requires a longer discussion, we encourage you to call the [Advice & Representation Service](#) and speak to one of our duty initial response team.

Interested in seeing what a Talk to SWU webinar is like?

You can watch the previous session here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?V=cM8EsOT3WM8>

18th March 2025
18:00 – 19:00
Opportunity for questions to
Advice & Representation
Trade Union Officers

Follow SWU on social media:

[in](#) [f](#) [X](#) [Instagram](#) [YouTube](#)

The only UK specialist union for Social Workers

Talk to SWU Social Workers Union
workplace issues webinar

Support available to SWU and BASW members

The BASW and SWU Advice & Representation (A&R) team has developed [55 guidance sheets](#) to support our social worker members from their first day of membership. These documents cover a wide range of employment law matters and on fitness to practice processes.

BASW members become eligible for telephone advice after just one month of membership. If you opt-in to SWU at the same time as joining BASW then you will also be eligible to receive representation from a SWU Trade Union Official after the one-month qualifying period. Please note that to qualify for advice and / or representation, the issue cannot have been a known pre-existing issue or active during the one-month qualifying period.

You can [read here about the benefits of being a member of SWU](#) including access to [GFTU training](#) - so remember to opt into SWU with your BASW membership!

Parliamentary monitoring report - June 2025



MP support

- **Sian Berry** - met with SWU Chair Dave Callow 23rd June

SWU and BASW All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Work

- **Ian Byrne** - to be Chair of APPG
- **Provisional date** for inaugural meeting Tuesday 15th July
- Official launch reception planned for September / October
- Three areas of focus: workforce; anti-poverty, reform agenda

Key issues and debates that mentioned social workers this month

Assisted Dying Bill - further debate on the inclusion of social workers on the panel to provide oversight of the process in each case.

Autism Act 2009 - in April 2025, the House of Lords Committee on the Autism Act 2009 launched a Call for Evidence to mark World Autism Acceptance Day.

Witnesses described how as health and social workers they had to support the needs of the whole person and how they ensured social workers were equipped with the right skills and knowledge.

Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill - second reading - cited that BASW raised concerns about the impact of the legislation on vulnerable children - that children are still being wrongly treated as adults. They called for the repeal of provisions from the Nationality and Borders Act that enable these practices. The lack of safe legal pathways for children and families, arguing that the Bill misses a crucial opportunity to address why people take dangerous journeys in the first place.

Casey Review - questions resulting from statement - House of Lords - what action Government will be taking to ask agencies including social workers to review working practices.

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill - House of Lords -

- **Social work standards** - Minister announces new post-qualifying standards for social workers
- **Proposal for a Children's/Independent Guardian** to provide ongoing support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Comment that while social workers offer important caring support, they might not have the requisite understanding of the asylum system and may change too frequently. Cost saving quoted, "[*of over £62 million, arising from reductions in social work time, police resources, interpreting time, judicial and legal expenses.*](#)"
- **Court reports** - proposed amendment by Baroness Barran to probe and [get on record confirmation from the government that only qualified social workers will be able to prepare reports ordered by the courts.](#) She quoted concern expressed by BASW about the revised Working Together guidance that removed the [requirement for Section 17 or children in need assessments to be done by a qualified social worker](#) given the gravity of decisions that are taken based on these reports. The amendment was withdrawn on the agreement that a letter of assurance based on Baroness Blake's (Govt) speech would be sent to Baroness Barran (Opp) regarding the quality and supervision of the reports.
- **Agency workers** - (Clause 19) intends to regulate their use more tightly. In the debate concern was expressed about their high costs and lack of continuity, with agency workers reportedly being three times more likely to leave mid-assessment than permanent staff. Discussion about workforce trends with use of agency workers decreasing. Concerns raised about pay disparity between agency and permanent staff.
- **Children in need plans** - stated that social workers [have expressed frustration with the system that burdens them with process but does not enable them to deliver change.](#)
- **Sibling relationships** - mention of the research done by social workers that emphasises the importance of sibling relationships for children going into care.
- **Physical punishment of children** - mention that BASW supported the amendment to protect children from assault and battery. Cited that [over half of social workers and teachers said the current law makes their work of safeguarding children more difficult.](#)

Debate: Report from the Preterm Birth Committee Preterm birth: 'reducing risks and improving lives' - [more understanding by social workers and counsellors](#) needed.

Education Committee - evidence session. [Evidence that says that young people with multiple changes in their personal advisors and social workers are more likely to become NEET.](#)

General Debate on Fifth Anniversary of COVID-19 Pandemic - James Asser MP praises frontline workers including social workers

Home-based working committee (HoL) evidence session - witness flagged that **child protection social workers** face unique challenges with remote and hybrid working because of the emotionally demanding nature of the role. New starters in social work are particularly vulnerable, as they may struggle to build those essential connections remotely.

Mental Health Bill

- [Introduces new duties on hospital managers to provide information about complaints procedures to patients. The Department will work with the NHS, Social Work England to develop appropriate training on the reforms.](#) (HL)
- Anna Dixon MP praises social workers for their strong and excellent role when dealing with people in mental distress.
- Acknowledgement of good practice and emphasis on the need for a collaborative approach to develop a culture of excellence.

Public Accounts Committee - **Improving family court services for children** - witness evidence sessions. Discussion on a backlog of cases which is for different reasons in different areas - including shortage of capacity of judiciary and social workers.

Fran Oram, (former) Director of Children's Social Care Strategy and Care System, Department for Education stated there were now 34,300 child and family social workers, which is 3.7% up from the previous year, and a record number since data began being collected on this in 2017 and cases per full-time social worker had reduced from 17.3 in 2017 to 15 today - the lowest caseload since data was collected so the system was moving in the right direction.

Also that "[we're seeing positive signs that people want to join social work, they stay in social work longer than they were.](#)" However, witnesses said that it was more challenging to recruit and retain social workers in London - or for any role in the MoJ. Evidence given on Pathfinder model was that about 200 more social workers were required to make it work.

Social Mobility Policy Committee - witness session - concern about the 'brain drain' out of rural areas and need for affordable housing for social workers.

Current inquiries and legislation

| Name | Inquiry /stage | Key dates/Action |
|---|---|--|
| Assisted Dying Bill | House of Lords - 2 nd Reading | TBC |
| Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill Committee | HoL - Committee stage | Ongoing - consideration of further amendments |
| Mandatory Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse) Bill | Committee stage (line-by-line) HoL | To be scheduled |
| Mental Health Bill | Public Bill Committee | Report to House by 26 th June |
| Education Select Committee | Children's Social Care | To be scheduled |
| Health and Social Care Committee | Community Mental Health Services | Oral evidence sessions taking place |
| H&SC Committee | Adult Social Care Reform Report published | Government response on 5 th July |
| H&SC Select Committee | Inquiry - The first 1000 days of life | Oral evidence sessions held. Next step TBC |
| APPG on Adult Social Care | No current inquiries | Held a Parliamentary Reception on 4 th June. The APPG also used this reception to launch a report on co-production recommendations for the Independent Com-mission on Adult Social Care |
| APPG Care-Experienced Children and Young People | No current inquiries | Held an event in Parliament in June - see TikTok video online |
| APPG Households in Temp Accommodation | New report England's Homeless Children: The crisis in temporary accommodation | No meetings planned |
| APPG on Poverty & Inequality | Inquiry - Disproportionate Impact of Poverty and Inequality on Disabled people | Published its report from its inquiry into the disproportionate impact of poverty and inequality on disabled people |

Congratulations to the 2025 BASW Social Work Journalism Award winners



These awards are supported by SWU as part of a wider joint campaign to improve public perceptions of social work. As part of this wider joint campaign to improve public perceptions of social work, SWU launched [guidelines on media reporting of social workers](#) in 2022. This guidance, produced in consultation with the UK press regulator IMPRESS, helps journalists report on social work in a more accurate, fair, and balanced way.

The BASW awards - in turn - celebrate journalism across the UK that demonstrated an excellent understanding of social work with creative, informed, and sensitive reporting. [This year's winners](#) across the eight categories showcased powerful journalism that took an in-depth look at poverty, the state of social work, and lived experience stories.

SWU is proud to have worked with journalists on two of the winning entries for the categories “Written journalism in national media” and “Broadcast journalism in national media”.

Congratulations to Rosa Silverman at *The Telegraph* and Daniel Hewitt at *ITV News* on their Social Work Journalism Awards wins!

Rosa Silverman worked with SWU to take an in-depth journalistic look at the many daily challenges social workers face trying to protect children like Sara Sharif. [Click here to read the full article “How Britain’s social services are failing - and Sara Sharif is the tip of the iceberg” which was published in The Telegraph on 12th December 2024.](#)

Rosa said, “What happened to Sara Sharif is heartbreaking and shocking. Stories like hers inevitably draw attention to the people who were meant to be helping her, and raise



questions about what went wrong. Taking an in-depth journalistic look at the many challenges social workers face on a daily basis when trying to protect children like Sara can hopefully help the public reach a better understanding of the problems in the system.

“The interviews I did for this piece opened my eyes to how tough the job is, with social workers often forced to contend with inadequate resources and a huge burden of bureaucracy when they want to be able to spend more time in direct contact with families. Only by understanding and improving the conditions in which social workers operate can we hope to prevent more terrible cases like Sara's.”



Daniel Hewitt worked with SWU to show how rising poverty and the housing crisis are piling pressure on services trying to protect the vulnerable. [Click here to watch the full in-depth report 'Burnout is real': Rare access to the frontline of children's social services](#) which aired on ITV News on 4th December 2024.

Daniel commented, “All too often the only time national media reports on social workers is when something has gone horribly wrong. It is important to provide a

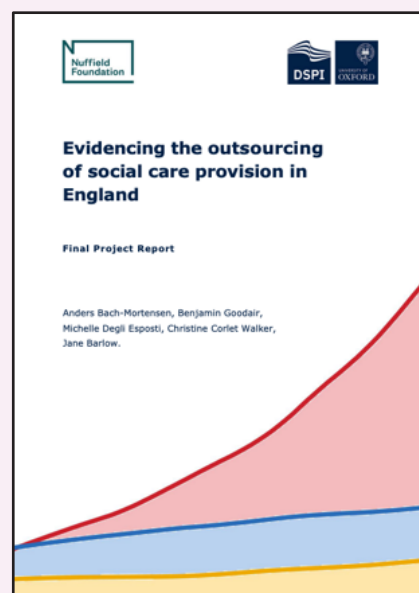
balance, to shine a light on the enormous pressure the workforce faces at a time when demand for children's social care is growing in size and complexity.

“All of the country's crises arrive at the door of the social worker - whether it be housing, mental health, poverty - yet it is a profession often overlooked in discussions of the 'frontline'. If we are to judge a society by how it treats the most vulnerable, we must ask ourselves how well equipped those caring for them really are.

“We are pleased that our investigation has given a small glimpse into the immense challenges the sector faces.”

Call for Research Participants Delivering care in a “market” of provision

We are a team of researchers based at Oxford University, conducting research into the marketisation of social care services. We are interested in understanding how delivering care is impacted by financial pressures, the management of care providers, and your employment conditions. We really want to understand the perspectives of children's and adult's care workers, from anyone involved in delivering care services - **if you are interested in taking part, please [return your details via this link](#).**



Outsourcing of care services

Our research to date has primarily tracked the levels of social care provision by for-profit; third sector; or council-owned providers. You can read our previous work [on our research project page](#). We find that more and more services are provided by independent companies. But what we want to understand is how care ownership impacts the care received by children, patients, adult residents. We know that much of this can't be measured in data, and that the expertise lies with those delivering care. And so, we would be so grateful for your voice informing our study.

Why participate?

We would be grateful for 1 hour of your time to conduct an informal interview. We will discuss whatever you think is important for delivering care in relation to your employment conditions, what you need to do your job well, and what you perceive are the important issues relating to the management of care providers. It may be the case that this discussion is an opportunity for you to explore your own perspectives on care systems in a new way. While you will be anonymised, your experience will contribute to policy-relevant research outputs which we will write-up and disseminate to different stakeholders.

To take part in the study, please either [respond to the survey in this link](#) or email Ben Goodair directly at Benjamin.goodair@bsq.ox.ac.uk



New SWU and ITV News survey

Help us build a national picture of the hidden costs of poverty and the pressures on frontline workers.

Social workers are often the last line of defence for families in crisis and too often, that means stepping in personally to help meet essential needs. Even if you haven't been affected by the issue of paying for people's essentials, please take this survey as your answers will help us understand the scope of this issue.

The survey is anonymous and takes just a few minutes.



Please take part and share with social work colleagues across the UK:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SWUITV25>

The findings will be used to campaign for better support for families and for the professionals who go above and beyond to help them.

Free Health and Safety Trainings Designed Specially for Social Workers

Social workers face many of the same problems other public sector workers face, in large part because of cuts to budgets, but the risks are higher for social workers who are expected to handle increasingly high caseloads, to work alone long hours and late into the night and to make high pressure decisions.

SWU delivered the first of its two-part course on workplace health and safety this week. The training is being run after concerns about dangerous working conditions, staff being left to work alone without proper support, and high caseloads.

This training was developed through conversations with union contacts who told us about the real challenges facing social workers in their day-to-day roles. Their insights from the front lines of social work practice helped us understand the specific safety risks and workplace pressures that needed to be addressed in our training program.

As well as helping us develop training like this, union contacts receive information about GFTU courses that fit their development in the role and any special interest areas. They're the union in the workplace, and we provide resources and support, but they also mean the workplace influences the union - making sure our campaigns and training reflect the real experiences of members.

The course is taught by Janet Newsham who is Chair of Hazards Campaign and Coordinator of Greater Manchester Hazards Centre. Janet is a union activist with over 40 years of experience fighting for worker safety. In her current role, she advises workers and campaigns on occupational health, safety and welfare issues.

The training covers how to stay safe when working alone. It also looks at the legal rights workers have to demand better safety measures from their employers.

Key topics covered included dealing with serious and imminent danger, taking action when safety problems arise. But it also covered campaigning, how to organise your workplace around health and safety and how to carry out 'DIY research'.

The sessions show workers how to report safety problems and demand action from their employers. They explain the rights that safety representatives have to investigate dangers and push for improvements. They are free for all SWU members. To book a place, or to find out about becoming a Union Contact email Jessie Hoskin at: jessie.hoskin@swu-union.org.uk.

Research Participants needed

Intersectionality and Gender in Frontline Asylum Work: A Research Invitation

Dr Marija Grujić, a postdoctoral researcher at the European University Viadrina and visiting fellow at SOAS University of London, is inviting frontline professionals to take part in a research study about working with asylum seekers and refugees in the UK.

If you work in casework, safeguarding, mental health, housing, or related support roles - and have experience using digital tools (like screening forms, translation apps, or case systems) - this study would greatly value your insight.

What's the Study About?

This research looks at how digital tools are used in everyday support work and how they affect decisions about needs, vulnerability, and protection.

It pays special attention to:

- how gender, sexuality, race, legal status, and other factors shape asylum experiences
- how staff navigate pressures and make ethical decisions
- the role of tools in facilitating or limiting inclusive, gender-sensitive practice

Why Participate?

Your experience matters. This is an opportunity to:

- Reflect on your work in a confidential and trauma-informed setting
- Contribute to improving how digital tools are used in support services

- Help highlight the realities of frontline work in research and policy

What Does Participation Involve?

One-to-one interview (approx. 60 minutes)
Online or in-person, at a time that suits you
Fully confidential, anonymous, and voluntary
Open to current and former practitioners, including those with lived experience

To take part or ask questions, contact:

grujic@europa-uni.de

This is a UK-Germany comparative study, approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the European University Viadrina and funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) as part of a Walter Benjamin Fellowship (Ref. 2025/04-EUV-Grujic).

Introduction to the ASC Fair Pay Agreement for Social Workers | BASW England & SWU Webinar - 7th July

BASW England and SWU will be hosting a webinar by Department of Health & Social Care's to introduce the first Fair Pay Agreement for adult social care staff and how it will affect you as a social worker. This free online event for BASW and SWU members will take place on Monday 7th July 2025 at 12pm noon.

The Fair Pay Agreement will set minimum pay and other terms and conditions for workers in adult social care, and will be negotiated between employer and worker representatives. The Department welcomes your questions and views about the Fair Pay Agreement and what it means to you. This is part of a broad engagement process to hear from the sector, and will inform a public consultation the Department will launch later this year.

Book your place on the BASW website: <https://basw.co.uk/events/introduction-asc-fair-pay-agreement-social-workers-basw-england-swu-webinar>

If you need any support with booking onto this webinar please contact:
england@basw.co.uk

BASW
England

SWU Social Workers Union



Department
of Health &
Social Care



BASW
The professional association for
social work and social workers



BASW Diaspora SIG Conference 2025

RESILIENT DIASPORA SOCIAL WORKERS:

Surviving and Thriving in a
Challenging Environment



Diaspora Social Worker Awards



@The Millennium City Building,
Lecture Theatre MC001.

University of Wolverhampton

JULY | 10TH | 2025

9AM TO 4PM

CPD = 7 hours

Contact us: policyadmin@basw.co.uk



**SCAN TO
REGISTER**



Trauma

Calum Gallacher,
SWU Assistant General Secretary

This article has been inspired by an evening talk from Dr Angela Kennedy, Psychologist, *The Science of Trauma & The Body: The Psychomatic Nature of Trauma*.

To introduce Dr Kennedy to you, she is a long-standing leader and innovator of trauma-informed approaches in the UK. She did her first trauma-informed systems conference talk in 2004. Angela set up the national network that was the forerunner of the CIC, whilst Mental Health Lead for NHS-England's Regional Clinical Network and programme lead for Trauma Informed transformation within a large mental health trust. She is a clinical psychologist by profession, specialising early in therapies for complex trauma and severe psychotic or dissociative presentations. As well as a focus on research, innovation, prevention, and collective healing. Angela was a visual artist and now also brings her creativity to her trauma-informed work, producing films, including 'Life Well Lived', a documentary about how people find lives of meaning after a suicide attempt.

Dr. Kennedy opened by telling a packed-out Glee club (Glasgow) that human beings have an inherent reaction to turn away from trauma. She then took us on a perfectly flowing journey of the physical, psychological manifestations of harm, how trauma impacts us individually early in life (attachment), and has a lasting impact throughout our lives, and a perspective of anthropological exploration and ancient wisdom.

Angela used several visual resources you will be familiar with, [Ainsworth's Strange Situation](#), and the recovery of soldiers in vast convalescence hospitals during the Great War. Finally, the [Nuremberg trials](#), which show the severe and immediate physiological impact of having to



relive an experience, giving witness testimony, caused me to consider the [Witness to Harm research](#), which is currently ongoing.

We humans have become accustomed to turning away from discomfort and choosing distractions that bring instant gratification, increased dopamine, or a brief cognitive distortion in terms of escapism from the atrocities of the world. Distractions can be essential and valuable tools for our coping with distress, our survival. However, long-term term these can be to our detriment. If we consistently look for distractions to stop us from having to think about difficult or traumatic experiences, squashing down emotions, this can prevent us from processing and reflecting on the impact of events and planning for how we manage our triggers through exposure rather than avoidance. Should multiple experiences build up, possibly personal and professional, this might lead to activation of the sympathetic nervous system (the body's fight or flight and fawn response). Traumatic incidents do not need to be life-threatening for this system hijack. Immediate consequences are manifest in a range of presentations during initial shock, though not limited to pale, cool, and clammy skin, rapid breathing and heart rate, dizziness, or confusion.

This activation can continue for days, months, or years, and [effects](#) become increasingly problematic and debilitating without the

right environmental supports such as family, community, connection, purpose, means of expression, and sometimes medication. [Greater Manchester Hazards Centre](#) delivered bespoke Health and Safety at Work training for SWU members - there may be further future opportunities to register for this 2-part training - and informed that 10% of all suicides are work-related. Suicidality can be consequent because of the harmful effects of working environments, the exposure to hazards not limited to object danger such as substances/ equipment or lack of but also toxic workplaces such as organisational cultures. Another fact you will find on the GMHC website is that more construction workers die from completion of suicide than they do by catastrophic safety incidents.

The dangers for social workers can be less frequent physical, but there have been several recent examples of social workers being murdered while carrying out their duties: Marcia Grant run over with her own car in Sheffield, Sulai Bukhari was stabbed 8 times whilst carrying out a welfare check on children in North London. At times, our job is risky. Speak to an insurance company about vehicle insurance - I recall them informing me that my insurance was increasing because social work is classed as a high-risk profession.

[Chronic stress](#) can affect the same physiological, cognitive, behavioural, and existential reactions, activating the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system. This might be something that we can easily overlook, not necessarily linked to our work with people accessing services: service redesigns with a lack of meaningful consultation; limited support during sickness and absence processes; inadequate attention paid to health and safety at work (including reasonable adjustments); discrimination based on age, disability, gender, gender recognition, marriage, pregnancy/maternity, race, sex, sexual orientation, religion/ belief; the growing phenomenon that

is bullying and harassment. This all falls under the umbrella of poor working conditions and is forcing social workers to seek more autonomous roles via practicing as an independent or through agency contracting.

Dr Kennedy declared that *shame is a fundamental cause of trauma*. Some of us and our colleagues are more predisposed to constant exposure to [seemingly innocuous attitudes and treatments, such as microaggressions, because of individual diversity and individual or collective ignorance](#). It is the persistent and pervasive nature of this that can lead to an accrual of small T trauma(s) and burnout (which is the degree of harm for us).

In supporting others with complex challenges, we soak up their current and early life traumas, and along with other helping professions, are more predisposed to vicarious trauma. You might think you leave this stuff in a box under your desk. Compartmentalisation a form of dissociation but, there is every chance this may start to permeate through aspects of your professional life (constantly low on energy, feeling numb or detached despite exposure to harm, changes in mood, patterns of sleeping) and with affect on your personal life (becoming more socially withdrawn, having limited tolerance or interest in things you normally enjoy). These are only a few examples; for a more comprehensive list, [read this article](#). When a manager offers you a debrief, don't say *I'm fine*. Accept it at a time you think will be better for you - if not immediately after the incident then plan it in forthcoming weeks. Most people process a harmful event within 12 weeks but if fears, worries, or symptoms persist beyond this then specialist help may be needed. Don't *just get on with it* - this supports harmful cultures and can contribute to poorer health later in life. Gabor Maté makes the consequences of avoidance abundantly clear in his book *The Myth of Normal: Illness, Health & Healing in a Toxic Culture*. I highly recommend this book if you are interested in the long-term impact of trauma.

SWU and BASW launch a major campaign to tackle poor working conditions in the social work profession



New research reveals that alarming staff shortages and deteriorating working conditions are putting children and adults at risk

The Social Workers Union (SWU) and the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) have announced the launch of a wide-reaching campaign to improve professional working conditions for social workers across the UK. This announcement was made at the 2025 BASW UK annual conference in Manchester.

The campaign comes in response to years of research by BASW, SWU, and others showing deteriorating conditions for social workers. [New research by SWU with ITV News](#) published in 2025 - in the largest survey of its kind with 2,380 social workers taking part - shows that 86% of social workers believe the profession has inadequate staffing levels, with 84% saying these shortages are seriously limiting their ability to do their jobs properly.



BASW CEO Ruth Allen and SWU General Secretary John McGowan presenting the “*Stronger Social Work, Better Lives*” campaign, Manchester, 9th June 2025.

Picture by Simon Hadley

Most alarmingly, 80% of social workers report that understaffing is putting the people they work with at risk, while 90% say that lack of funding and investment is impacting their ability to do their job effectively.

SWU General Secretary John McGowan said:

“The statistics speak for themselves - we are facing a crisis that threatens not just the wellbeing of social workers, but the safety and support of the children, families, and adults who rely on social work services. Urgent action is needed to address staffing levels, workload management, and professional support.”

BASW Chief Executive Ruth Allen said:

“Social workers provide vital services to adults and children at risk of harm and disadvantage, yet both the profession and people they serve are being failed by a system that does not provide adequate resources, staffing, or support. This campaign represents our commitment to ensuring social workers have the conditions they need to protect and support those who depend on their expertise.”

The cost to staff is severe, with 76% of social workers reporting their mental health is in crisis and just over a quarter (27%) find themselves emotionally exhausted at least once a week.

The research reveals that around half of those surveyed are considering leaving social work entirely, representing a potential exodus of experienced professionals at a time when their services are most needed.

The joint campaign “Strong Social Work, Stronger Lives” will focus on:

- Adequate and safe staffing
- Sustainable workloads
- Proper funding and investment in social work services
- Better services through better professional development
- Recognition and respect for social work expertise
- Improved mental health and wellbeing support for practitioners

This latest research builds on a concerning pattern identified in previous studies demonstrating there has been little improvement in working conditions over a 7 year period. Joint research by BASW and SWU with Bath Spa University in 2018 found that 60% of social workers were looking to leave their current job within 15 months, with nearly 40% planning to leave the profession entirely.

BASW’s 2023 annual survey found that 46.91% of respondents identified inadequate staffing levels as one of their workplace’s biggest challenges, while 50.21% reported being unable to manage their current workload.

Comparative analysis shows that working conditions for social workers are worse than 90-95% of other employees in both public and private sector occupations. Social workers are working an average of 64 days per year more than contracted - equivalent to 11 additional hours per week - with high caseloads and administrative burdens creating unsustainable pressure.



SWU General Secretary John McGowan speaking at the “Stronger Social Work, Better Lives” launch, Manchester, 9th June 2025.

Picture by Simon Hadley

During the conference BASW and SWU launched [a new wellbeing toolkit to support systemic change](#) involving all stakeholders - from frontline social workers to senior leaders - and announced plans to launch a petition in support of the campaign's aims. They plan to host a reception in UK parliament in Autumn 2025 to raise awareness of the campaign among MPs and Peers, and gain the support of relevant ministers.

To find out more or to support the campaign to improve professional working conditions for social workers please visit: <https://basw.co.uk/about-basw/campaigning-and-influencing/improving-working-conditions-social-workers>

Battling the Cost-of-Living Crisis: Campaign Action Pack

Dr Peter Unwin from the SWU funded [Austerity Action Group \(AAG\)](#) also presented the *Battling the Cost-of-Living Crisis: Campaign Action Pack*. SWU and BASW are proud to support this updated Campaign Action Pack from the AAG and encourage social workers to make use of this toolkit for activism.

The Campaign Action Pack is a step-by-step guide on how social workers and their communities can take action against ongoing austerity and the cost-of-living crisis. In it you will find information on everything from how to organise public meetings, rallies, and awareness-raising film nights to setting up petitions, lobbying, and contacting the press.

The AAG has tried to include everything you need to get campaigning, but would welcome your feedback about what works and what doesn't. You can get in touch with the AAG at aag@swu-union.org.uk.

Download your free copy today: <https://swu-union.org.uk/austerity-action-group/swu-basw-aag-campaign-action-pack-2024>



Dr Peter Unwin presenting the Campaign Action Pack at the “Stronger Social Work, Better Lives” launch, Manchester, 9 June 2025.

Picture by Simon Hadley

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Laura Sheridan, SWU / BASW Advice & Representation Advisor/
Trade Union Official, writes about:



Constructive Dismissal

‘Shall I just resign and claim constructive dismissal?’

This is one of the most common questions that the A&R team get asked! I can’t emphasise enough how important it is to get advice on this before jumping the gun and handing in your notice.

Constructive dismissal claims are really difficult claims to bring - you have to prove that your employer has ‘fundamentally breached’ a term of your contract to the extent that you felt you were left with no choice but to hand in your notice. The bar for this is set very high.

There are other things to consider. You will lose your income. If you do issue a claim in Employment Tribunal, it is likely to take 18 months or more for your case to reach a hearing. In the meantime, the bills won’t pay themselves!

Social Workers are regulated professionals. If you leave whilst under some kind of disciplinary or capability process, the employer is obliged to refer you to your regulator. Having to declare an ongoing investigation when seeking employment will inevitably have a detrimental impact.

If you are experiencing a problem at work and are thinking of resigning, please make sure you get advice from our team before doing so. You need to be fully informed about the implications - making the wrong decision can have serious consequences.

FORMAL NOTICE

SWU 2025 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

FRIDAY 26TH SEPTEMBER 2025

The 2025 Annual General Meeting of the Social Workers Union will be held online and joining instructions can be found at www.swu-union.org.uk

As per SWU rules, the SWU Executive shall have power to make and provide a provision for an AGM meeting to be held using electronic means, and to provide for electronic communication for members, including facilitating provision for members to vote and speak by appropriate electronic means.

| THE TIMETABLE IS AS FOLLOWS: | |
|------------------------------|---|
| 1-8-2025 | Deadline for receipt of motions |
| 5-9-2025 | Notice of any proposed amendment to rules given in writing to members |
| 19-9-2025 | Deadline for amendments to motions |

Motions must be signed by 10 members and submitted to the Executive Committee by the above date.

Amendments to motions must be signed by 10 members.

To register your attendance please visit:
<https://swu-union.org.uk/2025/01/swu-annual-general-meeting-2025>

Entry to this event is FREE for SWU Members.

We are always willing to assist union members with the drafting of motions. Please send an email to joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk for such assistance. Motions should be submitted by email to joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk

Membership numbers must be stated and will be checked.

The Social Workers Union, Wellesley House,
37 Waterloo Road, Birmingham B2 5PP
www.swu-union.org.uk

The forgotten ism

I was once at a conference when a senior manager from a local authority admitted to the audience that older people in her area were receiving a substandard service that did not give them the dignity and autonomy that they should be entitled to. Imagine someone in a position of authority saying something parallel in relation to people of colour, something like black and Asian people are not being treated by our system with the dignity and autonomy they should be entitled to. There would be outrage about such a clearly racist situation having been allowed to develop. And yet, when the equivalent ageist statement was made, nobody seemed to bat an eyelid.

Similarly, I have heard people who would not dream of telling racist or sexist jokes who seem quite happy to base their humour on ageist stereotypes. The irony of this is that, in allowing ageism to go unchallenged, so much of the time, we are actually creating problems for ourselves (as well as behaving unethically), in so far as older people are our future selves in a very real sense.

From a social work point of view, this situation is particularly galling. When it comes to racism and sexism, for example, there are strong communities of people on the receiving end of such discrimination who have developed strong networks of resistance and challenge. White people and men respectively can act as allies to support black people and women who experience racism, but when it comes to ageism, there is much less available in terms of organised resistance on the part of older people themselves, and so there is a greater reliance on younger people adopting an allyship role. Clearly, social workers, with our commitment to social justice, should be in the forefront of promoting anti-ageist policy and practice.

Part of the problem, as I see it, is that neoliberal thinking has created a strong emphasis on consumerism in relation to social work with older people, by which I mean a strong focus on service provision at the expense of other, more creative, cost-effective and empowering forms of practice. The net result is a high volume of assessment work that needs doing, leaving practitioners and managers with little time or energy to consider the big picture and engage in critically reflective practice. This creates a vicious circle in which older people get locked into an unsatisfactory system in which ageism is allowed to continue.

If, as a profession, we are committed to anti-discriminatory practice and the promotion of dignity for everyone, then we need to look again at how older people (and those who work with them) are treated and the extent to which they are valued and listened to.

I would argue that everyone has lost out to neoliberalism and its tendency to relegate social work from a powerful and liberating process of problem solving and empowerment into a much simpler transactional process of rationing scarce resources. But I think it is clear that this applies in particular to older people, reflecting not direct intentional ageism, but rather a subtle unintended but none the less harmful ageism rooted in institutionalised policies, practices and assumptions. It is time to think again.



Dr Neil Thompson is an award-winning author and educator, a visiting professor at the Open University and Wrexham University and an ambassador for SWU. His latest book, co-written with Gerry Cox, is *Age and Dignity: Anti-ageist Theory and Practice* (Edward Elgar, 2025). His website is at www.NeilThompson.info.

Meet the SWU Team

This is an opportunity to hear from the team, learn more about our work behind the scenes, and ask any questions you may have. We look forward to welcoming you!

Date: 21st August 2025

Time: 12:30 - 13:30

Location: Online using Microsoft Teams

We're pleased to invite SWU members to this free online event where you can meet the SWU staff team



Book your place here: <https://basw.co.uk/events/meet-swu-team>

Austerity Action Group sends open letter to the Chancellor opposing proposed cuts to disability benefits

This letter was sent to Rachel Reeves Chancellor of the Exchequer for reply on 13th June 2025



Austerity Action Group

The [open letter to the Chancellor from the SWU funded Austerity Action Group \(AAG\)](#) has been signed by over 100 UK social workers. It expresses deep concerns about the government's planned disability benefit cuts announced in its Spring Statement which, at the time the letter was written, the government estimated would push an additional 250,000 people into poverty.

After the Spring Statement the government published its ["Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working Green Paper"](#) which proposed disability benefits cuts including changes to Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payment (PIP), and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). Citizens Advice has condemned the government's Pathways To Work Green Paper in a hard-hitting report of their own entitled ["Pathways To Poverty: How planned cuts to disability benefits will impact the people we support"](#).

The [consultation on the Green Paper](#) is due to end on 30th June but it does not cover the most crucial issues such as the changes to UC payment rates, the scrapping of the work capability assessment (WCA), or the PIP four points system. It should also be noted that the Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment (UC & PIP) Bill that introduces key changes announced in the Green Paper has already been published and had its first reading in Parliament on 18th June.

The AAG letter reads:

Dear Chancellor,

Re: Welfare Reforms and Disability Benefit Cuts

As social workers, we are writing about the welfare changes in your Spring Statement.

Disability benefits such as Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and the health element of Universal Credit are lifelines for disabled people. They enable many to work and live independently. Making cuts to these benefits would have a catastrophic impact on disabled people across the country.

According to the government's own figures, planned disability benefit cuts will hit 700,000 families who are already in poverty. These figures are in addition to the projected 250,000 people who will be newly driven below the poverty line by the cuts, as set out by the government's impact assessment in March.

Further, those who lose PIP eligibility will also lose their "marker of need" with local councils and NHS services, making it nearly impossible for them to access help. This effectively erases some of the most vulnerable people from the system.

The government's proposals to make changes to Personal Independence Payment and other benefits pose a threat to self-determination, choice. These are hard fought and won rights for disabled people who continue to face multiple forms of oppression and discrimination on a daily basis.

We expect these disability benefit cuts will likely lead to more deaths of claimants, increases in homelessness, child protection cases, and care admissions as disabled people can no longer afford to meet their needs at home.

As a profession committed to challenging injustice, we urge you to safeguard disability benefits from cuts. We fear the cost of cuts is too great. We urge you to meet with the Social Workers Union and frontline social workers to hear our profound concerns about the disabled people we support daily.

Over 1 million people pushed newly or into deeper poverty by the cuts

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Poverty and Inequality has published [a new report from its inquiry on the disproportionate impact of poverty and inequality on disabled people](#). The vast majority of submissions to the APPG raised concerns and criticisms of the proposals laid out in the government's "Pathways to Work" Green Paper, warning that the planned reforms to disability benefits would have severe and far-reaching consequences. Respondents expressed fears that the proposals risk deepening poverty, increasing inequality, and further marginalising disabled people, particularly those already facing multiple forms of disadvantage.

The APPG on Poverty and Inequality's report warns that the proposed sweeping cuts to disability benefits will result in:

- Up to 800,000 people could lose PIP support entirely
- Some individuals stand to lose up to £886 per month
- 250,000 people, including 50,000 children, will be pushed into poverty (government estimate)
- The proposals could result in a £1.1 billion cut to unpaid carers' support

The Government has made it clear that its priority is growing the economy and part of the plan to do this involves supporting more people into work. However, cutting social security can't incentivise people into jobs that don't exist. New analysis by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows [there are simply too few jobs for the Government's argument to hold](#), and that that the parts of the country that will be among the hardest hit by the cuts have fewer job opportunities.

The Government keeps saying the cuts will "focus support on those in the greatest need" but let's hear the unspoken part that those who aren't deemed "in genuine need" - the undeserving, if you will - are going to have their benefits cut. Analysis from both the New Economics Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that the Government's original figure is an understatement and that closer to [350,000 people could be pushed into poverty by the cuts](#). In addition, the [700,000 families already in poverty are also forecast to be hit by planned disability benefit cuts](#) - so that's over 1 million people who could be pushed newly or deeper into poverty by these cuts.

Only MPs can stop the disability benefits cuts now

The Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment (UC & PIP) Bill has now entered Parliament and the second reading of the bill was on Tuesday, 1st July 2025.

MPs were asked to vote on this bill despite:

- The Government analysis of the employment impact of these reforms is not due to be published until the autumn of 2025.
- The Government has not published an assessment of the impact of these reforms on health or care needs.
- The Government is still awaiting the findings of its review into PIP assessment.
- The Government's "[Keep Britain Working](#)" independent review into the role of employers and government in boosting the employment of disabled people and people with long-term health conditions is not due to be published until the autumn of 2025.

A joint briefing from 10 organisations including Scope, Citizens Advice, Mind, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and Trussell sets out the case to rethink cuts to disability benefits: <https://ucpipbill.co.uk>

Contact your MP and keep piling the pressure on

There are many ways to get involved in collective action to oppose these cuts, and one simple and effective way is to contact your MP about it. Inclusion London has created a template letter that you can use to urge your MP to protect disabled people from harmful cuts to vital benefits: <https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/campaigns-and-policy/act-now/stand-up-against-cuts-to-disability-benefits-write-to-your-mp-today>

Whether you're directly affected by the cuts or standing in solidarity, the #TakingThePIP campaign outlines the many meaningful ways you can take part in collective action:

<https://takingthepip.co.uk/how-you-can-help>



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Social worker responds to Reform UK Councillor who called Children in Care “downright evil”

Nana Yabbey-Hagan's [response video](#), posted on the TikTok account of popular podcast *The Social Worker and the Mentor*, has gone viral. He said, “It was important for me to be to be authentic in my response and this is part of me being a relatable social worker to the community. I strive through the platform and practice to bridge the gap between social workers and the communities of whom we work with, and it’s important for them to see social workers stand up when we see or hear injustice. I will always maintain this in the social work and political arena.”

So let me get this straight. The Reform UK Councillor Andy Osborne attended a County Council meeting and had the audacity to say that children in care are “evil”?

As a social worker who’s worked with young people who have been in the care system. As a manager who has managed a looked after children’s team and a leaving care team. This is what I’m going to say to you directly:

On behalf of children in care, on behalf of professionals who work with children in care, on behalf of the parents of children in care, and on behalf of any child, young person, and adult who has been through the care system - Just shut your mouth.

What you said is disrespectful. You don’t know people’s journeys. You don’t know what people have been through. You don’t know the system.

No one is waiting for your apology. I don’t want your apology. We don’t want your apology. You said what you said with chest. You meant what you said. Keep it, Mr Osborne.

You thought that people were going to back you. You thought the media was going to back you. You thought professionals were going to back you. No one is backing what you were saying.

Now is the time for us as professionals to make sure we’re confident in backing our young people. It’s times like this where you actually call out what this brother is saying. And Mr Osborne, you’re getting called out from me. Don’t come in the future saying, “Oh, you know what, upon reflection...” Bruv, you should have reflected before you said what you said. And you meant what you said. So, nah. We don’t want your apology.

Children in care are not evil. I know so many fantastic children and young people in the care system that I’ve worked with!

For children in care, listen - this brother doesn’t know what he’s talking about. We’re backing you all the way.



Nana Yabbey-Hagan is a Qualified Social Worker for Children and Families of 10 years and SWU Executive Committee member. Nana is currently a Team Manager for a Looked After Children’s Team, and previously a Team Manager for a frontline Children Protection team. Nana is a Practice Educator, ASYE assessor, University Lecturer, and mentor to Social Work Students and NQSWs. Nana has founded the Street Social Work Practice Model and is current Co-Host of [The Social Worker & The Mentor Podcast](#).

The Government is extending Free School Meals to over half a million children

SWU is proud to be part of the *No Child Left Behind* coalition

The Government has announced it is [extending Free School Meals to half a million more children](#). From the start of the 2026 school year, every pupil whose household is on Universal Credit will have a new entitlement to free school meals. This will mean food in more bellies. Stronger school communities and friendships in the dinner hall. A dent in the scandal of child hunger.

Coming together from every corner of civil society - education, faith, health, food security, trade unions, and more - we have collectively secured a giant step forwards in our efforts to make *Free School Meals for All* a reality for every pupil in primary school. Our diversity and solidarity are our greatest strength.

Eligibility for free school meals still varies across the UK

- All primary school children [in London](#) and [in Wales](#) can access free meals.
- In September 2026 eligibility for free meals will be automatically granted to all Universal Credit recipients **in England**, however [families will still need to actually apply to receive the benefit](#).



- [In Scotland](#) all children in the first five years of primary school are eligible, as well as all children from families receiving the Scottish Child Payment benefit.
- Parents [in Northern Ireland](#) can apply if they receive certain benefits and are below an income threshold which is approximately double the current England level, at £15,000.

Our next step? Ensuring every primary school child can learn and thrive with the roll out of *Free School Meals for All*.

Add your name to our open letter, alongside civil society and MPs, calling on the Prime Minister to do right by children: <https://freeschoolmealsforall.org.uk/take-action>

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND 

SIGN THE OPEN LETTER

Tell the Government it's time to extend Free School Meals to every child in primary.



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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: unioncontacts@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.
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**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

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