

An important moment for our union



By the time this newsletter reaches you, we will formally know who has put themselves forward as a candidate for the next General Secretary of the Social Workers Union. Once nominations are

confirmed, we will share further details about the candidates and the election process ahead.

I would encourage you to start thinking about questions you may wish to put forward. This is an important moment for our union, and member engagement will play a vital role in shaping the next chapter of SWU's leadership. Please see **page 4**.

After much consideration, I have decided not to stand for another term as General Secretary. Having previously served two terms, I believe this is the right time to allow space for change and a new perspective within the union. It has been an honour to serve, and I remain deeply committed to supporting SWU and its members during this transition and of course remaining an active member.

The General Secretary ballot process and independent scrutineer will be managed externally by <https://www.civica.com/en-gb/product-pages/print-and-mailing/> with a duty of confidentiality as the scrutineer. SWU is following Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 guidance on the electoral process with further advice sourced regarding the endorsement process from our appointed legal. The despatch of ballot paper(s) to individual members will begin on 30th March 2026. The ballot mailing will contain the candidates' election addresses, ballot paper and a return envelope.

The SWU Assignment Competition has now launched once again, and I strongly encourage Social Work students and SWU apprentices to take part. Each year we are inspired by the insight, creativity and passion shown in the submissions.

There are four awards of £500 available, and you never know, you could be one of this year's winners. The assignment topic will be announced on World Social Workday, Tuesday 17th March. Keep an eye on our communications and start preparing to get involved.

It is fantastic to see the hard-working SWU Chair and Chair of the Austerity Action Group, Dave Callow, organising and

supporting such an important event. On 28th March, SWU Social Workers Union will be marching alongside the Together Alliance in a collective call for social justice and stronger public services.

<https://swu-union.org.uk/2026/02/march-with-swu-and-together-alliance-28-march-2026/>

Dave will be there in person, and it would be wonderful to see a strong turnout from SWU members. Please share this information widely across your networks and encourage colleagues to attend where they can. Building our collective voice currently truly matters.

Full details of the march can be found on our website. If you would like more information or would like to discuss how to get involved, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

We also continue to promote valuable learning opportunities through the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) Education Programme 2025 - 2026. These

courses provide an excellent opportunity to strengthen your knowledge, skills and confidence as a trade union member and activist. Further details are available on our website, and I encourage you to explore what is on offer.

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

As a union it is incredibly important to meet with social workers, and we do this well at SWU. I am always keen to hear from the membership. I enjoyed this month meeting with a group of social workers in Scotland, and it was also a great opportunity to go over some of the terrific work we have been doing including the Reflective Supervision Guide.

Thank you for your continued commitment to SWU and to the profession. Together, we remain stronger.

John McGowan
General Secretary

j.mcgowan@swu-union.org.uk



The SWU Assignment 2026 essay competition will open on World Social Work Day

Social work students and apprentices in the UK, get ready for the SWU Assignment 2026 - each winning entry will be awarded £500.



Each year the Social Workers Union (SWU) runs a World Social Work Day SWU Assignment essay competition in which we pose questions about current issues in social work. The 2026 competition will open for entries on Tuesday 17th March and the SWU General Secretary is also pleased to be announcing the essay question during his keynote speech at the upcoming [BASW UK Student Conference 2026](#).

Who can enter this essay competition?

All Social Work Students undertaking an Undergraduate or Post Graduate Social Work Degree

in the UK, Social Work Apprentices, and students undertaking specialist pathway routes are welcome to write and submit their 750 - 1000 word answers.

Curious about what it takes to become a SWU Assignment winner? You can find out more about the competition and read the brilliant essays that have impressed the panel judges in previous years here: <https://swu-union.org.uk/world-social-work-day-student-essay-competition>

The SWU Assignment is a great way to engage with current social work topics, especially if you are interested in becoming more involved in activism and the fight for social justice.

BASW UK Student Conference 2026, 19th March from 10am - 3pm



The online BASW UK Student Conference is free for BASW & SWU student members and £5 for non-members.

Be sure to join for SWU General Secretary John McGowan for the final keynote session “BASW & Social Workers Union - Student Campaigns: Stronger Together”. Alongside colleagues from BASW and Campaign Collective, he will discuss recent impactful campaigns - some of which have been student-led - and how

social work students can get more involved with campaigning. Students will also hear about opportunities to get more involved in activism through the SWU Campaign Fund, SWU Union Contacts, GFTU Education Programme, and upcoming events like the Together Alliance march on 28th March.

You can book your place on the BASW website: <https://basw.co.uk/events/basw-uk-student-conference-2026-creating-community-and-connection>

Did you know that with BASW you get discounted student membership to support your social work course and that you can also opt into SWU membership at an additional discounted rate of just 83p per month? [Click here](#) to learn about all the benefits of trade union membership alongside BASW, your professional association - all under one roof.

Online hustings for candidates in the SWU General Secretary election

The nominations have now closed for the position of SWU General Secretary. We look forward to announcing candidates after the nominations have closed.

These candidates will be given the opportunity to answer live questions at an online hustings later this month. This event will be recorded and made available to watch as a video on the SWU YouTube channel. A link to view this video and a transcription of the answers will also be provided to members in the April 2026 SWU Newsletter.

What would you like to know?

The outcome of this election will shape the future of our union and it's only right that members hear directly from the candidates.

SWU members are invited to contribute to the hustings by sending in anonymised questions for the General Secretary candidates. This will be an opportunity to hear each candidate's platform and to learn more about them before casting your vote.

Questions should be concise (60 words or less) for clarity and applicable to all candidates.

Please email your questions for the SWU General Secretary candidates to shawn.major@swu-union.org.uk by 9am on Friday 20th March.



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Rapid Decline in ASYE Opportunities for Newly Qualified Social Workers in the UK

SWU Executive Edith Till writes about a growing crisis in social work recruitment in which NQSWs are facing unprecedented barriers to employment.

Securing an Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) post has become increasingly difficult for newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) across the United Kingdom over the past few years. Many graduates now experience extended periods of unemployment, underemployment, or enforced continuation in unrelated roles, while repeatedly applying for ASYE opportunities. For some, this period extends for six to twelve months or longer.

The emotional toll of this situation is substantial. Many newly qualified social workers report feeling professionally trapped, unable to progress without ASYE accreditation, yet unable to access ASYE posts. This leads some to remain in unrelated employment, while others cycle through insecure short-term roles or withdraw temporarily from the profession entirely.

Until relatively recently, social work in the UK was widely recognised as an occupational shortage profession, characterised by rapid workforce entry and high employment security. Students who demonstrated competence during placements were frequently offered employment prior to graduation, and prolonged unemployment following qualification was rare. The current challenges in securing ASYE posts mark a notable departure from historical workforce patterns, warranting careful scrutiny and coordinated policy response.

Workforce Shortage and Structural Constraint

One of the most significant drivers of this shift has been long-term reductions in local authority funding and workforce capacity. Since 2010, English local authorities have experienced real-terms funding reductions of 25-30%, leading to recruitment freezes, workforce

restructuring, and substantial contraction of training investment. These fiscal pressures have constrained organisational capacity to provide the protected caseloads, enhanced supervision, and learning environments required to support ASYE practitioners effectively.

Many authorities - particularly in London, the South East, and parts of the Midlands - increasingly prioritise experienced practitioners who can immediately manage high-risk and complex caseloads, rather than newly qualified staff requiring developmental support. Regional workforce data show that London, despite hosting the largest concentration of registered social workers, also reports the highest vacancy rates, workforce churn, and service pressure, significantly limiting ASYE capacity.

In contrast, authorities in the North East, South West, and coastal regions frequently experience recruitment difficulties but lack the financial and supervisory infrastructure necessary to sustain robust ASYE programmes, generating a system-wide employment bottleneck. This structural constraint produces the paradoxical situation in which vacancy rates remain high while newly qualified practitioners struggle to gain workforce entry.

Misalignment of Graduate Numbers and Available ASYE Posts

This crisis is further intensified by a growing misalignment between social work graduate numbers and funded ASYE posts. In 2023-24, over 5,685 students completed the final year of full-time social work degrees in England, reflecting steady growth in graduate output. However, ASYE provision has not expanded proportionally, resulting in unprecedented competition for entry-level posts.

ONS workforce data confirm that while approximately 6,000 new starters entered children's social care roles in 2023, many of these posts were filled by experienced practitioners, agency conversions, and fast-track programme graduates, rather than mainstream university graduates. Consequently, recruitment processes increasingly involve 60-100 applicants competing for two or three posts, even in regions experiencing severe workforce shortages.

The Hidden Costs of ASYE Recruitment

An often-overlooked dimension of this crisis is its disproportionate impact on mature students, many of whom enter social work as a career change later in life. National data indicate that over 43% of social work students in England are aged over 30, with a substantial proportion aged over 40.

These individuals frequently undertake training motivated by deep ethical commitment, often leaving established careers, sacrificing income, and reconfiguring family responsibilities. For many, qualification involves significant financial sacrifice, including reliance on student loans, loss of household income, and increased debt.

Many newly qualified practitioners report feeling professionally immobilised, unable to progress without ASYE accreditation, yet unable to secure ASYE employment. As a result, individuals are often compelled to remain in unrelated employment, apply for non-social-work roles, or accept insecure temporary contracts, while continuing to pursue ASYE opportunities. This prolonged liminality significantly undermines professional confidence, identity formation, and workforce retention.

The recruitment process itself imposes a substantial and under-recognised burden. ASYE applications typically require detailed personal statements, extensive competency mapping, reflective portfolios, and multiple supporting documents.

Interview processes often involve multi-stage assessment, incorporating written case analyses, group exercises, role-play scenarios, and panel interviews, frequently lasting several hours or full days. ONS data show that over 38% of NQSW applicants apply beyond their home region, often necessitating long-distance travel, relocation planning, and significant financial expenditure.

Structural Exclusion of International Graduates

International social work graduates face additional structural disadvantage. Despite universities actively recruiting overseas students, workforce audits indicate that fewer than 6% of English local authorities currently offer visa sponsorship for ASYE roles, dramatically limiting employment pathways for international graduates. This structural imbalance raises serious ethical concerns regarding recruitment transparency, duty of care, and equality of opportunity, particularly where international students are encouraged to pursue UK social work qualifications without full disclosure of post-qualification employment constraints.

Policy Implications and Strategic Solutions

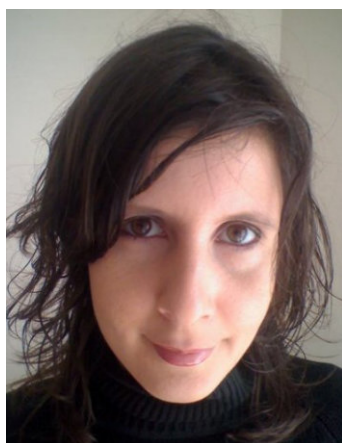
Addressing this crisis requires coordinated national workforce reform, involving central government, Social Work England, universities, local authorities, and professional bodies. Key strategies include:

- **Ring-fenced national funding for ASYE posts**, guaranteeing protected learning environments.
- **Strategic workforce forecasting**, aligning student recruitment with employer capacity.
- **Expansion of ASYE provision across NHS, voluntary and community sectors.**
- **Ethical recruitment frameworks**, particularly for international students.
- **National graduate employment pathways**, modelled on NHS graduate schemes.

Without decisive intervention, the profession risks losing skilled, motivated practitioners at the very point of workforce entry, undermining long-term service sustainability.

This Crisis Is Temporary, But Urgent Collective Action Is Needed

Despite present challenges, workforce modelling indicates that long-term demand for qualified social workers will continue to rise sharply. Nearly 29% of the current workforce is aged over 55, signaling substantial recruitment demand in the coming decade. Combined with increasing service complexity, this strongly suggests that employment opportunities will expand, provided structural workforce planning improves.



For newly qualified practitioners navigating this

challenging transition, the current employment crisis must be understood as a temporary systemic disruption rather than an individual failing. Evidence consistently shows that most NQSWs secure professional employment within 12 months, particularly where geographical and sectoral flexibility is possible.

Social work is a profession grounded in resilience, ethical commitment, and social purpose. Although the path into employment has become increasingly complex, the dedication, compassion, and capability of this generation of graduates remain profoundly needed. With sustained investment, transparent workforce planning, and collective responsibility, equitable employment pathways can be restored - ensuring that newly qualified social workers are enabled to, rather than obstructed from, delivering vital support to society's most vulnerable individuals and families.

Edith Till is a SWU Executive Committee member who has been elected to serve as a Student/NQSW Representative for a two-year term. Edith is also a social work student and a BASW Student Ambassador.

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>

Parliamentary monitoring report - February 2026



Cross-Party Group for Social Work

Following the launch event of the Cross-Party Group for Social Work, we sent a **template letter** to all parliamentarians who attended, asking them to write to the Minister. Cat Smith MP did so and received a reply.

A new event is planned to celebrate World Social Work Day in the House of Commons on **17th March** alongside BASW. The event will celebrate the value of social work with a focus on the positive impact it has on society. We will be aiming to secure positive coverage on social and mainstream media and offering an opportunity to educate and inform parliamentarians to counteract the negative comments about social workers in Parliament and on social media. MPs and Peers will hear directly from social workers in the field and have a conversation with them. Our aim is to engage with MPs and Peers who may become future champions of SWU and social workers.

Campaign Focus - Key Issues and Debates in Parliament

1. Anti-poverty

[The first Right to Food UK Commission evidence-based event took place in Knowsley on Friday 30th January 2026, hosted by Ian Byrne MP.](#) On X Ian said ‘Over the next six months, we’ll travel across the UK to develop a roadmap for enshrining the right to food in law. Hunger is a political choice and it’s time Westminster made the right ones. Join us on the journey.’ You can support the campaign by liking and sharing social media posts with the hashtags [#RightToFoodCommission](#) and [#HungerIsAPoliticalChoice](#). [The Commission is supported by SWU and BASW.](#)

Child Poverty Strategy - the Government added two updates to the website

- [Child Poverty Strategy: Research with Children - GOV.UK](#)
- [Low Income Poverty Projections Analysis - GOV.UK](#)

2. Workforce - working conditions, recruitment and retention, sharing research

House of Lords debate: [Justice and Home Affairs Committee report: 'Better prisons: less crime'](#) (February 12th) **Baroness Hunt of Bethnal Green said:** *['Prison officers, like social workers, nurses and firefighters, do work that is complex, emotionally demanding and essential. Yet we persistently treat these roles as low status, modestly paid and peripheral to public life.'](#)*

House of Commons Motions relating to Local Government Finance: Gareth Thomas MP said: *['One of the understated problems of the austerity that Harrow has suffered has been the decline in the quality of vital local services...Leadership stability, including management, oversight of staff and social workers. In particular, the quality of support advice and guidance for care leavers...children who are homeless.'](#)*

Westminster Hall debate: relating to indefinite leave to remain (ILR): In this 3-hour debate there were over 50 mentions of the impact that proposed changes to ILR would have on social care. Specifically on social workers; **Euan Stainbank MP** (who is a supporter of social workers) said: *"As MPs, we are hearing directly from providers - and workers - that a blunt transition to 10-year to 15-year ILR timescales for social workers before further work is done to recruit a sustainable workforce risks leaving one of the most important sectors in our country exposed in terms of recruiting critical workers."*

[Westminster Hall debate: Children's services in local authorities:](#) This took place on 28th January and a House of Commons Library background briefing was published. The briefing gives an overview of the performance of children's social care; government reforms and funding; Families First Partnership Programme; Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill and the Best Start in Life strategy. The briefing references the Institute of Government's tracker public services performance tracker report which states that, 'The number of child and family social workers is at an all-time high and vacancy and turnover rates are improving.'

Specific comments about social workers during the debate included:

Will Forster MP referenced a *'revolving door of social workers who are poorly trained and supported'* in some areas [of the country]

Richard Ford MP *'I would not criticise the people working in children's services, because I feel that individual social workers are a bit like goalkeepers: all too often, rather than praising their work for the children they save, we condemn and lambast the individuals who have cases where things go wrong.'* He also cited the cost of workforce instability; *'In Devon, a permanent children's social worker costs roughly £23 per hour, while agency staff cost about £44 per hour. Closing that gap and reducing the reliance on agency staff is clearly urgent.'* He praised the improvements that had been made through; *'tailored development pathways to encourage permanent careers in the county, rather than the short-term contracts that we have seen before.'*

David Chadwick MP also praised services saying; *'Staff report feeling supported and proud to work in the service, and Powys social workers and safeguarding professionals have been recognised at regional awards for their work protecting children and involving young people directly in shaping services.'*

3. Social care reform - Casey Commission (Independent Commission on Adult Social Care), private sector funding, and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Casey Commission - Organisations and members of the public can now submit their views on the Commission's website: [Contact us | The Casey Commission](#)

Over the coming months, the Independent Commission will start a national conversation with the public about their experience and expectations of the adult social care system where there will be further opportunities to feed into the Commission's work. Details of how the public can engage with this work will be set out by the Commission in due course. People can [Sign up to email alerts | The Casey Commission](#)

Health and Social Care Committee: Inquiry - The first 1000 days of life - the report of the fifth session (pp 32,33) states: 'Many of the staff that are essential to a child's health sit outside of the NHS - for example early years educators, nursery practitioners, and **social workers**. The Centre for Mental Health highlighted the need for an integrated children's workforce strategy that valued multidisciplinary teams and ensured coordination between councils, the NHS, education providers and the voluntary sector.'

Parliamentary Business that may affect Social Workers

Name	Inquiry /stage	Key dates/Action
Public Accounts Committee	Financial sustainability of children's care homes	Report published January 2026
Assisted Dying Bill	House of Lords - see above notes	In progress
Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill Committee	House of Lords - see above notes	In progress
Mental Health Act	Received Royal Assent	Now in statute
Education Select Committee	Children's Social Care	Report and Government response in October 2025
Health and Social Care Committee	Community Mental Health Services	Report due 2 nd February 2026 (overdue)
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	Report due 22 nd March 2026

March with SWU and the Together Alliance on 28th March



SWU Chair Dave Callow encourages our union members to join him in London on 28th March for the Together Alliance march.

Our union will be marching [with the Together Alliance](#) in central London to show that unity is stronger than division and that hope is more powerful than fear. Hundreds of organisations and thousands of people have united in this alliance against the far-right, and we hope you will join us in this demonstration of solidarity.

SWU Chair Dave Callow said, “Social workers are united by our collective mission to support vulnerable individuals, families, and communities. We dedicate our professional lives to helping people overcome adversity and to challenging inequality, discrimination, and oppression. Alongside the Together Alliance, we’re showing up on 28th March to push back against the far-right politics of division and hate.



“We won’t stand by as our families, friends, colleagues, and neighbours are targeted, intimidated, and made into scapegoats for social issues. We are letting politicians know in no uncertain terms that these issues won’t be solved by pandering to the far-right. I hope you will join me in marching for love, for hope, and for unity.”

The demonstration will start at **12pm noon** on **Saturday 28th March 2026** at **Park Lane, Central London**. The nearest tube station is Hyde Park Corner. The full route, bloc map, and accessibility information - and the location for SWU members to meet - will be confirmed closer to the event date.

If you would like to march alongside fellow SWU members please let us know by 26th March at SWUinfo@swu-union.org.uk and we will let you know the meet up location.



Need transport to London?

Community groups, unions, and local organisers across the country are arranging coaches, sharing costs, and making sure everyone can get to London on 28th March for the big day.

The Together Alliance has compiled a growing list of every confirmed coach heading to the march, so you can find the one closest to you and book your seat. You can view this list and interactive map on their website:

<https://www.togetheralliance.org.uk/transport>

Some coaches require a contribution towards the cost of travel, but some providers are offering **free or discounted travel** for low or unwaged individuals. If your town or city isn't on the list yet or a coach is already fully booked - don't worry, more coaches are being added all the time.

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SWU Social Workers Union

Always there for you.

Ignorance and hate will never win in our profession

SWU Executive Nana Yabbey-Hagan writes a hard-hitting open letter on World Day of Social Justice to Jim Ratcliffe in the wake of his recent anti-immigration comments.

To my fellow social work colleagues, students, foster carers, personal advisors, family support workers, business support officers, colleagues in education and health, who have come from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, thank you to all of you for your contributions and contributions to our children, young people, families and vulnerable adults.

Jim Ratcliffe's comments highlight the growing ignorance and rhetoric that continues to be strong, however his views and the views of others will never win and will never undermine the hard work and roles that our parents, grandparents and even us have played in our line of work.

I am super proud to be grandson and son of Ghanaian immigrants who have shaped me and continue to shape my role and practice in Social Work. Listening to what Jim Ratcliffe said, only fuelled more fire as to why representation is so needed and how important cultural competency needs to be central in our decision making, reflecting the impact on our children, young people and families.

In our BASW code of ethics, I quote Social Justice 2.2 Principle 5: "Social workers, individually, collectively and with others, have a duty to challenge social conditions that contribute to oppression, social exclusion, stigma or subjugation, and work towards an inclusive society".

We must in our practice regardless of which level we are at continue to upload this and stand against any rhetoric that continues to disrupt this. With my platform, through the podcast, through my role as a manager and role as SWU executive I will continue.

My final message is this, to Jim Ratcliffe and to others who hold his perspective; your views will never win and you can never undermine the contributions that immigrants continue to play in our Social Work Sector, our health sector and education. Hate will never win.



Nana Yabbey-Hagan is a Qualified Social Worker for Children and Families of 10 years and a member of the SWU Executive Committee. Nana is currently a Team Manager for a Looked After Children's Team, a Practice Educator, ASYE assessor, University Lecturer, mentor to Social Work Students and NQSWs, and co-host of [The Social Worker & The Mentor Podcast](#).

SWU is co-building a campaign of solidarity with Social Work Academics

This campaign was strongly supported by members in a Motion at the SWU Annual General Meeting 2025.

The initial campaign meeting in January explored options for campaigning and gave an opportunity for academics to share their experiences of current conditions in academia. The follow-up campaign building meeting in February focused on immediate next steps and long-term plans for the campaign.

Key messages this campaign will focus on:

- Financial pressures on universities are eroding academic working conditions
- Financial pressures are eroding students' wellbeing
- This is putting the social work workforce at risk
- Support for social work academics and students will deliver better outcomes and lower long-term costs

Call for evidence and case studies

SWU is looking to build an evidence base which will provide a snapshot of what's happening in UK higher education - redundancies, course closures, department restructures, and other examples of cuts and growing pressures that are putting social work education at risk.



CALL FOR EVIDENCE

FROM UK SOCIAL WORK ACADEMICS

EMAIL YOUR STORIES TO:
CAMPAIGNS@SWU-UNION.ORG.UK

We are asking for social work academics in the UK to provide us with examples of things that have happened to themselves and their peers. Let us know of concrete examples of the issues these cuts are causing.

These examples can be provided anonymously to be used on background. Please email them to: campaigns@swu-union.org.uk

SWU will continue to work with academics and students to develop key campaign asks, build this coalition, and organise parliamentary and media tactics for the campaign. If academics would like to be involved in the campaign, then please contact SWU General Secretary John McGowan. at: campaigns@swu-union.org.uk

Ten ways to thrive in social work

Trainer, author and SWU Ambassador **Neil Thompson** and general secretary of the Social Workers Union **John McGowan** share again top tips from their best selling Jessica Kingsley published book *How to Survive in Social Work*

1 Expect to struggle

By its very nature, social work is a demanding occupation. With the added pressures of the current inhospitable political climate and underfunded state of public services, it should come as no surprise that a significant proportion of people are struggling to get through their workload. This is nothing to be ashamed of. It is a reflection of the wider context and says little or nothing about individual capabilities. This is not to say that some people do not have their own issues that affect how well they cope with the pressures. But the idea that struggling is a sign of personal failing is a gross (and grossly unfair) oversimplification.

2 Don't blame yourself

For far too long there has been a destructive blame culture in social work (and public services more broadly). What can make the situation much worse is when people blame themselves for things not going very well - even to the point where they start to assume they are not competent enough. The technical term for this is 'Imposter Syndrome.' It describes situations where people doubt themselves to the point where they feel they are not good enough for the work expected of them - as if they are an imposter pretending to be a competent worker.

3 Be assertive

No, being assertive does not mean being stroppy, difficult or demanding. It means having the confidence and negotiation skills to work towards win-win outcomes. Often it amounts to saying 'no' or at least 'no, but ...' Sadly, we have come across many people who became ill with stress, because of work overload. A significant proportion of them have told us that they just passively accepted more and more work and made little or no attempt to negotiate a more reasonable workload. There are various reasons why this sad state of affairs arises but in most cases it boils down to people either not having the requisite assertiveness skills or choosing not to use them.

4 Don't expect a 100% success rate

It has been said that the only profession with a 100 percent success rate is undertakers. No matter how competent we are or how hard we try, the reality is that we will never achieve 100 percent success in social work, nor should we expect to. Imagine how stressful it would be for police officers if they were expected to clear up every crime and convict every perpetrator. The only fair expectation is that they do their best in difficult circumstances. Why should that not apply to social workers too? Things will go wrong and mistakes will be made. But if we are doing our best and acting in good faith, we can hold our heads up high (whatever the gutter press may say).

5 Look after yourself

This has been said time and again, but it remains true that far too many people put other people's needs first and thereby put themselves at risk. Not practising self-care is dangerous in any work setting. In such a demanding profession as social work, it is extremely so. It has to be recognised that we are in no position to help people meet their needs if our own needs are not being met. How would you feel if you needed the help of a social worker, but it was clear they were exhausted and on the way to burnout? Would you feel you were getting a fair deal?

6 Make use of support

Some organisations are not good at supporting their staff, but even in those that are, there can often be a reluctance to ask for help. It derives from the fact that stress continues to be stigmatised and seen as a sign of a weak individual (rather than the sign of an overloaded system). Surviving - and especially thriving - depend on making full use of the support available and moving away from this dangerous idea that 'support is for wimps.' Anyone doing as demanding a job as social work who is not prepared to make use of support is playing a highly risky game.

7 Keep learning

High levels of pressure can lead to a sort of emotional paralysis that stops people exploring new ideas or methods. This therefore acts as a significant barrier to learning. This can then lead to a vicious circle. Because social work is such complex and demanding work, we need to keep learning all the time. Once we stop, our ability to be effective is diminished. This means that our ability to manage our pressures and keep stress at bay is also diminished, leaving us all the more prone to that very paralysis. So, keep learning, come what may, is the key message.

8 Don't lose sight of your values

That same paralysis can also lead to losing sight of our values - not intentionally, but because we narrow our focus to just getting through the day, just getting the job done to relieve the massive pressures we are under. This too invites a vicious circle whereby the motivation, drive and reassurance that come from our values are lost. Again it leaves us ill-equipped to cope with the pressure we face. Our values are important not only for ethical reasons, but also for their role in sustaining us through difficult times and territory.

9 Support one another

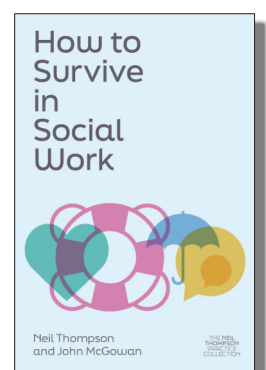
Unfortunately, one of the effects of a high level of pressure is that it can force people to withdraw into their own 'security bubble' for their own protection. This is understandable, but it is also a problem, because it undermines teamwork and solidarity. It is essential in such difficult times that we pull together and support one another. It is what teamwork is all about; it is what BASW is all about; and it is what SWU is all about. Let's make sure that it happens.

10 Have faith in yourself

Another consequence of a constantly high level of pressure is that we can lose confidence in ourselves. We feel we are struggling so much that we start to lose faith in ourselves. This too is understandable, but also problematic. If we do not have faith in ourselves, other people will not have faith in us and, without that credibility, our very difficult job becomes even harder, if not impossible.

Thompson, N and McGowan, J (2023) 'How to Survive in Social Work' is published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers

[How to Survive in Social Work | Jessica Kingsley Publishers - UK \(jkip.com\)](#)



Government publishes updated timetable for Employment Rights Act changes coming into effect in 2026

The Government has published a timetable for the implementation of certain changes introduced by the Employment Rights Act 2025. Following a prolonged period of uncertainty around the implementation of the Act's key measures, and with extensive consultations on regulation and implementation still ongoing, the Government has released this timetable to "give workers, employers and businesses confidence about upcoming changes." The latest timetable confirms that a number of reforms will come into force in 2026.

Measures relating to balloting requirements, restrictions on industrial action, and, crucially, the repeal of the Trade Union Act 2016 will be among the first to take effect, with implementation scheduled for 18th February 2026.

The full implementation timetable is set out below.

Measures that took effect at Royal Assent, December 2025

- the repeal of the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023

Measures that will take effect on 18th February 2026

- the repeal of the great majority of the Trade Union Act 2016, thereby simplifying requirements on trade unions, including in relation to industrial action and political funds
- removing the 10-year ballot requirement for trade union political funds
- simplifying industrial action notices and industrial action ballot notices
- protections against dismissal for taking industrial action
- employees that are newly eligible for 'Day 1' Paternity Leave and Unpaid Parental Leave can give notice

Measures that will take effect on 6th April 2026

- collective redundancy protective award - doubling the maximum period of the protective award
- 'Day 1' Paternity Leave and Unpaid Parental Leave
- whistleblowing - strengthening protections for workers who 'blow the whistle' on sexual harassment
- Bereaved Partners' Paternity Leave - (non-MWP measure) will enable bereaved fathers and partners to take up to 52 weeks of paternity leave if the mother or primary adopter dies within the first year of the child's life
- Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) - removing the Lower Earnings Limit (LEL) and waiting period
- action plans on gender equality and supporting employees through the menopause (voluntary)
- menopause guidance
- simplifying trade union recognition process

Measures that will take effect on 7th April 2026

- the establishment of the Fair Work Agency

Measures that will take effect in August 2026

- electronic and workplace balloting for Statutory Trade Union Ballots

Measures that will take effect in October 2026

- bringing forward regulations to establish the Fair Pay Agreement Adult Social Care Negotiating Body in England
- procurement - two-tier code
- tightening tipping law
- the duty to inform workers of their right to join a trade union
- strengthening trade unions' right of access
- requiring employers to take 'all reasonable steps' to prevent sexual harassment of their employees
- introducing an obligation on employers not to permit the harassment of their employees by third parties
- introducing a power to enable regulations to specify steps that are to be regarded as 'reasonable', to determine whether an employer has taken all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment
- unfair practices in the trade union recognition process
- new rights and protections for trade union representatives
- extending protections against detriments for taking industrial action

Measures that will take effect in October 2026

- employment tribunal time limits

Measures that will take effect in January 2027

- reduction of unfair dismissal qualifying period to 6 months, for dismissals from 1st January 2027, and uncapping compensatory awards
- fire and rehire protections

Measures that will take effect in 2027

- action plans on gender equality and supporting employees through the menopause (mandatory)
- enhanced dismissal protections for pregnant women and new mothers
- specifying steps that are to be regarded as 'reasonable', to determine whether an employer has taken all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment
- extending blacklisting protections
- industrial relations framework
- regulation of umbrella companies
- collective redundancy - collective consultation threshold
- flexible working
- bereavement leave including pregnancy loss
- ending the exploitative use of zero-hours contracts
- electronic and workplace balloting for recognition and derecognition ballots

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