



Social Care Sector Guide

A practical introduction to roles, training,
and career pathways in social care.



**LEARNING AND
DEVELOPMENT HUB**

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1. Overview

Introduction to the Social Care Sector

Social care plays a vital role in society, aiming to protect children and vulnerable adults from harm, support families in need, and empower individuals to lead safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives. At its core, social care is about making a positive difference in people's lives — particularly those facing complex challenges — and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

The children's social care sector is a diverse and evolving field dedicated to the safety, well-being, and development of children and young people.

It supports those who are vulnerable or at risk due to factors such as abuse, neglect, family breakdown, disability, or socio-economic hardship.

This work is delivered by a range of professionals and services — including social workers, family support workers, foster carers, and youth practitioners — who collaborate across health, education, and legal systems to deliver the right help at the right time.

The adult social care sector focuses on supporting adults who may face challenges such as physical or learning disabilities, mental health conditions, long-term illness, or the effects of ageing.

The goal is to promote independence, dignity, and quality of life through personalised care and support. Adult social care professionals work in a variety of settings — from people's homes and residential facilities to hospitals and community services — helping individuals access the services they need, manage daily living, and stay safe.

This sector is collaborative and rewarding, offering the chance to build strong, person-centred relationships and make a real difference in people's lives.

For those considering a career in social care, it is a sector that offers meaningful, people-focused work with opportunities to grow, specialise, and make a lasting impact. It requires compassion, resilience, and strong communication skills, as well as a commitment to safeguarding, equality, and human rights.



2. Key Areas of Social Care

Social care covers a wide range of support services aimed at safeguarding and improving the lives of children, families, and adults. Below are some of the key areas in which social care professionals work — particularly within children's services:



Children's Social Care

◆ Child Protection

- Ensuring children are safe from abuse, neglect, and harm. Social workers intervene in cases where children are at risk and may remove them from unsafe environments if necessary.
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◆ Foster Care and Adoption

- Placing children in temporary or permanent homes when they cannot live with their birth families. This includes foster care placements and support for adoptive families.
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◆ Children in Care (Looked After Children)

- Providing long-term care and support for children in the care system, including those in foster homes, residential homes, or with guardians.
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◆ Family Support Services

- Helping families who are struggling with parenting, financial issues, or other challenges that could affect a child's well-being. This can include parenting classes, counselling, and financial aid.
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◆ Residential Care

- Providing care in children's homes or specialised facilities for young people with complex needs, such as behavioural difficulties or disabilities.
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◆ Youth Justice Services

- Working with young people involved in crime to rehabilitate them and prevent reoffending. This can include community service, education, and therapy.
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◆ Support for Disabled Children

- Providing specialised care, therapy, and educational support for children with disabilities and their families.
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◆ Mental Health and Well-being

- Supporting children with emotional and mental health issues through counselling, therapy, and specialised care programs.
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◆ Education Welfare and Safeguarding in Schools

- Ensuring children attend school, are safe in educational settings, and receive support for any difficulties they may face.
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Adult Social Care

Adult social care focuses on supporting individuals with a wide range of needs, including age-related challenges, long-term health conditions, disabilities, or mental health difficulties. Services are tailored to help people live as independently and safely as possible.

Key areas include:

◆ Support for Older Adults

- Providing care and assistance with daily tasks such as washing, dressing, cooking, and mobility — often delivered in-home, in residential settings, or through day centres.
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◆ Disability Services

- Offering tailored support for adults with physical or learning disabilities to help them access housing, education, employment, and social opportunities.
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◆ Mental Health Support

- Helping individuals manage conditions such as anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, or bipolar disorder. This includes crisis intervention, therapy, medication support, and recovery planning.
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◆ Hospital Discharge and Reablement

- Supporting individuals after hospital treatment to transition safely back home. Reablement services help people regain skills and confidence after illness or injury.
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◆ Safeguarding Adults

- Protecting adults at risk of abuse, neglect, or exploitation. Social care professionals assess risk, put protection plans in place, and coordinate with other services.
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◆ Carer Support Services

- Providing information, respite, emotional support, and practical assistance to unpaid carers — such as family members — who care for someone with long-term needs.
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3. Roles & Responsibilities

The social care workforce is made up of a diverse range of professionals who work across local authorities, charities, schools, health services, and residential care settings. Each role plays a part in supporting individuals and families, delivering care, safeguarding well-being, and promoting independence.

Below is a snapshot of key roles across the children's and adult social care sectors:



Care Managers

- Oversee the delivery of care services, manage teams, and ensure care plans meet standards. Liaise with families, health professionals, and local authorities.



Children's Mental Health Practitioners (CAMHS Workers)

- Deliver therapy, counselling, or group work for young people with mental health challenges. May include psychologists, therapists, or mental health nurses.



Community Support Officers

- Help adults engage with community services, reduce isolation, and promote inclusion. Support access to housing, education, and social groups.



Early Help Workers

- Provide early intervention to families before challenges escalate. Offer support around parenting, routines, housing, and access to services.



Education Welfare Officers

- Work with schools to monitor attendance, improve pupil well-being, and support families with barriers to education.



Family Support Workers

- Help families facing parenting, financial, or relationship challenges. Offer emotional and practical support such as home visits, parenting groups, and signposting.



Foster Carers and Adoption Professionals

- Foster carers provide temporary homes for children unable to live with their birth families. Adoption professionals support families and children through the adoption process.
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Home Care Coordinators

- Plan and manage home care services for adults, ensuring quality care delivery and scheduling care workers effectively.
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Mental Health Support Workers

- Support adults with mental health needs, helping them manage daily life, attend appointments, and build coping strategies.
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Occupational Therapists

- Assess people's needs and recommend equipment or home adaptations to support independence, mobility, and daily activities.
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Residential Care Workers

- Work in children's homes or adult residential facilities to provide hands-on support, emotional care, and help with independence skills.
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Care Workers / Support Workers

- Deliver personal care, prepare meals, support medication routines, and assist with mobility. Work in homes, residential care, or day centres.
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Safeguarding Officers (DSLs)

- Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) ensure safeguarding policies are upheld in schools or organisations. They handle child/adult protection concerns.
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Social Workers

- Qualified professionals who assess, intervene, and support families or adults in complex situations. Specialise in areas like child protection or mental health.
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Youth Justice Service (YJS) Workers

- Work with young people involved in crime, focusing on rehabilitation, behaviour change, and preventing reoffending.
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Youth Workers

- Support young people's personal, educational, and social development. Often work in community or school settings.
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4. Social Work

Social workers play a central role in safeguarding, assessing needs, and supporting individuals and families in crisis or facing ongoing challenges. In the UK, they typically specialise in working with either children and families or adults, although all social workers are trained to practice in a variety of settings.

Children's Social Workplace

Children's social workers focus on the welfare and protection of children and young people. Their work includes:

- Identifying and responding to cases of abuse, neglect, or family breakdown
- Developing care plans and offering early intervention to support families
- Coordinating foster placements, adoption, or kinship care where needed
- Collaborating with schools, health services, and legal professionals to ensure children's needs are met

They aim to keep children safe and help families build nurturing environments where children can thrive.

Adult Social Workers

Adult social workers support people facing issues such as:

- Physical or learning disabilities
- Mental health conditions
- Long-term illness
- Age-related challenges

Their role involves assessing individual needs, developing care plans, and helping people access services such as healthcare, housing, and financial support. They are also key to safeguarding adults at risk, ensuring that people are protected from harm, abuse, or exploitation — while promoting independence, dignity, and choice.

Specialist Areas of Practice

Social workers can specialise in areas including:

- Child Protection Social Workers – Investigate concerns of harm and act to keep children safe
 - Looked After Children (LAC) Social Workers – Support children in care to ensure stability and well-being
 - Fostering and Adoption Social Workers – Recruit, assess, and support foster carers and adoptive families
 - Family Support Social Workers – Work with families to resolve difficulties and prevent children entering care
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- Hospital Social Workers – Support patients during discharge planning and connect them with community-based care
- Mental Health Social Workers – Provide therapeutic support and care coordination, often working under the Mental Health Act

These specialist roles require a solid foundation in social work practice, but some (e.g. mental health or hospital work) may also involve additional training or experience in their respective settings.



5. Qualifications and Progression

 The social care sector offers a wide range of roles — some requiring formal qualifications, others accessible through on-the-job training or apprenticeships. There are clear routes for progression, from entry-level positions to qualified social work and leadership roles.

Entry-Level Roles

Many frontline care roles (e.g. care assistants, support workers, or family support workers) require basic qualifications such as:

- Level 2 or Level 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care
- Care Certificate (mandatory induction for new care workers)
- On-the-job training and shadowing opportunities

These roles often serve as valuable stepping stones for those interested in progressing into specialist or senior positions.

Becoming a Social Worker

To become a registered social worker in England, you need to complete a Social Work England-approved qualification and meet professional standards.

Step 1: Meet Entry Requirements

You'll usually need:

- GCSEs (including English and Maths)
- Relevant experience in social care, youth work, education, or support services

Step 2: Choose a Social Work Qualification

There are several recognised routes:

A. Undergraduate Degree (BA/BSc in Social Work)

- 3-year full-time course
- Combines classroom learning and placements
- Requires A-levels (some universities accept BTECs or Access to HE Diplomas)

B. Postgraduate Degree (MA/MSc in Social Work)

- 2-year course for those with an undergraduate degree in another subject
- Often requires a 2:1 or 2:2 in a related field (e.g. psychology, sociology)

C. Degree Apprenticeship in Social Work

- Work-based route: study part-time while working in a social care role
- Tuition is funded by your employer
- You earn a salary while training

D. Fast-Track Routes for Graduates

1. Step Up to Social Work – 14-month intensive training programme with a bursary
2. Frontline – 2-year programme focused on child protection, combining academic learning and direct work

Step 3: Gain Relevant Experience

Courses often require hands-on experience before applying. You can gain this through:

- Volunteering with family services or children's charities
- Working as a care assistant, teaching assistant, or support worker
- Applying for social work assistant or early help roles in local authorities

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Step 4: Apply to a Course

- Undergraduate: via UCAS
- Postgraduate: directly with universities
- Fast-track: via individual programme websites (e.g. gov.uk for Step Up)

Step 5: Complete Your Studies and Placements

All social work courses include practical placements in real settings. You'll be supervised by qualified professionals and gain experience working with families, adults, or children in need.

Step 6: Register with Social Work England

Once qualified, you must register to practice legally. This includes:

- Completing a DBS check
- Meeting fitness to practice standards
- Ongoing professional development

 Website: socialworkengland.org.uk

Step 7: Start Your Career

Qualified social workers can work in:

- Local authorities
- NHS Trusts
- Schools and education
- Charities and youth justice services
- Hospitals, fostering agencies, or mental health teams

Step 8: Continue Professional Development (CPD)

Social workers must log CPD each year to stay registered. There are also opportunities to:

- Specialise in areas like domestic abuse, mental health, youth justice
- Train as an Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP)
- Move into management, policy work, or higher education

6. Average Salaries

Salaries in the social care sector can vary by region, employer, and role. While wages tend to be higher in London and some parts of the South East due to cost of living, the following reflects typical salary ranges across England and Wales:

Social Workers (Children's and Adults')

- Newly Qualified (ASYE): £30,000 – £33,000
- Experienced Social Workers: £35,000 – £41,000+
- NHS Social Workers (Band 6): £35,392 – £42,618 (Agenda for Change pay scale)
- Some London boroughs offer NQSWs starting at: £32,430

Family Support Workers

- Entry-level to experienced: £23,000 – £34,000
- Salaries depend on qualifications, location, and whether the role is in a charity, school, or local authority

Support Workers / Care Assistants

- Entry-level to experienced: £23,000 – £34,000
- Salaries depend on qualifications, location, and whether the role is in a charity, school, or local authority
- Care Assistant / Support Worker: £19,000–£23,000
- Senior Support Worker / Key Worker: £22,000–£27,000
- Team Leader / Deputy Manager: £27,000–£34,000
- Registered Manager: £35,000–£45,000 (higher in some areas)

7. Further Information

If you're interested in pursuing a career in social care — or want to explore more about the roles, pathways, and professional standards — the following resources are excellent starting points:

◆ British Association of Social Workers (BASW)

Provides guidance on professional development, values, and career progression for social workers.

🌐 Website: <https://www.basw.co.uk>

◆ UCAS – How to Become a Social Worker

Covers the academic routes into social work and how to apply through UCAS

🌐 Website: <https://www.ucas.com/>

◆ Social Work England

The regulatory body for social workers in England. Offers registration info, training standards, and CPD requirements.

🌐 Website: <https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk>

◆ National Careers Service – Social Worker Profile

Outlines responsibilities, salary ranges, and qualification routes for social workers.

🌐 Website: <https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk>

◆ Step Up to Social Work (GOV.UK)

Information on the 14-month fast-track training programme for career changers.

🌐 Website: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/SUTSW>



www.ldhub.org.uk