

Some excellent campaigning



Employment and regulatory representation remain at the core of our activities and do consider this should you ever be feeling the need to ever consider ceasing your membership. Having someone in your corner who knows the

profession inside and out is extremely important. Trade union membership provides that right to employment representation, and you do not have this right with a BASW only membership. If you want to be more active with the union, then new Union Contacts are always welcome, and we are now recruiting for new members to be active with us. If helpful, I am always happy to be contacted.

Once more we are getting close to the deadline month for the SWU Essay Comp 2025 and if you do know a social work student then be sure to direct them towards entering for this and the chance of winning one of the four £500 awards that are available. The topic this year builds on the excellent work we have been doing with student bursary campaigns for the last three years. Once more we have an excellent cast of markers all ready to mark the essays after the closing date.

Another month passes and we remain as active as ever last month. My highlights

last month include the recent **Make Equality Real** campaign work with the General Federation of Unions and recent trips to Westminster highlighting the pressures that Social Workers are under. A coalition of nine national trade unions and campaign groups has today launched the Make Equality Real campaign. This campaign is directly calling on all political parties to make a clear commitment in their election manifestos to make Section 1 of the Equality Act law - the socio-economic duty, reducing poverty, and helping to make austerity unlawful.

At the Social Workers Union we have reconnected social work concerns for social justice with some excellent campaigning to support this through our own Austerity Action Group, SWU Campaign Fund and of course the great work of the GFTU and our motion that led to this action in Westminster. I am very proud of this. As SWU General Secretary, I have been campaigning relentlessly on austerity issues unfortunately for what seems a very long time now.

The recent talk at Westminster was attended by eleven MPs who listened carefully to my presentation on the pressures and challenges to social workers and providing a social work service with so many cuts.

It is therefore significant that social workers continue to invest time and effort in keeping the messages of this important campaign alive.



We recognise the extent to which policy choices of recent governments continue to oppress the poor and the marginalised, thereby putting more pressure on social work to “pick up the pieces”. Many social workers have only ever practised in times of austerity; many only know casework and do not have a “political” view about the causes of the struggles faced by families on their caseloads.

The Make Equality Real campaign is coordinated by the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) and aims to unite both the trade union movement and wider campaigners together to improve equality and end austerity once and for all.

<https://gftu.org.uk/make-equality-real/>

John McGowan
General Secretary
j.mcgowan@swu-union.org.uk



SWU General Secretary John McGowan was proud to be one of the ‘Make Equality Real’ coalition members with opportunities for parliamentary discussions regarding social work.

Social workers report housing crisis for children



As [millions of households](#) struggled through last winter in cold damp homes, the impact on children has been revealed in newly released data.

Over a fifth (21%) of social workers working with children, young people and families have seen their service remove a child or children from their family in the last three years where unsafe or inappropriate housing conditions was a key contributing factor.¹

Unsafe housing conditions can include maintenance issues, mould, damp, insect or vermin infestations or cramped conditions.

More broadly, 78% of all social workers strongly agree that housing conditions are a concern for people they support, with over a third (36%) strongly agreeing that over the last three years, the number of people they help live in unsafe or inappropriate housing conditions which has increased.

The research among social workers was conducted by the Social Workers Union and follows previous [reports by ITV](#) that the cost of living crisis has led to a third of UK social workers [witnessing](#) child removals in the past three years

where poverty or financial poverty has been a key factor.

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

“Removal of a child from their family is always a last resort, but sadly when conditions become dangerous action has to be taken.

“This data shows that the reality of life in modern day Britain is a struggle for many households. The country’s poor housing stock poses a danger to the wellbeing and development of children and poses a risk to the health of many adults with pre-existing health conditions.

“Social workers go above and beyond to help those at most risk in the country and are highlighting safeguarding concerns on a regular basis. However, addressing the housing challenge is more than social workers can do themselves.

“Not only do we need to see investment in a £13.2bn Warm Homes Plan to help improve housing conditions, but we also need a full range of fully-functioning and well-resourced public services.

“Ministers must own up to the fact that it is only the Government that can provide the funding to reverse the decline in public services and ensure the most vulnerable get the support they need.”

Among all social workers, housing conditions are a concern with large numbers strongly agreeing that “the number of people I work with who are living in unsafe or inappropriate housing conditions has increased over the last 3 years.”

However, the results varied across the UK, with those in the North East of England, London and Wales most likely to report that housing was a major concern.²

Simon Francis, coordinator of the End Fuel Poverty Coalition, said:

“Millions of people from the youngest children to our oldest pensioners are living in [cold damp homes](#), unable to heat their homes to a safe temperature or racking up massive debts - with some even turning to [loan sharks](#).

“To add insult to injury, around a quarter of what is spent on heating our draughty properties is wasted, because the UK’s old housing stock is some of the worst insulated in Europe.

“The Government is making the right noises when it comes to helping improve housing, but the Chancellor needs to put the money where their mouth is and commit the funding needed for a Warm Homes Plan which will help people improve the energy efficiency and insulation of their homes.

“And until these reforms are delivered, Ministers must not forget about the millions of people suffering in cold damp homes - they should provide enough support to ensure that everyone is able to stay warm every winter.”

Amaran Uthayakumar-Cumarasamy, an NHS Children’s Doctor based in South Yorkshire, commented:

“Some of the most acute harms of the UK’s unsafe, unaffordable and insecure

housing are shouldered by our most disadvantaged children and young people.

“Whilst the findings of this report are shocking, they won’t come as a surprise to many of us working in the NHS. Increasingly, children’s health professionals across the UK are witnessing cases of respiratory illness, undernutrition and worsening mental health all linked to undignified housing circumstances.

“What’s more, rather than providing a foundation for their health, unfit, unsafe and expensive housing continues to severely impact their educational attainment, social health and life chances.

“Without radical change towards fairer policies that support affordability, energy efficiency, accessibility and security of tenure, housing will continue to entrench and reproduce childhood mass illness and stark disadvantage.”

Matthew Scott, senior policy officer at the Chartered Institute of Housing, added:

“Warm, safe homes are the cornerstone of our health, but this research demonstrates the life changing impact housing can have on children’s wellbeing.

“Local authorities’ Housing Revenue Accounts are stretched to their limit following decades of rent cuts and caps over the last ten years, and it is nearly three decades since the last significant central investment in upgrading homes, which came through the transformative Decent Homes Programme.

“The government should seize the opportunity to reverse the cycle of underinvesting in housing quality, so every child has a safe, secure home. In its forthcoming Spending Review, we urge the government to set out a new programme of investment in existing homes, including fully allocating the £13.2 billion promised for its Warm Homes Plan and taking steps to put the finances of housing providers on a more stable footing.”

This data is being widely reported on by the media. It has made LBC Radio and Absolute Radio Breakfast Show headline news and featured in articles from [Yahoo News](#), [Big Issue](#), [Professional Social Work magazine](#), [Social Work Today](#), [Morning](#)

[Star](#), [LocalGov](#), [Labour Hub](#), [Housing Today](#), [Inside Housing](#), [The Municipal Journal](#), and [End Fuel Poverty Coalition](#).

SWU will ensure the voice of social workers is heard by the decision makers.

Make Equality Real campaign at Westminster



John McGowan, Priya Sahni-Nicholas, and Gawain Little

SWU has used some of these findings in the union's ongoing campaigning work with the General Federal of Trade Unions (GFTU). On April 22nd SWU General Secretary John McGowan, Equality Trust Co-Executive Director Priya Sahni-Nicholas, and GFTU General Secretary Gawain Little took the [Make Equality Real](#) coalition's petition to No 10.

The coalition held a Westminster discussion with MPs about supporting the Make Equality Real campaign, urging the government to implement swiftly the section of the Equality Act 2010 which places a duty on all public bodies to tackle inequality. Thanks go to Nadia Whittome MP for hosting the discussion and to all the MPs that joined us.

GFTU General Secretary Gawain Little commented at the Make Equality Real petition hand in:

“Now, at the commencement of the consultation on implementing the socio-economic duty (SED), we believe it is time to establish a commission with trade unions at its heart - to essentially begin a discussion across the whole of our society about the implications of austerity.

“We need an end to the austerity that keeps our children in poverty, that keeps our families in poverty and that shuts off future progress for future generations.”

SWU submits evidence to House of Commons Committee

SWU General Secretary John McGowan has also [submitted these survey findings as evidence](#) to the House of Commons Energy Security and Net Zero Committee and will be increasing the work the union does to engage with MPs, MSPs, MSs, MLAs, and ministers over the coming months. **You can read the letter on the next page.**

To: Bill Esterson MP
Chair
House of Commons Energy Security and Net Zero Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA
By email to: commonsensz@parliament.uk and bill.esterson.mp@parliament.uk

23 April 2025

Dear Bill Esterson MP,

RE: Inquiry into the Cost of Energy – The Impact of Housing Conditions on Families and Children

I am writing on behalf of the Social Workers Union (SWU) to contribute evidence to the Committee's inquiry into the cost of energy, and in particular, to highlight how inadequate housing - exacerbated by high energy costs - is having a devastating impact on children, families, and the most vulnerable people in our communities.

I apologise for the delay in submitting this evidence, but we needed to secure approval from our research partners at ITV that we were able to make this information available. We hope it is still able to be accepted.

New research by SWU, involving over 2,000 frontline social workers, paints a deeply concerning picture. More than one in five (21%) social workers supporting children and families have been involved in cases over the past three years where children were removed from their families in part due to unsafe or inappropriate housing conditions.

These conditions include serious maintenance issues, mould, damp, infestations, and chronic overcrowding - circumstances often worsened by families being unable to heat their homes properly due to unaffordable energy cost.

Our findings also show that nearly four in five (78%) social workers strongly agree that housing conditions are a major concern for the people they support, with over a third (36%) reporting an increase in the number of people living in unsafe housing over the last three years.

The picture is starkest in the North East of England, London and Wales, where over 40% of social workers reported that poor housing was a serious and growing concern.

It is important to stress that social workers do not take the decision to remove a child lightly. This is always a last resort.

But when children's health and development are at risk because their home is cold, damp, and dangerous, decisive action must be taken. The lived experience of these families is one of daily struggle, and it is clear that current housing and energy policy is failing them.

Social workers are going above and beyond to keep people safe, but we cannot tackle these challenges alone. We need urgent government action.

This includes immediate investment in housing upgrades and improved insulation, and long-term support through a properly funded **£13.2 billion Warm Homes Plan**. Without this, we risk perpetuating cycles of poverty, poor health, and disadvantage for future generations.

We also support calls from across the sector to ensure local authorities and housing providers are properly resourced to carry out their duties. The last significant government investment in upgrading homes was nearly thirty years ago.

Colleagues in the NHS have told us of the serious consequences for children's health caused by unsafe housing; respiratory illness, undernutrition, and declining mental health are all on the rise. Housing has become a public health emergency.

The cost of energy is also a significant factor in the suffering of families, but it cannot be looked at in isolation.

It is a key part of the wider housing emergency and must be addressed with urgency and seriousness. We urge the Committee to consider the evidence from social workers as it forms its recommendations, and to press for real and lasting change that puts families and children first.

We would welcome the opportunity to provide further evidence to the Committee or contribute to oral hearings as the inquiry progresses. I include a full summary of the research findings below.



Yours sincerely,
John McGowan
General Secretary
Social Workers Union

SOCIAL WORKERS UNION / ITV NEWS RESEARCH

STATISTICAL HEADLINES

86% of social workers (88% of those in children's services (CS)) believe the profession has inadequate staffing levels, with 84% (87% in CS) believing these staff shortages are seriously limiting their ability to do their jobs properly.

Four-fifths (80%, 81% among those in CS) go further to say that the understaffing is putting the people they work with at risk - half of this number (40% in CS) strongly agree that this is the case.

Just one in ten (11%, same in CS) of social workers believe that their service is adequately funded. Of those who feel underfunding is a problem almost all (90%, same in CS) say that this lack of funding is impacting on their ability to do their job.

Almost all social workers (95%, same in CS) say that cuts to local authority budgets have harmed their ability to do their jobs properly as cuts hit not just social work recruitment, but also harm the services social workers rely on to refer people to.

In fact two-thirds (67%, 80% in CS) report that they are unable to refer clients to public services when they need to.

More broadly, 88% (90% in CS) of social workers have seen the number of people they work with who are in poverty / seriously struggling financially increase over the last 3 years as the cost of living crisis hits.

81% of social workers working with children, young people and families have seen the number of cases referred to them due to poverty increase in the last three years. Similar numbers (79%) of social workers also report self-referrals increasing.

A third of social workers working with children, young people and families have seen their service remove a child or children from their family in the last 3 years where financial hardship or poverty was a key contributing factor.

While 14% of children's social workers strongly agree that they have seen an increase in removals where the family are living in poverty (and 36% agree), 20% disagreed with this, and 3% strongly disagreed.

Over a fifth (21%) social workers working with children, young people and families have seen their service removed a child or children from their family in the last 3 years where unsafe or inappropriate housing conditions (e.g maintenance issues, mould, damp, insect or vermin infestations, cramped conditions etc) was a key contributing factor.

More broadly, 78% of all social workers strongly agree that housing conditions are a concern for people they support, with over a third (36%) strongly agreeing that over the last three years, the number of people they help live in unsafe or inappropriate housing conditions which has increased (e.g maintenance issues, mould, damp, cramped conditions).

Meanwhile, the mental health and recruitment crisis in social work continues.

Over three quarters (76%) say their mental health is suffering because of work (up from 65% in 2022).

Over a quarter (27%) find themselves suffering an emotional response to their work (crying / feeling unwell) at least once a week (up from 24% in 2022).

Around half are considering leaving social work (similar numbers to previously) which would further increase the crisis.

SOCIAL WORKER TESTIMONIES

“Whilst we would never remove children for poverty alone, financial stressors and poverty often lead to other difficulties such as domestic abuse, drug and alcohol misuse and poor mental health. When these become entrenched in family dynamics, children are then at risk of significant harm. When it is simply a matter of money, the Local Authority (LA) can subsidise this for a short period, but I am often concerned what will happen once the children are no longer on a plan and the LA is no longer able to subsidise the cost of living.”

“Poverty contributes to wider risk factors - poor mental health, substance and alcohol misuse and domestic abuse. Rather than money being directly spent on supporting families remaining together, funds are redirected to remove children from parents at a huge expense.”

“The impact on a parents capacity to meet their children's needs is compounded through poverty, lack of resources has a significant impact on mental health, we have seen a rise in children exposed to domestic abuse and substance misuse all of which are inextricably linked to managing the day to day in a context of poverty.”

“Not the main reasons for removal but poverty is often a feature for children at the edge of the care system”

“This is the case in almost all situations. Poverty leads to stress, leads to mental health difficulties, leads to maladaptive coping mechanisms such as substance use as mental health support is poor/untimely, substance use impacts parenting capacity and ability to meet basic needs of a child.”

“One example but is faced by almost all my families... Families can not pay for school uniforms or meals, child refuses to attend school, starts to hang around the streets, gets in with the wrong crowd, takes drugs, criminally exploited, in to car crime, stealing, eventually is arrested and mum is challenged by school, police, local community to control their child, we are either already there trying to help but can't fix the poverty, can't access services to help because they

have had to close due to funding or waiting lists or 12 months long so we become another face the mum feels is there to judge rather than help. If the child is female add in sexual exploitation. On top of this there could be ASD, ADHD, learning difficulties or a disability and they are on a merry go round of referrals to services that have no funding to provide anything practical just advise which to a mum who is hungry, in debt just to feed her children is another judgement.”

REGIONAL VARIATIONS

Almost all social workers (95%, same in CS) say that cuts to local authority budgets have harmed their ability to do their jobs properly. Those social workers in Northern Ireland were most likely to strongly agree with this statement, followed by those in Yorkshire & Humber and then those in the East Midlands.

A third of social workers working with children, young people and families have seen their service remove a child or children from their family in the last 3 years where financial hardship or poverty was a key contributing factor. Across the country the figures are:

1. Wales 46%
2. West Midlands, 41%
3. North East 39%
4. Yorkshire & Humber 39%
5. Scotland 37%
6. East Midlands 36%
7. North West 35%
8. East of England 33%
9. London 32%
10. South East 30%
11. Northern Ireland 29%
12. South West 27%

Over a fifth (21%) social workers working with children, young people and families have seen their service removed a child or children from their family in the last 3 years where unsafe or inappropriate housing conditions (e.g maintenance issues, mould, damp, insect or vermin infestations, cramped conditions etc) was a key contributing factor.

1. Wales 39%
2. West Midlands, 26%
3. Scotland 26%
4. Northern Ireland 24%
5. East Midlands 23%
6. North East 22%
7. North West 21%
8. South East 19%
9. London 19%
10. Yorkshire & Humber 18%
11. East of England 15%
12. South West 13%

While results varied, many social workers reported having seen an increase over the last three years of families with children approaching their service for help because they are in poverty / seriously struggling financially. Those in Wales, Scotland and South East England were most likely to strongly agree that this was the case:

1. Wales 39%
2. Scotland 33%
3. South East 32%
4. North West 32%
5. London 31%
6. Yorkshire & Humber 30%
7. North East 28%
8. West Midlands 27%
9. South West 26%
10. East Midlands 26%
11. Northern Ireland 24%
12. East of England 22%

Among all social workers, housing conditions are a concern with large numbers strongly agreeing that “the number of people I work with who are living in unsafe or inappropriate housing conditions (e.g maintenance issues, mould, damp, cramped conditions) has increased over the last 3 years”:

1. North East 41%
2. London 41%
3. Wales 41%
4. South East 39%
5. Yorkshire & Humber 39%
6. North West 39%
7. East Midlands 38%
8. Northern Ireland 37%
9. West Midlands 32%
10. South West 28%
11. Scotland 24%
12. East of England 26%

SOURCES

October 2024 data: The Social Workers Union invited all members and the wider social work community to respond to a survey commissioned by ITV News between 3rd to 22nd October 2024. 2,248 social workers responded. ITV News [broadcast a report](#) with unique access behind the scenes with a social work team on 4 December 2024.

February 2024 data: The Social Workers Union invited all members to respond to a survey commissioned by The Independent between 25 January to 12 February 2024. 716 social workers responded.

January 2022 data: The Social Workers Union invited all members to respond to a survey commissioned by LBC Radio between 10-17 January 2022. 824 social workers responded.



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Parliamentary monitoring report - April 2025



Key issues and debates that mentioned social workers this month

- **Autism Act 2009 Committee** - House of Lords - oral evidence sessions. Some positive comments about how good social work can save lives and some negative comments about social workers 'victim blaming' - but this was also blamed on insufficient time and resources in the service.
- **Health and Social Care Committee - Community Mental Health Services** - oral evidence sessions - to a question on prevention and 'person-centred' services - Cllr Lorraine Francis, Chair of the Adult Social Care Policy Committee in Bristol said that *'without the resources to back that up, we are running up the hill backwards'* and that social worker numbers were dropping. Association of mental Health Providers highlighted the need for investment in social work. Also flagged was the need to increase the number of people that become mental health social workers and that people were being turned down for this role because there was insufficient funding to train them. Witnesses called for a workshop plan that prioritised social work.
- **Scottish Parliament** - questions to children's minister about the pressures on social workers and people having to reach crisis point before they can get help.

Current inquiries and legislation

Name	Inquiry /stage	Key dates/Action
Assisted Dying Bill	Report stage and third reading	Friday 16 th May
Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill Committee	2 nd Reading and general debate - HoL	1 st May
Mandatory Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse) Bill	Committee stage (line-by-line) HoL	To be scheduled
Mental Health Bill	Now passing to HoC	Ongoing
Education Select Committee	Children's Social Care	To be scheduled
Health and Social Care Select Committee	Community Mental Health Services	Oral evidence sessions taking place
H&SC Committee	Adult Social Care Reform	To be scheduled
H&SC Select Committee	Inquiry - The first 1000 days of life	No longer accepting evidence
APPG on Adult Social Care	No current inquiries	No updates
APPG Care-Experienced Children and Young People	No current inquiries	No updates
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	No longer accepting evidence



Call for Action

Social Work Regulation - Safety First, but for Whom?



The regulation of social work is widely regarded as a fundamental mechanism for ensuring public safety. In the UK, various regulatory bodies exist, but this article focuses specifically on Social Work England (SWE). Few would dispute the importance of this role, as SWE is tasked with overseeing the practice of social workers in England, protecting the public, and upholding the integrity and competence of the profession. To achieve this, the regulator addresses cases where practitioners fail to meet established standards, imposing sanctions when necessary. In severe instances, social workers may be removed from the register, effectively preventing them from continuing in their profession. These measures are designed to eliminate poor practice and safeguard the public.

At its core, the regulatory process is about accountability. Registered social workers pledge to uphold the ethics and values of their profession, and any breach of these commitments results in professional consequences. SWE frames its role as one that promotes professional development, defines eligibility to practice, and fosters public confidence - all funded through mandatory registration fees (SWE, 17th August 2020, Hallam P, SWE online).

Social workers often face multiple layers of accountability, particularly within health services or integrated care boards. While these concerns warrant further discussion, the broader scrutiny of social work practice today reflects evolving societal expectations and the increasing prominence of litigation. In this environment, social workers operate under continuous oversight, not only from direct employers but also from regulators, whose decisions may override employer judgments and prove difficult to contest.

The Risks of Regulatory Oversight

The implications of regulatory scrutiny for social workers are substantial. Complaints and accusations can arise unexpectedly, and the complexity of social work means that flawless practice is virtually impossible. Regulatory involvement has become an occupational hazard, comparable to a factory worker neglecting safety gear or a gas fitter improperly sealing a joint, errors that carry serious consequences. These risks highlight the challenges of maintaining absolute safety in social work practice.

While public protection remains paramount, the unique demands of the profession introduce complexities not found in other fields. Investigations often rely on individuals with limited firsthand experience of the environments in which social workers operate. Despite efforts to establish the facts, the reliance on the balance of probabilities adds an element of subjectivity.

This raises an essential question: regulation prioritises public safety, but what safeguards exist for the well-being of the social workers who fulfil this duty? Like surgeons, doctors, lawyers, and nurses, social workers bear immense responsibility. They navigate complex human challenges and often face multifaceted risks. When accused or investigated, what protections are available to them?

Legal representation options vary, ranging from union support and hiring barristers to facing proceedings without representation. Employer-sponsored legal aid is rare, leaving many social workers vulnerable. SWE employs legal firms and barristers during hearings, supported by independent legal advisors, who, notably, are also funded by SWE. While registrants may appeal decisions, the process is daunting and costly, requiring litigation in the High Court.

Protecting Social Workers Without Undermining Public Confidence

The ramifications of regulatory hearings for social workers can be devastating, often leading to loss of income and restricted access to legal support. While maintaining public confidence is the regulator's primary mandate, this can sometimes overshadow considerations for the registrant's well-being. The analogy of occupational hazards reinforces the need for safeguards that mitigate risk, similar to protective measures employed in industrial workplaces.

As Shakespeare famously wrote, "therein lies the rub." Achieving fairness in health and safety protections for social workers is fraught with challenges. The profession contends with excessive caseloads, staff shortages, recruitment difficulties, resource constraints, heightened complaints, and the complexity of court-related work. Despite their significant impact on practitioners' well-being, these factors often receive insufficient attention in regulatory hearings, leaving social workers exposed.

A Call for Action

Proactive measures, including adequate supervision, manageable caseloads, and safeguards against unfounded allegations, should form the foundation of workplace health and safety protections, with employers playing a crucial role in their implementation. Just as employers ensure proper protective equipment for refuse workers, they must also adopt policies that safeguard social workers from associated risks.

Social workers must advocate for stronger health and safety measures in their workplaces, actively engaging with unions and employers to prioritise these concerns. Organised efforts, supported by professional associations and unions, are essential in securing meaningful protections for practitioners.

In conclusion, I hope this article sparks further discussion regarding workplace protections for social workers and encourages practitioners to engage with their unions in pursuit of strengthened safeguards. Industrial action, akin to past and ongoing movements, such as those seen with refuse workers in Birmingham, may prove necessary to achieve these aims. History has shown that workplace rights are not granted without action, and I urge social workers reading this to consult on what can be done in their workplaces to ensure the fundamental principle of health and safety is upheld.

Paddy McIntyre
SWU Trade Union Officer



The social worker as problem solver

SWU Ambassador, Dr Neil Thompson, shares his thoughts on shifting the focus away from social work 'consumerism'

In my lengthy career in social work I have seen many changes, while much has remained largely the same (the key role of compassion, for example). Of the changes I have witnessed, some have been very positive (a much clearer focus on and more sophisticated understanding of social justice, for example), some far from positive. One of the latter has been a major emphasis on consumerism. What I mean by this term is a major focus on providing, commissioning or rationing scarce service resources, with relatively little consideration given to what has created these care needs or what can be done to address the underlying issues. Participants on many of my courses have told me that they feel they have been reduced to administrative staff, with their role rarely extending beyond resource management. A common comment would be along the lines of: 'You know what, Neil, I hadn't thought about it until today, but I find myself driving to someone's house wondering what service I can give them'. Of course, it would have been much better to have been wondering what they were struggling with and what could be done to help them, relying on service provision only as a last resort.

This focus can be traced back to the NHS and Community Care Act 1990 and the neoliberal ideology it reflected in placing such a strong emphasis on care management, a much narrower focus than the traditional role of the social worker as enabler and problem solver. I have made many presentations and even run full-day training courses on the role of the social worker as a problem solver. What has emerged from these is that a high proportion of participants had never had any training in problem-solving methods or processes, and many had never even

considered their role to be that of problem solver, such has been the influence of consumerism and the neoliberal thinking underpinning it.

I remember, in my days as a team manager, being present at a safeguarding conference and noting that the major focus was on what services could be put in place to protect the child from harm. Thankfully, the meeting chair was supportive of my efforts to shift the focus more to looking at what the underlying issues were and what could be done to address them (rather just develop a shopping list of services that could potentially be offered). This lack of holistic, analytical thinking that I was challenging is sadly a common byproduct of consumerism, a tendency to adopt market-based thinking, seeking to match service to client, just as would, say, an insurance broker trying to match a policy with a customer's needs and circumstances.

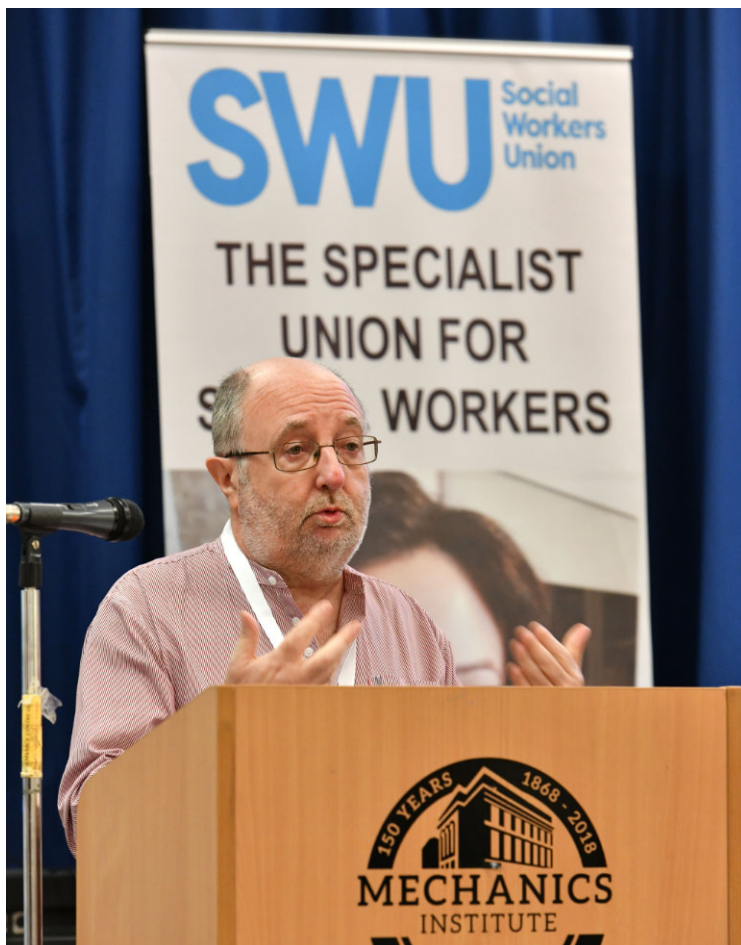
Interestingly, Daniel Pink, in his book on persuasion, presents influencing others as a form of selling, rather than presenting selling as just one example of a wide range of ways of influencing people. He translates a complex set of human interactions into a simple matter of making a sale - another reflection of neoliberal bias.

My social work training took place before consumerism took over so many different aspects of social work, so I approach the social work task in a very different way. For me, social work is about problem solving and empowerment, with service provision as just one of a wide range of problem-solving methods at our disposal (and in most cases the most resource intensive).

Consumerism has the potential to create dependency, whereas a problem-solving approach supports people in addressing their own needs and challenges and thus has the potential to be empowering. It is more effective in managing scarce resources and is likely to bring much higher levels of job satisfaction. It also offers opportunities for professional development by constantly enlarging your repertoire of problem-solving approaches and thereby developing your skills, confidence and

effectiveness. There is no shortage of such methods - for example, my *Effective Problem Solving* book contains over 100 tools, most if not all of which can be used in social work.

There is therefore much to be gained from moving away from a neoliberally based consumerism towards a more holistic person-centred approach based on problem solving and empowerment.

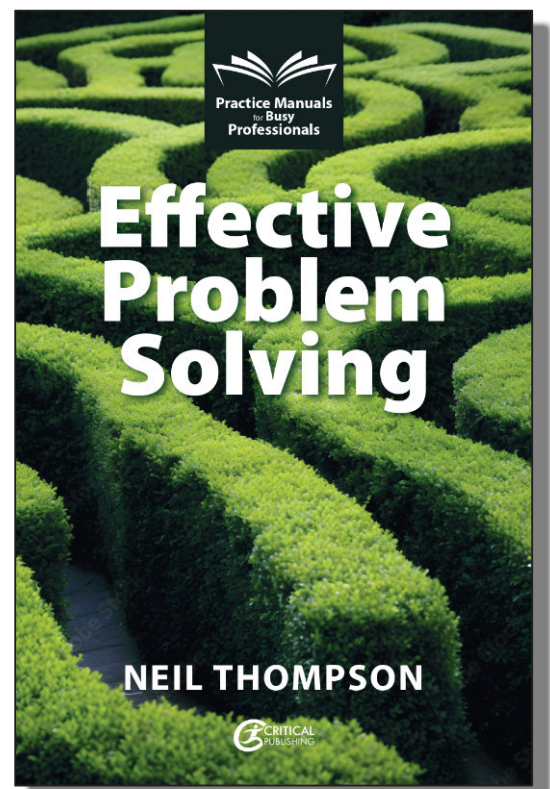


*Dr Neil Thompson is an award-winning author and educator, a visiting professor at the Open University and a SWU ambassador. His online Academy at www.NeilThompson.info offers a range of e-learning courses and Chartered Management Institute qualifications in social care. His latest book is the third edition of *Crisis Intervention*, published by Routledge.*

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Meet the markers for the SWU Assignment: World Social Work Day 2025 Essay Competition



Social work students and apprentices be sure to submit your entries by the end of day **Saturday 14th June 2025** for the chance to win £500.

The Social Workers Union (SWU) is pleased to announce that **Jessie Hoskin**, **Ann Marie Hayes**, and **Andrew Reece** will be marking this year's SWU Assignment essay competition. Our judges are really looking forwards to reading the responses from social work students and apprentices from across the UK to the question:

“What are the most important things social workers should get from their professional training? What type of social work practice would they like to be involved in as they begin their professional careers, and why?”

Up to **four** of the most compelling arguments within the word limit of 750-1000 words will win a grant of £500 each. Further details and winning essays from previous years are available on the [SWU Assignment webpage](#).

[Click here to see the flyer with the 2025 competition details.](#)

Without further ado, let us introduce you to the markers of the SWU Assignment 2025!

Jessie Hoskin is a National Organiser and [Union Contact](#) Manager for the Social Workers Union (SWU). Prior to joining SWU, Jessie worked in Parliamentary Offices for both the Labour Party and the Green Party before taking on the role of Director at the campaigning organisation Zero Hours Justice.

Jessie's extensive experience as a caseworker and then senior caseworker has instilled in her many of the same values, concerns, and drive for social justice that social work professionals share.

Jessie's career has focused primarily on systems change, initially campaigning against Universal Credit alongside disabled people and trade unions, before moving on to campaign against precarious work and the insecurity it produces.

Jessie was also elected as a councillor for her hometown, although she much prefers creating collaborative approaches to problem solving, working alongside communities, and now Social Workers.

Jessie commented, "I was probably politicised at a young age, not in the traditional sense that my parents were involved in activism, trade unions or party politics, but that I grew up in a single-parent household supported by benefits. Casework then felt like a natural fit; I often had more in common with the people I was supporting than the people I worked for. This taught me to really value lived experience. People who have politics done to them are so often the people who identify issues first, because they live it."



"I started my career in the arts, going on to study an art and politics masters at Goldsmiths. I really enjoy seeing and reading how people express themselves, and look forward to reading your essays!"

Ann Marie Hayes is a registered social worker who is also qualified as a systemic psychotherapist. She holds a masters level teaching qualification specially designed for university teaching staff.

Ann Marie joined the SWU Executive Committee in 2020 and continues to be inspired by the breadth and depth of work the union undertakes to meet the specific professional needs of social workers in the UK. She is committed to challenging the inequalities impacting both service users and the social workers working alongside them.



With a pre-qualifying wealth of experience in Youth and Play Work, Adventure Playground and Probation Hostel management, and in Secure Units and Residential Children's Homes, Ann Marie has focused her social work life on supporting Children and Families. As a practitioner and manager, she has worked across Referral & Assessment, Child in Need, Child Protection, Court, Looked After Children, Youth Offending, Leaving Care, Inclusion, and Therapeutic teams. She developed and managed a Family Support Service, and offered specialist (reflective) practice support as a Professional Educator. She has always taken advantage of opportunities to expand her repertoire of knowledge, skills and experience in order to provide the best service and outcomes for those she works alongside.

Ann Marie is currently researching Critical Reflection in social work practice, a research interest generated during a working life spent supporting marginalised, vulnerable and/or oppressed individuals and communities in a range of settings. She enjoys exploring theories to enhance practice wisdom, and is especially interested in constructions and operationalisation of power and how wider discourses shape the nature and practice of social work.

She has a longstanding interest in ethics, social justice and human rights work affecting local and global communities and in the power of resistance to bring about social change and social cohesion.

She is particularly passionate about Palestinian Solidarity and bringing Noam Chomsky's words to life: 'we do not become activists; we simply forget that we are.'

Andrew Reece is Professional Officer and Registered Social Worker with the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) England Team, where he specialises in Social Work practice with disabled children. Before working for BASW England, Andrew was an active BASW member, sitting on their England National Standing Committee and supporting both their '[Homes not Hospitals](#)' and '[80-20: Time for Relationship Based Practice](#)' campaigns.

From 2016 to 2024 Andrew worked for Camden Council in London as Head of Integrated Learning Disability Services, providing Social Work and clinical leadership to Social Workers and health professionals in an 'Outstanding' rated service supporting adults with learning disabilities to live fulfilled lives in their local communities. He is proud that they were awarded both the Learning Disability Team of the Year by the Royal College of Psychiatrists in 2020 for their work to develop a Named Worker model of practice and the Adult/Multidisciplinary Team of the Year in 2022 by the Social Worker of the Year Awards for their work to support 'Kasibba' to escape nearly 50 years of inappropriate detention.



As most social workers in England will be aware, SWE have proposed significant annual fee increases. SWE consultation set to close on 13th May 2025. SWU and BASW are highly appreciative of all who have contributed to our survey and member engagement to ensure we capture the concerns of social workers for our organisational responses to the SWE consultation. While we have strength in numbers, it is highly important to emphasise that, despite having members in their thousands, organisational responses will only count as one. Therefore, we urge all individual social workers to complete the SWE consultation [here](#) to add to the volume of responses.

SWU will be hosting a meeting to set out key concerns gathered from members and offer further input to SWU's consultation response.

This SWU meeting will be on Thursday 8th May 4pm-5pm, please join via Microsoft Teams

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 377 160 282 437 3

Passcode: n4YP9Jv7



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Trade unions in the UK play a pivotal role

Calum Gallacher, SWU Assistant General Secretary



In the 21st century, we are all labouring more within the parameters of government agendas, a dark socio-political climate that profoundly shapes social work in the UK and continues to narrow the scope of the quality of life for most citizens. Austerity measures, implemented in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and continuing in various forms, have significantly impacted funding for social care services, leading to increased workloads and pressures on practitioners.

Trade unions in the UK play a pivotal role in advocating for improved health and safety standards within the profession. Social work, by its nature, often exposes us to challenging and potentially dangerous situations, working with people more predisposed to vulnerabilities, navigating complex family dynamics, and working in increasingly unsustainable environments. These environments compromise the safety of the public and the personal safety of staff and the organisations we work for. Whilst most social workers are highly adept at advocating for others and themselves, in times such as now, we can find ourselves depleted and in need of support to challenge systemic changes that [create conflict between values and how we work](#). This is why we need to stand together to find solutions and press for professional recognition and change.

Unions like SWU, alongside professional bodies such as BASW, are instrumental in negotiating with employers to implement risk assessments, provide adequate training on personal safety, and ensure access to appropriate [support services](#) for social workers experiencing vicarious trauma or work-related stress. We are here with our members, by their side at every step of the way. We lobby for policies that challenge societal inequalities, [protect social workers from retribution of](#)

[legislation](#), and campaign for adequate resources and staffing levels to [reduce workload pressures](#) that can compromise both worker well-being and service quality. Fundamentally, trade unions strive to create a safer and healthier working environment for their members, enabling them to effectively support vulnerable individuals and communities, ensuring employers fulfil their duties to manage [risks to personal health and safety](#).

Shifts in political ideologies and government policies influence the focus of social work interventions and rationing of services, forcing employers to limit capacity for response to legal duties with disregard for elective powers, safeguarding, and risk management over preventative and empowering approaches have become a survival mechanism, which creates inner conflict for our professional values. This focus on crisis work has serious ramifications for social workers in terms of public perception, where only [negative aspects are reported on by the media](#). Inaccurate press coverage also contributes to the climate of practice, with an adverse impact on the trust, confidence, and engagement with social services.

Furthermore, evolving legislation and policy frameworks around human rights, equality, and social justice create both opportunities and challenges for social workers seeking to advocate for vulnerable populations and address systemic inequalities. These complex and often competing forces require social workers to be politically aware, critically reflective, and adept at navigating a constantly changing landscape to support individuals and communities effectively.

Professional trade unionism in the UK has increasingly focused on [promoting equality](#)

across workplaces and more broadly in society. This involves actively challenging discriminatory practices related to gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, and other protected characteristics. Unions are working to ensure equal pay for equal work, advocate for person-friendly policies, and tackle harassment and bullying in the workplace. They also play a crucial role in negotiating and

enforcing equality policies with employers, aiming to create more inclusive and equitable working environments for all. Trade unions share collective commitment, with social work, to the need for governments to enact legislative changes and increased funding to address systemic inequalities and promote social justice. Unity is strength; [10 reasons why being a member of a trade union is important](#).

Book Review

'CATCH!' by C & C Muirhead

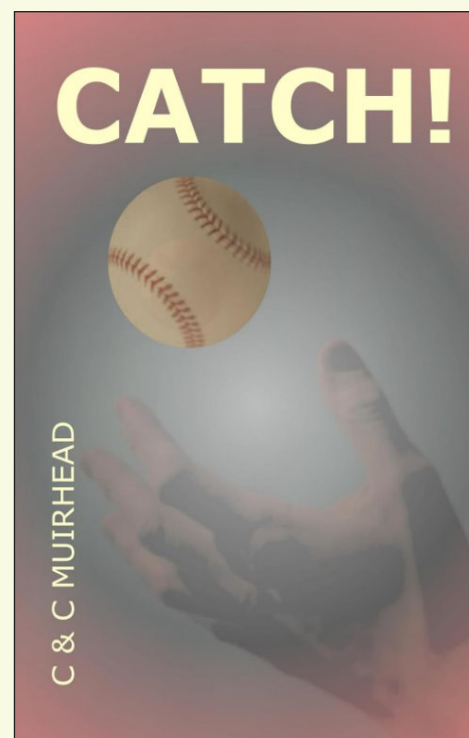
*Reviewed by Calum Gallacher,
SWU Assistant General Secretary*

Set under the glare of the Mediterranean sun in the city of Siracusa, Ortigia island, in the medieval shadows of Sicily. This story contrasts the light and darkness dwelling in contemporary society, wealth and exploitation. A young local man's swinging success in baseball has seen him migrate to distant Californian shores where he fulfils his dreams. Just before the weeklong baseball world series begins his attention is forced back to the underbelly of his home, on learning his mother has been abducted from the laundrette she works. The clock rapidly ticking for local police who search for Roberta, said to be the warmest kindest friendliest woman everyone loves. The investigation begins.

A compassionate priest, Don Enzo, champions the employment rights of workers arriving by boat from Western Africa. The construction workers have no right to remain and are exploited by a ruthless property tycoon and far-right politician. Enzo wants protection of a collective bargaining agreement, a living wage and reasonable working conditions, and while God is on his side he rightfully fears the merciless Alfonso and his mafioso associates.

Where to turn, who to trust?! The search for Roberta and justice intensifies with each turn of the page.

The Muirheads write simply and elegantly, with great insight into the maltreatment of refugees and asylum seekers who arrive in Europe in need of safety, community, and opportunities for fair work, not persecution. This book is a great holiday read. Much gratitude and respect to the authors who are donating all proceeds to the West End Refugee Service (WERS) in Newcastle upon Tyne. Nice touch with the trade union tint for employment rights and justice.



<https://www.amazon.co.uk/CATCH-C-Muirhead/dp/B0DSSYPKZG>

The 'Case for Change' in Northern Ireland

Gerry Madden reflects on the BASW NI and SWU event *Case for Change* held in Derry on 2nd April 2025.



I was absolutely delighted recently to represent SWU at the launch of the BASW NI and SWU [research report The Case for Change](#). This report is core to the ongoing campaign supported by both BASW and SWU aimed at bringing substantial and meaningful change to the Social Work Student Incentive Scheme.

There was a large turnout of students, academics, local elected representatives and also representatives from both BASW NI and SWU. The presentation of the research was made by Andy McClenaghan, BASW NI Public Affairs, Policy and Communications Lead. There was a palpable sense of energy in the room and a feeling that the report set out very powerfully the case for change: there has been no change / uplift in the student support scheme since at least 2008!

At the same time it was difficult and indeed at times distressing to listen to the experiences of students as they struggled financially to complete their studies. The research clearly evidences how the increased cost of living has affected students' standard of living during their time at university and also the impact of all of this on their mental health. The [film presentation](#) was particularly powerful in this context and it is hoped that this will be widely disseminated in the coming months to further strengthen the message of the campaign.

It is also important to note that there was a deep sense of frustration and disappointment expressed by all present at the failure of both the local Health Minister and Chief Social Worker to attend despite their being invited to do so. This however had the effect of making the organisers and supporters of the campaign more resolved to use the energy created by today's launch of the report to push ahead to achieve the change clearly needed and the final session of the event focused on responses to the students' experiences and reflections on next steps.

The clear sense was that the way forward was collective action and already a number of steps in this direction are being considered. For my own part, I indicated that SWU remained absolutely committed to supporting the campaign and to be involved in whatever way was needed.

Thanks in the meantime to all involved in the production of the report and to the organisers of a really momentous event.

THE CASE FOR CHANGE HAS BEEN MADE,
AND NO IS NOT AN ACCEPTABLE ANSWER!



Gerry Madden
SWU Northern Ireland Representative
and SWU Treasurer

Learn more about the BASW NI & SWU student bursary campaign



Under the current Social Work Student Incentive Scheme, the Department of Health provides eligible student social workers an annual payment of £4,000 and an allowance of £500 towards travel costs associated with practice placements.

Last year BASW NI and SWU jointly published research highlighting the dire financial circumstances of social work

students in Northern Ireland in a report called *Campaign to increase the Social Work Student Incentive Scheme: The case for change*. Included in this research, an online survey of social work students in Northern Ireland found that for nearly all (98%) the annual payment is not sufficient to meet the costs associated with completing the Degree in Social Work.

The Case for Change report calls for an uplift in the Social Work Student Incentive Scheme to £7,000 per year. You can read more about the report and download it on the SWU website: <https://swu-union.org.uk/2024/05/social-workers-call-for-an-increase-in-student-social-work-bursaries>

Watch this short film from BASW NI and SWU's campaign to increase the Student Incentive Scheme, featuring the experiences of social work students studying during the cost-of-living crisis.

The Case for Change:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPen1Lzgg44>

International Romani Day 2025

INTERNATIONAL Romani Day



APRIL 8



International Romani Day takes place each year on 8th April, and from April 1st to 30th the Council of Europe is marking [Opre Roma!](#) Month. These events are dedicated to celebrating the rich contributions of Roma history, language, and culture to Europe's shared heritage and cultural diversity and to raise awareness of the issues faced by Romani people.

The phrase "Opre Roma!", meaning "Stand up, Roma!" in English, was a call prominently mentioned during the first International Romani Congress in 1971. It was used to inspire and unite the Romani people in their struggle for recognition, rights, and equality and it symbolises a call to action for the Romani community to stand up against discrimination and to work towards a better future. It continues to inspire unity and resilience within Roma communities today.

As part of their work on language preservation, the Romani & Traveller Social Work Association - co-founded and led by Romani and Traveller social

workers - has recently published a [Welsh Romanus language resource](#). The "Learn Romani" handbook is intended to be used alongside the provided audio recordings but can be downloaded and used as a learning resource in its own right.

Part 4 No More - standing in solidarity

Parliament is currently debating a new Crime and Policing Bill. As the Bill makes its way through Parliament, there is a chance to repeal Part 4 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (PCSC) 2022.

The Social Workers Union (SWU) and British Association of Social Workers (BASW) continue to firmly [oppose Part 4 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill](#). As predicted, the tougher policing powers introduced by the PCSC Act have had a negative impact on the ability of Romani and Traveller communities to continue a nomadic way of life, free from discrimination and arbitrary treatment.

Join us and make a stand today by asking your MP to push for a repeal of Part 4 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (PCSC) 2022. [Email your MP today using this quick and easy tool](#) developed by Friends, Families & Travellers. It will just take a couple of minutes.

Everybody needs a place to live. It should not be a crime to have nowhere to go.

#Part4NoMore

The ROMA Model - restorative social work practice

The Reflection, Objective, Movement and Action (ROMA) Model: A Framework for Restorative Practice© has been developed by the Romani and Traveller Social Work Association to enable ethical, evidence informed, and rights based social work practice with Romani and Traveller communities.

[You can read more here about the ROMA model](#) four-stage circle process and for details about how your social work team can participate in piloting the model. The Romani and Traveller Social Work Association hopes that the ROMA model will act as a framework for repairing harm and provide social workers with a foundation for building respectful and trusting community relationships.

You may also be interested in:

- [A scoping review of social work with Roma and Traveller communities: introducing the ROMA model](#)
- Senior Lecturer in Social Work Allison Hulmes's 2023 blog on [Romani history, past, and contemporary struggles](#)
- [Resources and information](#) to support social workers in challenging anti-GRT discrimination, including the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022

SWU Executive Committee Member – Northern Ireland Representative

We are looking for a SWU member committed to social work and trade unionism, who can represent the decision-making process covering members and offer insight and accountability.

SWU is now seeking nominations from members to fill the Northern Ireland Representative vacancy on its Executive Committee. Executive Members play a key part in setting SWU's direction and overseeing its aims and mission, as part of SWU's three-year plan.

The General Secretary is elected by the membership and then provided with a mandate from the Executive to manage the union, the SWU staff and SWU's key functions and legal responsibilities. Executive members can take on responsibilities and activities relevant to their interests and expertise and may represent SWU externally.

The Executive Committee is made up of twelve members: at least two members from England; at least one member each from Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales (national representatives); a Student / NQSW representative and up to six others (UK representatives). The Chair of the union is elected by the Executive from among the representatives.

The time commitment includes attendance at up to six Executive meetings a year (online or in person) and occasional additional days such as attendance at Annual General Meetings (AGMs).

Attendance at Executive meetings is remunerated (if applicable) and expenses can be claimed for other SWU activity.

There is currently a vacancy for: Northern Ireland Representative:

1 position (2-year appointment)

The successful candidates would take office from the conclusion of the 2025 SWU AGM (26th September 2025) for a **2-year term**. Office holders may stand again for another consecutive term of 2 years.

Candidates for the SWU Executive must be nominated by two full voting members (other than the candidate themselves) and candidates must have been SWU members for at least 1 year* continuously prior to nomination.

**unless a student application, which are eligible to apply without being a member for 1 year.*

SWU encourages applications from Students / Newly Qualified Social Workers and Social Workers from ethnic minority backgrounds who are currently under-represented on the Executive Committee.

Candidates must complete a nomination form.

The closing date for receipt of nominations is 5pm on Friday 11th July 2025

The full timetable for 2025 elections and Executive role description can be found at:

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

Completed nomination forms must be accompanied by a head and shoulders photograph in a TIFF or JPEG format. These should be sent via email to:

joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk

International Workers' Memorial Day 2025

SWU National Organiser & Union Contact Manager Jessie Hoskin, SWU General Secretary John McGowan, and the SWU funded Austerity Action Group reflect on the importance of challenging inequality for a safer workplace for everyone.



INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' MEMORIAL DAY 28 APRIL

On International Workers' Memorial Day we must confront how disability benefits are still being framed as a "burden on working people" - as if disabled people exist solely outside the category of working people. This false division erases the reality that many disabled people are workers who face additional barriers.

The significant cuts proposed in the Government's [Pathways to Work Green Paper](#) have been widely criticised for targeting disabled people and the most disadvantaged in our society. A Freedom of Information (FOI) request to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) revealed that [87% of the working age people currently receiving the standard daily living PIP would no longer qualify](#) for this benefit [under Labour's proposed new rules](#).

The Personal Independence Payment (PIP) isn't an alternative to employment but essential support that covers disability-related costs - specialised equipment, transportation, and personal care that non-disabled workers don't face.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation impact analysis of these disability benefit reforms says that overall [the measures will push 400,000 people into poverty](#). This includes [ill and disabled people](#) and [unpaid carers](#), and it is estimated that the measures will have a [significant disproportionate impact on women](#). The [Child Poverty Action Group is estimating](#) that the key changes in the Green Paper alone, when fully rolled out, will amount to a £5bn cut to social security and will push an additional 100,000 children into poverty over the long term.

Cutting these benefits doesn't "encourage work"; it makes work impossible for many.



We must challenge the assumption that work is inherently good for everyone. Consider how many people become disabled through work itself: 12 million working days are lost annually to work-related injuries and illnesses. Back injuries, repetitive strain, and stress. Standard workplace environments can also be harmful for many disabled people, exacerbating conditions and creating new health problems.

The social model of disability recognises that people are disabled not by their impairments but by environments and attitudes that fail to accommodate their needs. When workplaces make adjustments for disabled people, they create environments that benefit everyone - health and safety is improved, accident rates lower, and risk of distress is reduced. Yet recent suggestions of cuts deliberately misunderstands this, placing the burden on disabled workers rather than creating accessible workplaces.

We believe that everyone should have the right to live full lives, that people ultimately best understand their own capacity, and that human worth isn't measured by productivity.

Some disabled people cannot and will never be able to work - and this doesn't diminish their value. Our society must support disabled people regardless of their employment status.

Let's reject the false division between "working people" and disabled people, and oppose these proposed benefit cuts that fail to understand PIP's purpose. Human dignity exists independent of productivity - our social systems should reflect this truth.

We encourage you to answer the Government consultation seeking views on approaches to reform the health and disability benefits system and employment support which runs until 30th June 2025: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/pathways-to-work-reforming-benefits-and-support-to-get-britain-working-green-paper>

The trade union movement: pushing for change and challenging inequality

General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) President Sarah Woolley - who is also the first female



General Secretary of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers' Union - spoke at the [SWU Conference](#) about breaking down barriers, growing the wider trade union movement, giving a voice to our diverse community of members, and getting involved in grassroots activism:

“Creating safer workplaces that actively challenge inequality is central to our ongoing mission as a trade union movement, and the movement has significant opportunities ahead to build on its successes.

“Creating safe channels for women and other marginalised members to speak out against injustices such as sexual harassment, racism, homophobia, transphobia, period poverty, pensions disparity, menopause stigma, and domestic violence will strengthen our collective capacity. By maintaining honest, open dialogues within branches and workplaces, we can dismantle harmful myths perpetuated by right-wing rhetoric and arm union representatives with effective negotiation tools. Concrete measures, including paid leave for survivors of domestic violence, provision of free sanitary products, robust sexual harassment reporting mechanisms with clear accountability, and comprehensive risk assessments inclusive of menopause symptoms, will demonstrate our movement’s commitment to tackling inequality head-on.

“These discussions, while essential, can sometimes be uncomfortable and risk being sidelined. However, confronting these issues openly signals to our members and potential members that their experiences matter deeply, increasing their engagement and active participation. Some unions have made impressive progress by drafting comprehensive workplace policies and initiating training, but we must ensure that these essential conversations remain at the forefront of our collective agendas.

“To cultivate inclusivity further, addressing imposter syndrome is critical. Many of us, particularly women and those from Black or Ethnic Minority backgrounds, struggle with feeling undeserving of our roles. Establishing robust support systems within unions is crucial to affirm that our voices and contributions are valuable and necessary. Recognising the extra hurdles women, Black and Ethnic Minority people, disabled people or from the LGBTQ community often face in achieving leadership roles can help dismantle existing barriers and shift outdated perceptions.

“Digital innovation also presents vital opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic taught us the value of digital platforms like Zoom, Teams, WhatsApp, and emerging chatbot technologies, all of which break down barriers for members who may not physically attend events but are eager to contribute. Maintaining and expanding digital engagement ensures continued accessibility and inclusivity, allowing diverse groups to convene virtually, discuss shared issues, strategise campaigns, and disseminate best practices efficiently.

“By sustaining these conversations and initiatives, our union movement can profoundly impact workplace equality, safety, and inclusivity, driving broader societal change through proactive, inclusive unionism.”

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>

What about working a second job?

With the cost of living increasing, social workers are sometimes finding that their money doesn't stretch like before. It is not always a solution to move to another employer to make more money. In these troubling times, it can be difficult to put food on the table or to pay ever-increasing mortgage costs.

Social workers may look to supplement their incomes just to make ends meet. Or they may just want to supplement their income so that they can have nice holidays with their families or buy a bigger car. Whatever the reason, it can be a struggle to make ends meet without finding a second source of income.

At the Advice and Representation (A&R) Service, we seem to be getting more calls from social workers who either have or want to supplement their income through working another job or even starting a business. While this is not out of bounds for social workers, I do want to make sure that, if you decide that your family's needs are such that you must supplement your income, then you do so in the right way.

Staying in-house

If you are with an organisation as a contractual full or part-time employee, then you have certain obligations to that employer if you would like to supplement your income. Some employers allow substantive employees to work elsewhere within the organisation such as in out of hours positions. You may even see a post you can do in another part of the organisation.

What is important is that you follow all the policies and procedures that are in place for accepting that post. You may be required to notify your current line manager for instance. Before even

applying for a supplementary post within your organisation, be sure to read the policy.

Seeking work outside the organisation

Where it may get tricky is if you decide you want to work for another organisation, such as a private sector company or another local authority. The first thing you must do is seek out the local policy regarding working two jobs. Even if that 'job' is voluntary, you need to seek out the policy regarding volunteering. If you can't find it on your intranet, contact HR and explain what you are looking for and they can send it to you.

Most organisations, and likely all local authorities will require you to first notify your manager prior to filling out any applications for second jobs. If you are ever in doubt as to whether you should tell your manager, then tell them. It is better to tell and not need to then to not tell and find out later that you should have.

What is very important is that you should never, under *any* circumstances, work two jobs concurrently. There is never a circumstance where this will be acceptable, and it could even find you falling foul of the Fraud Act 2006. It is possible for the act of fraud to become a criminal offence if your employer deems it necessary to inform the police. You also could find yourself facing your regulator if the employer finds that your actions could potentially have led to the harm of a vulnerable person in your care.

After getting approval

If you decide you want to work two jobs and your employer has approved it, then you must make sure to disclose to the second employer that you intend to continue to work for the first employer, what those hours are, and how long

you intend to continue with both roles. You must do this regardless of how many hours you are working in both posts.

Further issues to consider and that your employers will consider is whether there are violations of the working time directive. Although you may opt out of the WTD, there are circumstances whereby one or both of your employers may still fall foul of the WTD, so just make sure you are always transparent about your working hours. Additionally, it's important to make sure that there are no conflicts of interest in working both jobs at the same time.

It's important to remember that your manager has a right to discuss your second job with you, regardless of what that job is and regardless of which job you took first. Your manager has a duty of care to you which extends to making sure that you are not overloaded. If your manager feels that the second job is causing concern, they could ask you to make a choice. Additionally, you are still bound by your standards of conduct with your regulator, even if the second job is a non-social work post.



Starting a business

What if you decide that, instead of working two jobs, it may be more beneficial and easier to just do some work on the side - weekend gardening, selling items online, or even being a social media influencer?

You still need to find the local policy around working two jobs, consider your employment contract and discuss any plans with your line manager - *before* you start to make them. Again, if you are ever in doubt about discussing it with your line manager, discuss it at the earliest opportunity. It is important to note that, even if you are just selling confections to your friends and family to supplement your income, your employer may have a policy that requires you to disclose that to them. They have a right to ask for that information and you have a contractual obligation to provide it to them if their policy, or your contract, requires it. It may seem unfair or unnecessary, however, it is not a defence to say that you didn't know about the policy or thought it was stupid or did not apply in your situation.

My final piece of advice is to remember to always ensure that HMRC is receiving the right amount of tax. That is your responsibility and is not something with which we can assist you.

About the author

Lyse Hurd is a Trade Union Official from the Advice and Representation (A&R) service at BASW / SWU. She currently works in the Employment Team with previous experience in regulatory body work. She holds a Master of Science in Social Work from the University of Louisville and is a formerly registered social worker with a background in child protection.

Why Local Government Matters

SWU National Organiser & Union Contact Manager Jessie Hoskin reflects on the importance of voting in local elections.



As council election signs spring up in gardens across my neighbourhood, I'm reminded that so much of the politics affecting our daily lives happens locally.

It's local councils that decide if our streets are clean, our children have places to play, and how much funding our social services get.

These local budgets come partly from council tax, but also from central government - which over the last 15 years has faced austerity budget cuts averaging 40%. The effects were immediate: youth clubs were among the first things to go in 2010, leaving communities without important services, and more broadly affecting communities; where youth services are lost, 'anti-social behaviour' tends to go up.

Well-funded councils and proper funding allocation is ultimately a matter of early intervention and directly affects the health of our communities more broadly. When we invest in local services, we prevent larger problems before they develop, saving both financial resources and community wellbeing in the long run.

Despite challenges, local councils still control much of what makes communities work well and which party runs your council shapes these decisions just as much as national government shapes national policy.

Local government is a Trade Union issue

Take for example, the Birmingham residents dealing with bin strikes as a result of the locally authority making huge cuts to wages of the striking workers, the outsourcing that local authorities now have to do as a result of cuts to staffing budgets, and the reliance this then creates on zero hours contracts, and not least the cuts to social work budgets that have a direct impact on workloads and conditions.

The trend toward outsourcing has further weakened job security and working conditions. As councils contract private companies to deliver formerly in-house services, permanent positions with decent benefits are increasingly replaced by precarious employment. Workers often find themselves on contracts without sick pay, holiday entitlements, or pension contributions. This race to the bottom in employment standards directly stems from funding decisions made both locally and nationally.

Social workers provide another stark example, with many now managing huge caseloads due to staffing cuts. This not only creates unsustainable pressure on dedicated professionals but compromises the quality of support available to community members. School support staff, library workers, care providers, and countless other public service employees face similar challenges, making local government funding a critical trade union concern that affects thousands of workers and the communities they serve.

As election season continues, remember that while national politics fills our news feeds, local government determines everything from the buses we take to the parks our children play in and the wages and conditions of the people employed to provide vital services.

Information about local elections and polling stations can be found on the Electoral Commission and Electoral Office for Northern Ireland websites.

Voters in England and Northern Ireland need to show photo ID to vote at polling stations in all elections. Voters in Scotland and Wales need to show photo ID to vote at polling stations in some elections. However, you do not need photo ID to vote by post.

If you don't have an accepted form of photo ID and are in England, Scotland, or Wales then you can [apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate](#) to vote at a polling station. Voter Authority Certificates do not have an expiration date.

If you are in Northern Ireland you can [apply online for an Electoral Identity Card](#). In Northern Ireland expired photo ID is accepted to vote at polling stations however the photo must be of a good enough likeness to allow polling station staff to confirm your identity.

You can also [register to vote without appearing on the electoral register](#) if this would be a risk for you.

And you can [register to vote if you don't have a home address](#).

For more information about anything mentioned above you can go to the Electoral Commission website for England, Scotland, and Wales: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk>

If you are in Northern Ireland, for more information about anything mentioned above you can go to the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland website: <https://www.eoni.org.uk>

Only **£30** a year with your present BASW membership (**£10** a year for students)

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

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

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

Being part of a strong growing trade union is a vital and recognised way of successfully being part of the Trade Union movement. Help us campaign for better working conditions, pay and professional recognition. If you want to join SWU or learn more about becoming actively involved as a Union Contact get in touch: 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.
- collaborates with external unions and continue to be active through membership of General Federation of Trade Unions and ongoing union campaigns.
- funds the Austerity Action Group and opportunities to get involved.

As a SWU member you get:

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

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

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

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