

Busy as normal



As things get back to some normality after a busy summer period it is busy as normal for us all at SWU and keeping active and busy.

Employment and regulatory representation remain at the core of our activities

and do consider this should you ever be feeling the need to 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.

The challenge ahead for SWU is building on that membership base, working on retention, for SWU to be actively involved with more campaigns and engaging with members. This continues to be a challenging task with only a small but active team and why it was necessary to increase the annual SWU fee from £30 to £35 - our first increase for several years.

This coming month we have two important events. The SWU 2025 Annual Conference will be on Thursday 6th September in Manchester with some great speakers and guests lined up. We also have the

SWU AGM on Friday 26th September and once more due to member feedback and preferences; this will be an online event with the AGM going live at 2pm. It is your union and a chance for you to share your view on the future and direction of the union. Please do register to be a part of it and say hello. If not, I can always be contacted via email and I look forward to regular correspondence from members. Please register for the AGM here:

<https://swu-union.org.uk/2025/01/swu-annual-general-meeting-2025/>

SWU with BASW continue to campaign and the main issues are wider than just a pay increase. We are facing a crisis that threatens not just the wellbeing of social workers, but the safety and support of the children, families, and adults who rely on social work services. Urgent action is needed to address staffing levels, workload management, and professional support.

Our new joint campaign comes in response to years of research by BASW, SWU and others showing deteriorating conditions for social workers. New research by SWU with ITV News published in 2025 of 2,380 social workers shows that 86% of social workers believe the profession has inadequate staffing levels, with 84% saying these shortages are seriously limiting their ability to do their jobs properly.

<https://basw.co.uk/about-basw/campaigning-and-influencing/improving-working-conditions-social-workers>

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



Annual General Meeting 2025

Join us for the fourteenth Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Social Workers Union which will be held **online** on Friday **26th September** 2025 from **2pm - 4pm**.

This is a **free** event and for SWU members only. It is your union and a chance for you to share your view on the future and direction of the union. Please do register beforehand at the link below to be a part of it:

<https://basw.co.uk/events/swu-annual-general-meeting-2025>

If you are planning to attend, be sure to register by 12pm (noon) on Thursday 25th September.

BOOKING YOUR FREE PLACE: Sign into your account on the BASW website to book your place. When you reach the payment method section, please select the “Credit Card” option and you will then be able to sign up to the event for free. You do not need to provide any payment method.

If you need any support registering for this event please don't hesitate to let us know by emailing joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk before Thursday 25th September.

If you require additional support please notify us by email before Friday 12th September at joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk.

Voting facilities will be provided during the meeting. Members will also be able to ask questions during the event using the questions box feature. If you have a question to ask during the AGM, it may be helpful to type out the question before the event so that you can copy-paste it into the question box at the appropriate time.

AGM documents and Motions will be made available to members closer to the event and we recommend that members read these beforehand. Proposed rule changes are available now to see on the webpage. In the coming weeks keep an eye out for our SWU AGM information email which will provide you with the website link and password required to access this member only information. If you have not received the SWU AGM email by the end of day on Friday 19th September then please get in touch with joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk.

You can also visit our website for more information:
<https://swu-union.org.uk/2025/01/swu-annual-general-meeting-2025>

If you run into any issues attending this online AGM, you can request event support on the day at: SWUinfo@swu-union.org.uk

We hope to see you there!

SWU Social Workers Union Conference

Solidarity at Work

6th September 2025, Manchester

This free event includes lunch, networking, CPD Certificate, and refreshments.



Saturday 6th September 2025

9:30am to 4:30pm

at the historic

Mechanics Institute, 103 Princess Street, Manchester M1 6DD

The Social Workers Union (SWU) invites all of our members and social work colleagues to join us for a one-day conference at the Mechanics Institute in Manchester on 6th September. We welcome social workers, NQSWs, social work students and apprentices to join us for this activism themed and solidarity building event.

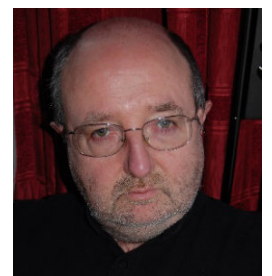
We are pleased to announce the following keynote speakers:



Vivian Okeze-Tirado is a UK national award-winning social work leader, social justice advocate, practice educator, keynote speaker, and [author](#).

Vivian will be speaking on “Social Work Solidarity in Action: Harnessing Emotional Intelligence and Cultural Sensitivity to Drive Social Justice to Social Change”.

[Dr Neil Thompson](#) is a SWU Ambassador, an award-winning social work [author](#), and visiting professor at the Open University and Wrexham University.



Neil will be speaking on “Why We Should Be Talking about Alienation”.



Tricia Pereira and **Dr Godfred Boahen** are social workers and Co-Chairs of the [Independent Advisory Group \(IAG\) Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard \(SC-WRES\)](#).

Tricia and Godfred will be speaking on “Moving from Allyship to Solidarity - How we address findings from the Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard to progress race equity”.

Gawain Little is the current General Secretary of the [General Federation of Trade Unions \(GFTU\)](#), [author](#), former chair of the International Solidarity Committee of the NEU, and currently sits on the Executive Committees of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, Venezuela Solidarity Campaign and Committee for the Defence of the Iranian People's Rights.

Gawain will be speaking on “Solidarity in the 21st Century”.



[Dr Joe Hanley](#) is a social worker, Lecturer in Social Work at the Open University, [author](#), and researcher whose area of expertise includes social work workforce challenges.

Joe will be speaking on “Give up or stand up? Social work workplace activism in 2025”.

Conference highlights will include

- A focus on building solidarity with each other and the people that we as social workers support.
- Inspiring speakers from the social work and trade union sectors.
- Celebrate and learn from the successes of community social work groups who are making a difference.
- Networking with colleagues from across the UK.
- Meet the [SWU team](#), chat with our [Union Contacts](#), and hear from Trade Union Officers from the BASW / SWU [Advice & Representation team](#).
- Get involved with UK-wide and national SWU & [BASW](#) campaigns.

Book your free place today:

<https://basw.co.uk/events/swu-conference-2025-solidarity-work>

This event includes lunch, networking opportunities, a CPD Certificate, and refreshments for all attendees.

Important booking notice:

SWU and BASW members must be logged into their account on the BASW website to book their free place at this conference.

Non-members can create a free account on the BASW website to book their free place at this conference.

If you have any issues booking your free place at the SWU Conference 2025 please contact Joanne Marciano at: joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk



The Social Workers Union (SWU) and the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) [announced the “Stronger Social Work, Better Lives” campaign](#) to improve professional working conditions for social workers across the UK at the BASW Conference this summer. SWU and BASW will soon be making an exciting announcement on next steps for this wide-reaching campaign at the upcoming SWU Conference!

Learn more about this campaign here:

<https://basw.co.uk/about-basw/campaigning-and-influencing/improving-working-conditions-social-workers>



SWU submits unsafe housing evidence to MPs

The Social Workers Union (SWU) has submitted powerful evidence to MPs exposing how unsafe housing is having a majorly negative impact on families, as part of Parliament's inquiry into the condition of homes in England.

Drawing on previously published [research carried out in partnership with ITV News](#), the submission to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee sets out how poor housing - including damp, mould, infestations and chronic disrepair - [is placing children and vulnerable people at risk](#), especially when combined with unaffordable energy bills.



Over one in five children's social workers surveyed (21%) said they had worked on cases in the past three years where unsafe or inappropriate housing was a key factor in children being removed from their families.

SWU General Secretary John

McGowan said, "No child should be removed from their family because their home is cold, damp or dangerous to live in. But that is the reality social workers are facing. The housing crisis is now a frontline child protection issue."

The evidence also shows that:

- **78%** of social workers strongly agree that housing conditions are a major concern for the people they support.
- **36%** have seen an increase in people living in unsafe or inappropriate homes over the past three years.

Social workers provided harrowing testimonies of families caught in cycles of poverty, poor housing and deteriorating mental health, faced with service cuts, waiting lists, and nowhere to turn for practical support.

The [End Fuel Poverty Coalition](#) also cited the same research in its submission to the inquiry.

Simon Francis, Coordinator of the End Fuel Poverty Coalition, said, "Cold, damp homes are not just uncomfortable, they're dangerous. Children are being taken into care because of unfit housing. People are ending up in hospitals. In some tragic cases, people are dying.

"This is a public health emergency. We need urgent action to strengthen housing standards, fund local enforcement, and ensure that no home is unfit to live in."

John McGowan added, "Social workers are going above and beyond to protect people, but they cannot do it alone. The government must listen and act. Every home should be safe, warm and fit to live in."

The Committee's inquiry is examining the general condition of homes in England and the prevalence of housing hazards such as damp and mould. SWU has offered to give further oral evidence as the inquiry continues."





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SWU is proud to feature the winners of the SWU Assignment: World Social Work Day 2025 Essay Competition



Four social work students / apprentices have each won a prize of £500 for their outstanding essays.

Congratulations to **Wisdom P. Mensah** of Liverpool John Moores University, **Leith Greig-Connor** of Oxford Brookes University, **Fatima Ishaq** of Dundee University, and **Samantha Ncube** of the University of Greenwich who wrote the winning essays!

The SWU Assignment: World Social Work Day 2025 question was:

“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?”

This competition is open to 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. Each winning entrant will receive £500.

Thank you to all the social work students and apprentices who participated in the competition this year and shared their reflections, insights, and hopes for the future!

The 2025 SWU Assignment was marked by a Panel including:

- **Andrew Reece** - Registered Social Worker and professional Officer with the [British Association of Social Workers \(BASW\)](#) England Team
- **Ann Marie Hayes** - Registered social worker who is also qualified as a systemic psychotherapist and sits on the SWU Executive Committee
- **Tina Peterson** - [SWU Union Contact](#) and member of the SWU Executive Committee

[Click here to download the four winning essays as a PDF.](#)

You can also [click here to meet the markers for the 2025 SWU Assignment](#) and read the winning essays from previous years at the bottom of the [SWU Assignment webpage](#).

Thank you to our panel of markers

Ann Marie Hayes said, "As a marker for this year's SWU Assignment essays, I was delighted that such a range and depth of issues were discussed by the contributing students. The essays captured a range of discourses relating to social work training; many expressed heart-felt and personal views about particular theories, concepts or models for practice, and most writers offered a critical eye, identifying what they perceive to be working well as well as perceived gaps in current social work training. The quality of the essays was inspiring overall, and it was reassuring to read such thoughtful and provocative evocations of an idealised structure for learning, one that this cohort of students may bring to fruition as they progress through their social work lives.

"I would therefore like to thank each writer for committing the time and effort into considering this thorny issue; successive government and social work bodies have struggled with this question for decades, revealing the genuine complexity of social work. You all powerfully argued for specific forms of training, or reforms of training practices overall, which means there is hope for social work training to evolve with the changing needs of social workers as they strive to ethically support the marginalised and oppressed members of society towards equity and human justice. The work continues."

Andrew Reece said, "It was a privilege to be able to read such a group of inspiring and thoughtful student essays. If the really high standard of all the entries is anything to go by, the future of Social Work is in safe and radical hands."

Tina Peterson said, "I'd like to say a big thank you to every student who entered the SWU Assignment competition this year; your commitment and hard work is commended. It was such a privilege to read them all. Key concepts and ideas relating to the question '*what are the most important things students should get from their professional training?*' were explored and the essays were packed with knowledge, research and diversity, and a deep understanding of how the social work role is evolving. Themes including Eco Social Work, Artificial Intelligence and Climate Impact were all included in the discussions. I feel confident and encouraged that the future of social work is in safe hands."

Winning quotes from the four winners

Wisdom P. Mensah of Liverpool John Moores University said:

"To have my essay recognised among the top four is both a profound honour and a call to responsibility. This piece was born from the conviction that social work must reclaim its prophetic edge - uniting trauma-informed compassion, legal fluency, and digital vigilance to meet the demands of a fragmented age. In a time of poly-crisis and systemic fracture, I believe our profession must not retreat into bureaucracy but rise as a morally imaginative, intellectually rigorous, and justice-driven force. I am humbled to contribute to this emerging vision."



Leith Greig-Connor of Oxford Brookes University said:

"I feel honoured to be selected as one of the winners in this year's competition. My piece explored how professional training must evolve to address emerging issues like AI literacy, environmental justice, and inclusive practices for increasingly diverse communities. I'm grateful for SWU's recognition and believe it reinforces the need to adapt our profession for current and future needs."



Fatima Ishaq of Dundee University said:

"I am overjoyed to have my assignment chosen amongst the winning entries in this year's SWU Essay Competition. My assignment focused on the importance of relationship-based practice and moral courage, highlighting the need to embed these principles in social work training amid an increasingly bureaucratic and technical-rational practice environment. In addition, this essay gave me the opportunity to reflect personally on my aspirations going into practice and as I enter my penultimate year of university."



University of Dundee

Samantha Ncube of Greenwich University said:

"As a final-year student, I am honoured that SWU has recognised my essay. Writing about the importance of professional training and development in social work allowed me to reflect on my passion for social justice and empowerment. This award reinforces my commitment to making a positive difference through inclusive and community-focused practice. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute thoughtfully to the debate on building a more just and compassionate society."



UNIVERSITY OF GREENWICH

Social work students and apprentices, be sure to check back next year for the announcement of the 2026 SWU Assignment question on World Social Work Day - 18th March!

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>

General Federation of Trade Unions launches new Education Programme for Trade Unionists and Activists



The majority of courses in the new GFTU Education Programme for 2025/2026 are free for SWU members - see what's on offer!

The General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) Educational Trust has launched its biggest selection of training courses yet at the 2025 Durham Miners' Gala. SWU General Secretary John McGowan, who was recently [elected as GFTU co-Vice President](#), was in attendance and representing the union. The GFTU are offering over 90 courses this year which is an 80% growth of content on offer to members since 2023.

The GFTU courses offer something for everyone who is already active or wants to become active in their trade union. They combine the best elements of union education, development of skills, peer-to-peer networking, and strategic discussion with a hybrid delivery. There is a broad range of topics to learn about including tackling inequality in the workplace, trade union and working-class history, roots of racism, international solidarity, skill building, the use of Artificial Intelligence, employment law, and union strategy.

GFTU Head of Education, Campaigns & Organising, Henry Fowler commented, "We are delighted to have secured such an incredible lineup of speakers from across the world to

help us discuss the strategies and tactics our movement needs. We continue to balance the residential courses at our fantastic training centre with the online spaces that we know are critical to supporting workers building power."

John McGowan, SWU General Secretary, said, "The founding mission of the GFTU in 1899 was built around three pillars - education, solidarity and unity in action - and the continued excellence of its training is supported by these pillars. Nearly all of the training offered in the GFTU Education Programme 2025-2026 is free for members of affiliated organisations such as SWU, and this includes hotel stays and meals for the residential courses."

The full Education Programme can be viewed on the GFTU Educational Trust website, including links to apply for all courses: <https://gftuet.org.uk/education>

The full timetable of courses for 2025-26 can be [downloaded here as a PDF](#).

You can also view them on our SWU website: <https://swu-union.org.uk/gftu-training>



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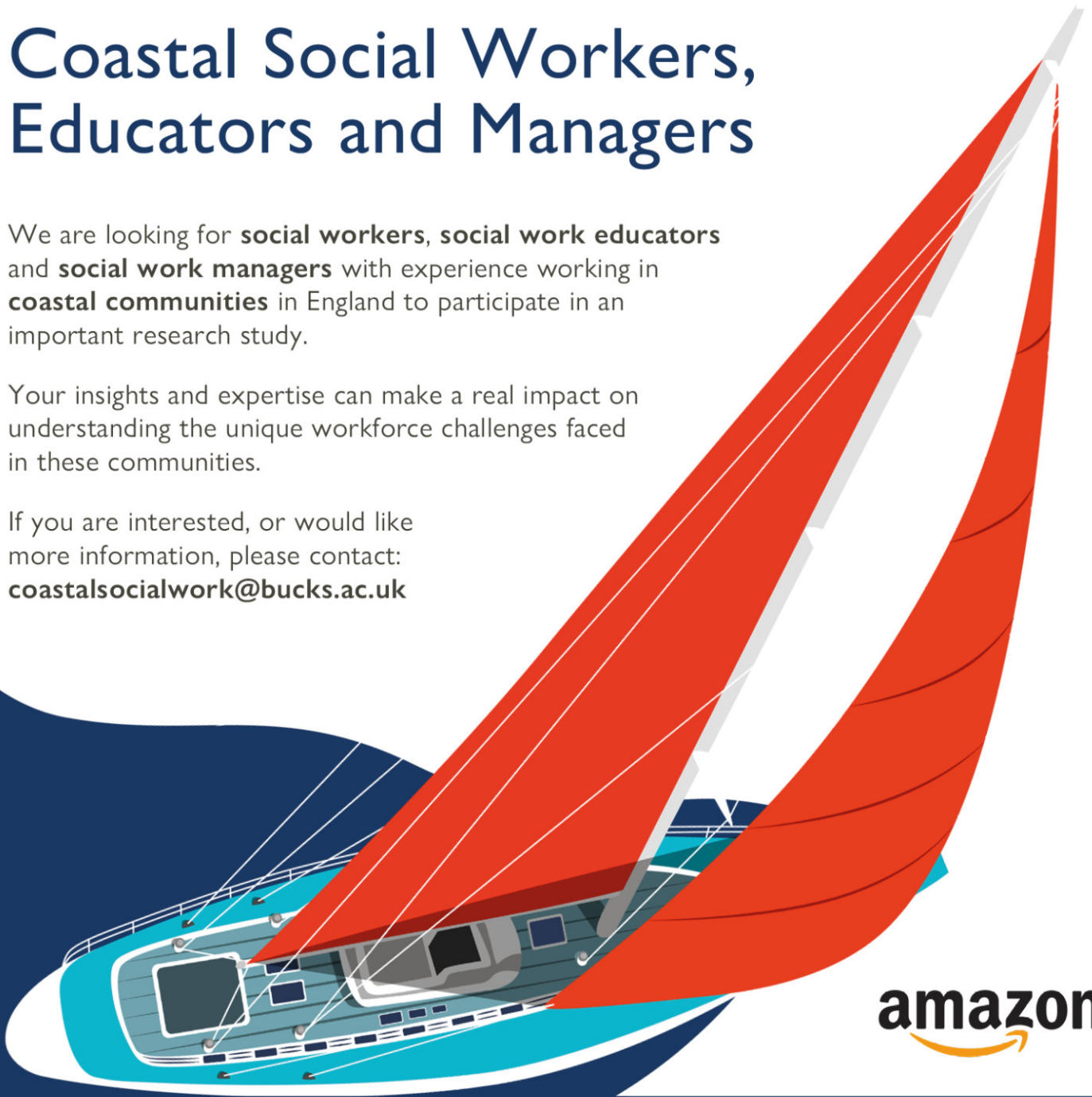
WANTED!

Coastal Social Workers, Educators and Managers

We are looking for **social workers, social work educators** and **social work managers** with experience working in **coastal communities** in England to participate in an important research study.

Your insights and expertise can make a real impact on understanding the unique workforce challenges faced in these communities.

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coastalsocialwork@bucks.ac.uk



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For participating in a short interview, **you will be compensated with a £25 Amazon** (or other store of your choice) voucher.

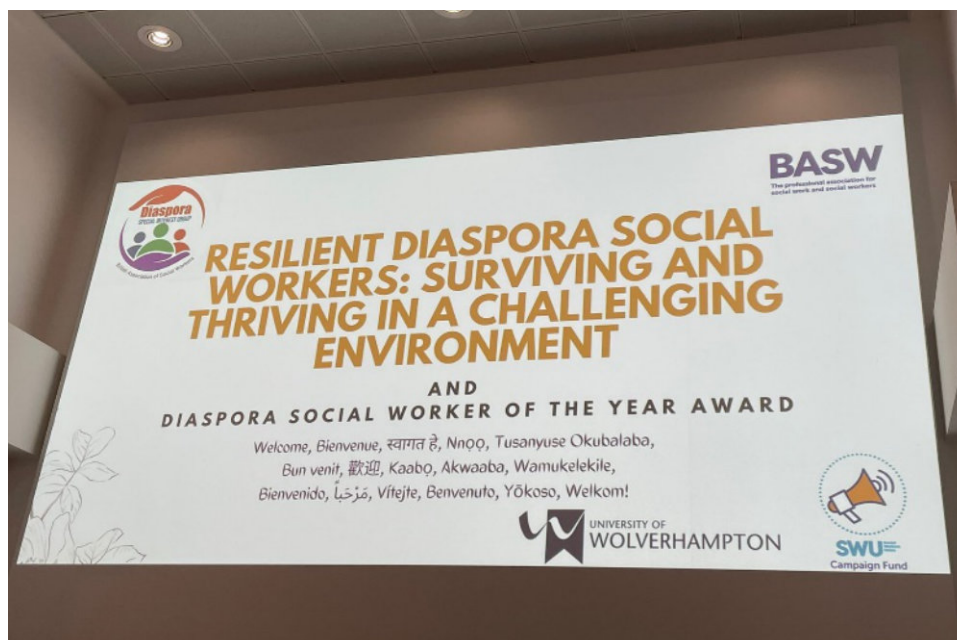
Resilient Diaspora Social Workers: Surviving and Thriving in a Challenging Environment

SWU was pleased to sponsor the second UK Diaspora Social Work conference, planned and delivered by the BASW Diaspora Social Workers Special Interest Group (SIG) on 10th July 2025.



This unique conference was held this year at the University of Wolverhampton. A member of the university's school of Health and Wellbeing stated that of the 25,000 students at the university, one quarter are of the global majority and represent over 130 countries. The university is proud of the diversity international students bring, and that 2 out of 3 new students are the first generation of their families to attend university.

Certainly, a suitable place to hold an event to recognise and celebrate the eclecticism of diaspora social workers and their unwavering commitment and accomplishments working in practice, studying, mentoring peers, researching, writing journal papers, delivering education and training, and advocating for each person they know who will face the same stressors and similar challenges of relocating to a new country.



Anstance Fometu introduced the day and the speakers for this consistently inspiring conference:

- Dr Ruth Allen, British Association of Social Workers (BASW) CEO
- Sarah McClinton, Chief Social Worker for Adults and Mental Health Social Work
- Susan Dobson, Professional Officer at the Scottish Association of Social Workers (SASW)
- Dr Linda Harms-Smith, Research Associate and Lecturer in Social Work at the University of Pretoria
- Dr Echo Yeung, Associate Professor in Research in Social Work at the University of Hertfordshire
- Teresea Barnett-Asamoah, social work student
- MP Janet Daby sent her support from Parliament

We celebrate diaspora as leaders and visionaries for justice.

Priya David's opening introductory speech as Co-Chair of the Diaspora Social Workers SIG was powerful, invigorating, and outlined the aims for the day *to bring together voices of courage and strength that have the fortitude to rise in solidarity.*

One-third of new starters in social work, of 130,000 in England, come from abroad.

Many will be much more likely to



experience lack of support at work, lack of welcome in communities, and face career stagnation as the full package of systemic injustice is weighted more upon them than white peers.

Co-Chair of the Diaspora Social Workers SIG **Susanne Machin-Autenrieth** emboldened the reality: *the diaspora social workers are the backbone of our workforce... the insider-outsider perspective is a unique strength*. Having the ability to observe situations with more curiosity due to heightened senses in a new environment, and an openness to learning and sharing, humility a level ground with people they work with, highly skilled relational social work practitioners.

With the day's intentions of celebration in mind the fact that diaspora social workers are still coming to the UK - despite what is now a deranged immigration policy going far beyond the dystopian nightmares of George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, Ray Bradbury and Philip K Dick forewarned of - is to be admired and honoured. Diaspora social workers are much more likely to face volatile and hostile environments at work with the public and social work contemporaries; it is key for us all to acknowledge this sacrifice among many others they make on leaving their homes and most things familiar and comforting behind. This sacrifice and courage is to be admired, coming to a hostile environment reinforced by overarching systemic barriers.

We had not even made it to the morning plenary speakers by this stage!

BASW CEO **Ruth Allan** thanked the Diaspora SIG for the pivotal role they play and their groundbreaking influence. *Challenging systemic racism is important work for us all, as social workers. We share values collectively... this is our universal language. We need to drive innovation and change together, to assume responsibility, we struggle and work together for change that embeds anti-racism in workplaces. Inclusive and fair working environments are needed, and we all share that responsibility.*

The Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard (SC-WRES) provides a framework for tackling inequities through measurement of metrics and responsive action planning.

The BASW Diaspora SIG, British Association of Social Workers (BASW), and Social Workers Union (SWU) will be present for a forthcoming review of the SC-WRES. Updates on this will be shared when possible.

Susan Dobson from the Scottish Association of Social Work (SASW) brought us up to date with the progress being made with Scottish Government support since their 2021 report [Racism in Scottish Social Work](#). SASW set out the need to consider the varying forms in which racism occurs, how it may take form depending on the place and local history or cultural contexts and current interactions. Religious sectarianism was listed as a primary source of bigotry in Scotland and has had a divisive influence over generations. An anti-racism learning resource is in production with the intention that *racism should be eradicated*.

Chief Social Worker **Sarah McClinton** closed the morning plenary, sharing her experiences of transforming lives with people living with HIV in the 1980s and the stigmatisation rife at this time.

She spoke of the complexities of our jobs, building relationships in difficult circumstances, and that our professional workforce needs support to deliver higher standards, *but policy needs to connect with the realities of how we support people.*

Racism may show up differently across our nations and localities, or indeed within our organisations but there should be a uniform response. We all must share the responsibility to see it, not look away, and address it. We can commit to supporting and empowering others to do this through enterprise and dedication collectively with guidance from the SC-WRES, our [professional bodies](#) BASW and SASW, and our trade unions.

The Diaspora Social Workers SIG calls on the social work sector

Diaspora and overseas-qualified social workers make up over 10% of the UK workforce. We bring global skills, cultural wisdom, and lived experience. Yet too often we face racism, illegal recruitment fees, housing insecurity, and limited progression.

We are not waiting to be seen. We are building change:

- ✓ Shaping recruitment policy
- ✓ Launching diaspora-led induction tools (now adopted in Oxfordshire)
- ✓ Challenging scrutiny fees
- ✓ Amplifying voices through podcasts, webinars and national forums

Now we call on the sector:

- Don't just recruit diaspora social workers - support and retain us
- Don't just listen once a year - partner with us every day
- Don't wait - act with urgency

Because when diaspora social workers thrive, everyone benefits.

“We don't want seats at the table just to be seen - we're here to be heard, to lead, and to transform the table itself.”

We stood up. We spoke out. We moved the dial - together.

Photos from the event are available on LinkedIn:

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/basw-diaspora-social-workers-sig_overseas-social-workers-we-are-the-strength-activity-7353047543036923904-nAuu

You can also read SWU Assistant General Secretary Calum Gallacher reporting in 2024 on the [first ever Diaspora Social Worker Conference in the UK](#), which was also sponsored by the SWU Campaign Fund.

More to come in “Part 2”!

No Child Left Behind coalition summer conference 2025



This summer the Social Workers Union joined delegates at the National Education Union’s “No Child Left Behind” conference which celebrated recent victories in securing free school meals while calling for expanded universal provision.

The conference heard from speakers from unions, schools, universities and activists who highlighted the need to extend free school meals to all children. They argued that universal provision would eliminate stigma and reach families who fall just above benefit thresholds but still struggle to afford meals for their children.

The conference heard evidence of growing food insecurity in schools. More food banks now operate within schools than are delivered by the Trussell Trust, with one in five schools now having to provide food support. Currently, 4.5 million children live in poverty across the UK, a figure expected to rise to 4.8 million largely due to the two-child benefit cap, low wages, and the cost-of-living crisis.

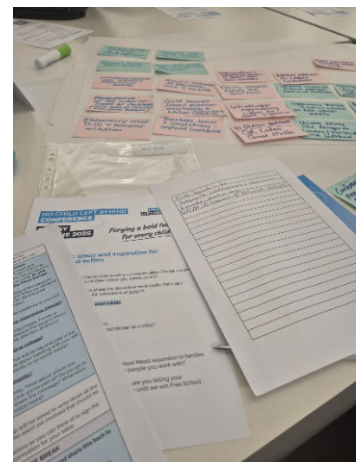
SWU chaired a breakout session where trade unions and other groups including education groups, faith groups and school children broke into groups by sector to brainstorm ideas for a major “Back-to-School” campaign moment in September 2025. The workshop focused on growing the open letter following recent wins on free school meal

expansion, engaging MPs and councils, and maintaining momentum for universal free school meals - a policy already implemented in London and established in countries like Finland.

Breakout sessions focused on planning actions and events for the new school year and the autumn term leading up to Labour Party Conference.

The push for universal free school meals continues to gain momentum as unions and campaigners highlight both the welfare benefits and educational advantages of making sure no child goes hungry at school.

Sign the petition asking the Prime Minister to commit to Free School Meals for All:
<https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/sign-the-open-letter-free-school-meals-for-all>



SIGN THE OPEN LETTER

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



What I Learned About Real Union Work at GFTU Summer School

SWU National Organiser & Union Contact Manager Jessie Hoskin reflects on this GFTU Education Programme course for trade union activists who want an opportunity to think outside the box with key leaders from across the movement.

A week ago, I attended a session at the GFTU Summer School that made me think about union work. Gawain Little, the GFTU's General Secretary, led a discussion about something lots of us get wrong - the difference between mobilising people and actually organising them.

Before this session, I thought getting people to turn up to protests was the main job. You spread the word on social media, get people fired up about an issue, and hope they show up on the day. That's what Gawain called "mobilising." But here's the issue he pointed out - after everyone goes home from the protest, what happens? Usually not much. People return to their normal lives, and we're back where we started.

Proper organising is completely different. Instead of trying to get people to care about your cause, you focus on one specific group of people who already share the same problems.



What really surprised me was that real organising isn't about getting existing union activists more involved. It's about reaching the workers who've never been to a union meeting, who don't see themselves as political, and who might even be suspicious of unions. These are often the people with the most influence in their departments.

The goal isn't just to recruit members, but to find and develop leaders from within the workplace itself. Gawain explained how these natural leaders - the people others already turn to for advice or who can get a group together for someone's leaving do - are the key to building real collective power.



Why This Matters for Unions

What struck me was when Gawain talked about how unions have moved away from this basic approach. Instead of doing the hard work of talking to every single person in a workplace and building real collective power, we often just focus on winning single issues or campaigns.

But winning one dispute about pay or conditions isn't enough. The real goal should be changing the balance of power at work permanently. That means developing workplace leaders who can hold management accountable day after day, not just during big campaigns.

This is about more than individual grievances; it's about building the kind of collective strength that forces employers to think twice before making decisions that affect workers. When you have genuine workplace organisation, management can't just impose changes without consulting the people who actually do the work.

When unions focus on genuine organising - bringing everyone into the conversation and decision-making - members feel like they actually own their union. It's not just something that exists somewhere else that they pay dues to. This kind of mass participation changes everything. Instead of union leaders making decisions and hoping members will support them, the members themselves are driving the agenda because they've been part of building it from the ground up.

The GFTU has just bought out its new [2025-2026 Education Programme](#) which includes Health and Safety training, Workplace Reps Trainings and Employment Law session. Most of the sessions are held at the beautiful Quorn Grange Hotel in Loughborough but there are also online courses too, and the majority are free for SWU members including the residential courses!

The GFTU Education Programme is open to all SWU members and is invaluable for any member looking to get more involved in improving their workplaces.

SWU Union Contacts

Union Contacts, don't forget [we now have monthly online meetings](#) on the first Tuesday of every month. If you're a [Union Contact](#), you'll have received a link and I'll send one out closer to the time - I'd love to see you all there.



“Artificial Intelligence in Social Work Practice: Opportunities and Risks”

It was a pleasure to represent SWU at the *Community Care* online panel discussion on 9th July 2025 to discuss the ethical considerations of using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in children’s and adult services. I was joined by fellow panel members Dr. Peter Buzzi - Director: Centre for Safeguarding and Emotional Research and Wellbeing and Sean Manzi - Senior researcher and data scientist.

Conversations centred on issues such as data bias, transparency, accountability, and the potential for AI to either reduce or reinforce existing inequalities. The importance of maintaining human oversight, safeguarding privacy, and building AI systems that support - rather than replace - professional judgment was also considered in this thought-provoking discussion.

It became clear as conversations progressed with panel members that my role in the discussion would remain focussed on the working conditions of social workers and the risks/opportunities AI may present to a profession that continues to experience issues with retention and recruitment.

While AI narrative directs us towards the benefits of time management through various software/apps that allow us to email meeting transcripts, summaries and suggested actions to ourselves <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2024/10/04/ai-could-be-time-saving-for-social-workers-but-needs-regulation-say-sector-bodies/> the panel discussion returned to the argument - *Is time saved, always time well spent?* throughout. It was this aspect that allowed me to lead a discussion on the benefits of making “good” social work notes as well as the skills and critical reflection that often accompany the note taking process.

Furthermore, research findings suggest that while AI can simplify learning tasks, it may

hinder deeper engagement and critical thinking https://www.psypost.org/study-finds-chatgpt-eases-students-cognitive-load-but-at-the-expense-of-critical-thinking/#google_vignette

I was equally mindful of the suggestion that “saving time isn’t conducive to promoting social work skills and knowledge” <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2024/10/25/social-workers-split-over-impact-of-ai-on-professional-skills/> and expanded upon this to propose the question ‘Show me a Social Worker with a better work balance because of AI and I will show you a Social Worker whose time is soon filled’. It is also important to consider that while AI allows us to strive for what seems to always be just out of our reach - better time management - should we be measuring our worth by this alone. Furthermore, while AI grants us efficiency, or perhaps even a “quick fix for the lack of funding and staff in the sector” <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2024/10/04/ai-could-be-time-saving-for-social-workers-but-needs-regulation-say-sector-bodies/> - what does this mean for the social worker in the field? returning the panel and audience to the reoccurring theme of ‘time’.

To offer balance at this point and address the fact there is always fear of the unknown, the time saving opportunity of AI was welcomed by many webinar attendees, citing the opportunity to spend more time with people, doing the social work we came into the profession to do, as a major benefit. Furthermore, AI can offer Social Workers an inclusivity perhaps previously unavailable to them, for example acting as individualised support with spelling and writing <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2024/10/25/social-workers-split-over-impact-of-ai-on-professional-skills/>

There is perhaps a need to be cautious with AI and apply the social work approach ‘pause and reflect’, to “allow the

social work regulator, our professional association, education providers and practising social workers to come to grips with the myriad of ethical implications and challenges”

<https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2024/10/04/ai-could-be-time-saving-for-social-workers-but-needs-regulation-say-sector-bodies/>

It was a pleasure to be part of the panel and to hear and read the comments from social workers attending this webinar. While the arguments both for and against AI in social

work practice received equal attention, there was universal acceptance that we are living in an AI world and that social workers need to be at the table when these tools are designed and implemented, advocating for ethical standards that protect both practitioners and service users as a technology that enhances, rather than erodes, the human connection at the heart of our work.

Dave Callow
SWU Chair

An Open Letter to the UK Government: The Case for a Transformative Welfare Approach Rooted in Dignity and Efficacy

In times of significant policy reform, it is crucial to transcend quantitative metrics and examine the qualitative implications of such changes. The recent enactment of the UK Welfare Reform Bill may be perceived as a legislative achievement, but for practitioners - social workers, individuals with disabilities, caregivers, and low-income families - there is an underlying concern that transcends simplistic political narratives. The core ethos of our welfare system is under scrutiny.

As a student social worker, my insights are grounded not merely in academic discourse but in lived experiences. I have engaged with children affected by parental imprisonment and families grappling with housing instability, trauma, and loss. My intention is not to incite opposition but to advocate for a paradigm shift: one wherein policy development is not solely dictated by fiscal constraints but is informed by the principles of dignity and empowerment. We require a reform strategy that prioritises healing over efficiency.

The current trajectory indicated by this bill has prompted significant dissent, evidenced by the defection of 47 MPs and heightened concerns expressed by the UN. Even among senior government officials, there is palpable unease. The crux of this apprehension lies in the apparent marginalisation of those most affected by welfare reform. The bill risks compromising the foundational purpose of welfare: to safeguard and empower vulnerable populations. While the establishment of a disability taskforce represents an initial positive movement, we must ensure that this initiative embodies genuine co-production. It's essential that individuals with disabilities are not merely consulted but actively colead the policymaking process. Their first-hand experiences must provide the blueprint for strategies and implementation.

Moreover, any modifications to Universal Credit or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) assessments warrant rigorous pilot testing. We would not authorise a pharmaceutical intervention without clinical trials;

thus, we should not enact sweeping changes to critical welfare programs without comprehensive understanding of their real-world implications. Pilot programs must integrate independent evaluations, real-time feedback mechanisms, and transparent reporting protocols.

The welfare system must transition from one that engenders fear to one that fosters hope. The current framework can often feel adversarial and dehumanising for claimants - akin to navigating a courtroom. This perception must be addressed. Every assessment process should adopt a trauma-informed approach, and frontline workers should receive extensive training in mental health, disability awareness, and anti-oppressive methodologies. The language and tone used in communications are vital; they must reflect respect and humanity.

Furthermore, we need to challenge the misconception that compassionate welfare is financially burdensome. The real cost is borne by neglect. When benefits are reduced or delayed, the repercussions permeate to the NHS, educational institutions, food banks, and local authorities, all of which are struggling to maintain services. Preventative strategies, early intervention, and comprehensive support systems should be viewed as essential investments - both economically and ethically.

In envisioning a new moral framework for welfare, we must place dignity at the forefront. Success should be determined not merely by fiscal savings but by the enrichment of human lives. Our metrics ought to reflect not just efficiency but the flourishing of individuals and communities.

This vision aligns with the principles of social work. I believe in cultivating a welfare system where individuals are treated with respect and dignity, where the mechanisms of support do not simply prevent destitution but actively cultivate human potential. Citizens should be perceived not as burdens but as valuable members of our society deserving of nurturing and support.

To the UK Government, policymakers, and those in positions of authority: this is your pivotal moment. Use the contentious nature of this bill as a springboard for meaningful transformation. Lead with humility, engage in active listening, and commit to decisive action. Shift the focus from political manoeuvring to human-centric solutions.

As I embark on my journey in social work, my commitment extends beyond individual support; it encompasses advocating for systems that foster healing. I maintain hope that we can construct a societal framework that exemplifies compassionate policy. Let us aspire to create a welfare state that not only functions but genuinely serves the needs of the people. Let this be the turning point. Let our policies communicate to those in need: You are seen. You are valued. You belong.



With conviction, courage, and commitment.

**Wisdom P. Mensah MA,
Social Work Student, Liverpool John Moores University,
BASW Student Ambassador,
2025 SWU Essay Award Winner,
Advocate for Systemic Change,
Champion of Dignity,
Believer in a Better Future**



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01/09/25

JOINT STATEMENT ON SOCIAL WORK ENGLAND

This is a joint statement from our organisations to document our ongoing significant concerns on behalf of our respective members.

BASW, the Social Workers Union (SWU) and UNISON jointly express deep concern over Social Work England's recent decision to implement a 33% increase in the annual registration fee for social workers - from £90 to £120 - effective from 1st September 2025, with further planned increases through to 2029.

This decision has provoked [widespread dismay across the profession](#). Notably, 96% of respondents (nearly 8000 registrants) opposed the increase. Justified concerns were also [echoed by the Adult Principal Social Worker Network and Principal Children and Families Social Worker Network](#).

Despite this overwhelming response from registrants, the regulator has chosen to proceed without significant revision or concession, [calling into question its commitment to transparency, accountability, and genuine stakeholder engagement](#). On the Social Work England website ("[What we will do](#)"), it states that whilst 8,000 responses were received, this is less than 8% of registrants. The assumption appears to be that if people did not respond then they were accepting of the proposals. This is a dubious process for decision-making. It also disregards the collective responses BASW, SWU and UNISON each submitted after consulting our thousands of social worker members who told us they strongly objected to the proposals.

Our members feel Social Work England's consultation gave a false impression that their opinion really mattered when all along the intention was to disregard their views and add pressure to an already struggling profession.

Social Work England's approach, in not amending its plans, contrasts to the approach adopted by the Scottish Social Services Council which recently softened planned fee rises following a consultation that also generated significant opposition.

Social Work England, as a non-departmental public body receiving substantial government funding, must be held to a high standard of public duty. Ongoing delays in its Fitness to Practise processes and a growing perception among registrants of poor value for money only compound concerns. Many social workers report a widening disconnect between the regulator and the realities of frontline practice.

The fee increase comes during a time of exceptional financial pressure for social workers and against the backdrop of an escalating recruitment and retention crisis. We fear this decision will drive more professionals out of the sector, further jeopardising vital services and the safeguarding of vulnerable children and adults.

We therefore call for the following urgent actions:

1. Intervention by the Professional Standards Authority (PSA):

Call for Action - The PSA must review both the process and outcome of Social Work England's consultation and assess whether the regulator has fulfilled its statutory duties with the necessary levels of transparency, accountability, and proportionality. We will continue to raise this with the PSA in our regular meetings with them.

2. Immediate commencement of the Statutory 5-Year Review:

Call for Action - Under Section 64 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, an independent review of Social Work England's operations should have begun by now, with the five-year review period starting on 2 December 2019. Had the review been completed in a timely way, this could have informed the decision on the additional funding requested by Social Work England and their [decision not to review 2.5% of registrants continuous professional development submissions for 2 consecutive years](#). This undermines the public safety measure "promote public protection". We urge the Secretary of State for Education to commission this review without further delay, and in accordance with the legal requirement to consult representatives of social workers in England. We will continue to monitor this situation.

3. Parliamentary scrutiny and government response:

Call for Action - We urge Members of Parliament to raise these issues in Parliament, questioning the rationale behind the fee increase, the lack of pre-announcement stakeholder involvement, delays to the statutory review, and the dismissal of the views of several thousand respondents.

4. Comprehensive evaluation of Social Work England's Performance:

Call for Action - The forthcoming independent review must examine the effectiveness, value for money, and operational performance of the regulator. It should pay particular attention to the Fitness to Practise process, where we continue to see unacceptable delays - with some registrants informed that hearings will not be scheduled until after March 2026. These delays have serious emotional, financial, and professional impacts on social workers. We have [previously highlighted](#) the detrimental physical, emotional and financial impact for BASW, UNISON and SWU members who experience delays with Fitness to Practise processes. Members continue to be advised in writing of further delays and final hearings not taking place 'until after March 2026', this remains an intolerable and unacceptable situation - especially following the additional financial investment from central government.

We encourage all social workers that have concerns to raise their voices and write to:

- [Your MP](#). Ask them to raise these issues with the Secretary of State for Education, Minister for Women and Equalities, and the Prime Minister. Please include your postcode and what you are personally experiencing in your letter.
- Secretariat Leads, Independent Review of Social Care Regulation
- [Professional Standards Authority](#)

The voices of social workers and the organisations representing them must be heard. The future of the profession and the people we serve depends on it.

We remain committed to working in the interests of the profession, the public, and the principles of fair and accountable regulation.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our concerns with Social Work England, PSA, Department for Education and other relevant stakeholders.

The **British Association of Social Workers (BASW)** is the professional association for social work in the UK with offices in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. With over 22,000 members we exist to promote the best possible social work services for all people who may need them, while also securing the well-being of social workers working in all health and social care settings.

The **Social Workers Union (SWU)** is the only trade union to offer representation by qualified social workers who understand the complexities of the profession. With officers working across the UK, SWU provides representation at internal hearings for disciplinary and grievance procedures, and employer investigations into practice and misconduct allegations.

UNISON is the biggest trade union in the UK and the largest membership organisation for social workers and the wider social care workforce. We are recognised for collective bargaining within local government and the NHS and negotiate nationally, regionally and locally with employers to improve social worker pay, pensions, employment conditions and job security. Our Professional Services Unit provides the highly specialist knowledge and skills required to represent UNISON members who are being investigated by their professional regulator. UNISON offers a unique lens in that we work and represent registrants across the 10 UK wide regulators and those in devolved nations.

You Can't Pour from an Empty Cup...

SWU Executive Committee Vice Chair Chrissie Beatty shares her personal reflections on self-care.



On 24th July, we marked International Self-Care Day, which sparked some interesting conversations in the office about self-care. While everyone agreed that they regularly encourage the people and families they support to prioritise their wellbeing, the idea of applying that same principle to ourselves was met with laughter. The general consensus? "Who has time for self-care?"

That got me thinking: why don't we practice what we preach? We wouldn't let our phone batteries run flat - so why don't we treat ourselves with the same care and attention?

Self-care is often misunderstood as selfish or indulgent.

It involves prioritising our own needs, which can feel at odds with our instinct to put others first. As Social Workers, we're the helpers, the fixers, the empowerers. We spend our days focused on the needs of others, so it's no surprise that putting ourselves first doesn't come naturally. But true self-care isn't self-centred - it's about replenishing our own resources so we can continue to support others effectively.

The statistics speak for themselves. Research shows that 82% of Social Workers experience stress at work, with 65% reporting that their mental health is suffering as a result. A quarter of us admit to having an emotional response to our work - such as crying or feeling physically unwell - at least once a week. On average, we face 10 stressful situations a day, which adds up to around 50 a week.

It's no wonder that half of Social Workers have considered leaving the profession.

Without self-care, burnout becomes almost inevitable.

Burnout is a global public health issue in our field. It's a state of extreme physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that leads to reduced motivation and performance.

If left unchecked, it can manifest in physical symptoms like headaches, stomach issues, insomnia, chest pain, and frequent illness, as well as emotional symptoms like anxiety, poor concentration, and a sense of detachment. It erodes job satisfaction and weakens our commitment to the work we once felt passionate about.

Many of you will be familiar with the "oxygen mask" analogy: in an emergency on a plane, you're instructed to secure your own mask before helping others. The same principle applies in life. We must take care of ourselves first in order to be there for others.

But let's be honest - Social Workers aren't known for having a lot of spare time. So how do we make space for self-care?

The truth is, it looks different for everyone. And no, it's not all face masks and bubble baths (though it can be, if that's your thing!). Self-care is about setting boundaries, carving out time for yourself, and intentionally doing things that bring you joy. It's about hitting pause, taking a breath, and asking yourself: "Is my oxygen mask secure?" before diving into the needs of others.

If you're not sure where to start, here are a few ideas:

- **Exercise:** Choose something you enjoy - walking, dancing, yoga, swimming.
- **Healthy Eating:** Fuel your body with nutritious meals and stay hydrated.
- **Sleep:** Aim for 7-9 hours of quality rest each night.
- **Rest & Relaxation:** Schedule breaks and make time to unwind.
- **Mindfulness & Meditation:** Stay present and manage stress with breathing techniques or apps.
- **Journaling:** Reflect on your thoughts and emotions through writing.
- **Set Boundaries:** Learn to say no and protect your time and energy.
- **Practice Gratitude:** Focus on the positives and express appreciation.
- **Connect with Others:** Spend quality time with loved ones.
- **Nature Time:** Being outdoors is proven to reduce stress and restore balance.

Whatever fills your cup - make it a habit. You'll feel the benefits, and so will everyone around you.

As Social Workers, our role is to support others - but we must remember: we're not here to set ourselves on fire to keep others warm.

Labour's disability benefits cuts will hit people already facing the greatest inequality

This summer over 100 social workers [supported an open letter written by the Social Workers Union's Austerity Action Group](#) to the Chancellor about Labour's benefit cuts bill. What is obvious to so many of us - disabled people and allies - but what the government and press seemed to have to be reminded of time and again, is that disability benefits like PIP and Universal Credit aren't luxuries. They are money to help pay for the extra costs of being disabled.

At the time, the government's own figures showed that the combined Universal Credit (UC) and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) cuts would hit [700,000 families already in poverty](#). On top of that, by the government's own estimate [250,000 more people would be pushed below the poverty line](#). These aren't just numbers - they are real people, including members of our [Austerity Action Group \(AAG\)](#) who are disabled and disabled activists themselves.

A sign of the extremely rushed nature of this Bill are the knock-on effects of people losing benefits that hadn't seemed to be considered. For example, when someone loses PIP they also lose their "marker of need" with councils and the NHS. That means they can't access other support either. It's like they disappear from the system entirely.

The Universal Credit Bill will now make no changes to PIP, but it will make big cuts to the health element of Universal Credit for future claimants and to Income based Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

Thanks to activism from disabled people's groups, the government dropped the PIP cuts and stopped freezing some

UC payments. But they're still planning to halve UC payments for new claimants and freeze them for people who claimed before April 2017. For now, disabled people live with uncertainty.

Most of these people have been assessed as having limited capability for work; they're often called "unfit for work" for a reason. The government admits employment outcomes for this group will be minimal, but they won't tell us the actual numbers until October.

The governments also hasn't published poverty impact data for the remaining cuts to the health element of UC. So MPs have voted on something that will affect hundreds of thousands of disabled people without knowing how bad it will be. This lack of information is causing real distress for disabled people who don't know if they'll lose their support.

A member of the Austerity Action Group said: "The [severe conditions criteria](#) require claimants to meet the same criteria 'constantly'. Constantly is defined in the Bill as 'at all times' or 'on all occasions on which the claimant undertakes or attempts to undertake the activity'. However, many degenerative conditions such as Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis and muscular dystrophy follow a slow path of decreasing ability, with periods of remission. So, most days you may be unable to turn the pages of a book, but you may have occasional good days when you can do so. Or your manual dexterity may be better first thing in the morning but get rapidly worse as fatigue sets in.



“At the moment, a claimant in these circumstances would get the full LCWRA amount, which from April 2026 will be £423.27 a month, because they meet the descriptor for the majority of the time. However from April 2026, new LCWRA claimants in the same position will only get around half this amount, £217.26, because they do not meet the descriptor constantly.

“This means that someone like me with a fluctuating condition applying after April next year will not be able to afford the support they so desperately need. It also does not take into consideration those with lesser disabilities who still need support. This can only result in more hospital admissions and admissions to long term care when the idea of PIP and its current premiums is to keep those with disabilities in the community.”

We will continue to campaign for disability benefits that properly support disabled people.

The Speaker of the House of Commons has certified this Bill as a Money Bill which means that it bypassed the House of Lords' approval and will become law as the Universal Credit Act 2025. Because it is a Money Bill, the Commons were able to [ignore any amendments the Lords attempted to make](#).

The Universal Credit Act 2025 will make no changes to PIP but it will make big cuts to the health element of Universal Credit for future claimants and to Income based Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). These cuts will come into effect in April 2026. Separately to the Universal Credit Act 2025, Minister Stephen Timms will be leading a review of the PIP assessment and has confirmed that the outcomes of this review will shape changes to PIP. However, the Timms review has been [criticised for a lack of genuine co-production with disabled people](#) and [questions remain about if a primary aim of the review will be cost-cutting](#).

Cutting benefits will push more people into poverty. As an Austerity Action Group, we spent 14 years watching Tory cuts destroy the safety net. We won't watch Labour carry on where they left off. The government says they're fixing a broken system, but cutting support for disabled people isn't the answer.

The government shouldn't be making decisions about disabled people's lives without proper impact assessments or consultation. The Austerity Action Group will continue to campaign for all of the cuts to UC to be dropped.

Help Us Improve Health and Safety for Social Workers

We recently spoke to Union Contacts and found that the most commonly raised issues were related to health and safety - one working and caseloads were frequently raised, but could also include office environment issues such as workstation strain problems. Now we want to hear from as many members as possible so we can take the right action to support you.

Our short survey will only take a few minutes and we're asking that you please complete it by 30th September. Your responses will help us understand what health and safety challenges social workers face most often. Based on what we learn, we can decide whether to focus on health and safety training for members or launch campaigns to address the issues you raise most frequently.

Take the SWU Health and Safety Questionnaire: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfEqXtynrWD7SB212rGhU4kzqIJ2GHxAqR2DDd1Wam5aHGYcA/viewform>

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

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

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



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- is lobbying MPs and Peers to improve working conditions for social workers.
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- Opportunity to be active as part of the trade union movement
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