Advice for newly-qualified social workers:

Finding employment

The jobs market for newly-qualified social workers is difficult – what can you do to increase your chances of getting a job?
What is the problem?

- Newly-qualified social workers (NQSWs) in both 2010 and 2011 are reporting that it is difficult to find employment as a social worker.
- It is impossible to know the numbers of students not finding work. (The GSCC report that this may be 1 in 4, but figures are not reliable as NQSW usually register on completion of their degree and it is at that point that 1 in 4 report they are unemployed. NQSW’s are supposed to contact the GSCC when there has been a change in circumstances – such as securing employment, but it is known that not all do so. Also there is no record required as to what type of job NQSW’s have secured i.e. it is not clear whether employment is in a qualified social work post or a social care post).
- It is undoubtedly true that there is a problem. A number of universities report that the situation is very difficult, however some universities are saying that nearly all their students are getting jobs.
- BASW are meeting increasing numbers of NQSWs who are having real difficulty finding a job despite many applications.
What is the cause of the problem?

- The number of students doubled between 2003 and 2009 (this was in response to a major shortage of social workers).

- Job freezes, cut backs and pressures on local authority social work departments. 2010 to 11 saw cuts of up to 25%. The Independent sector has also been hit by cuts in funding.

- It has become an “employers” market. Given the choice between a NQSW and an experienced social worker many, but not all, employers will take the former.

- However there is some evidence that social work posts have had some protection from cut backs.

- There have been cut backs in the voluntary sector, another major employer of social workers.

- It is known that some social workers have taken redundancy and then signed on as social workers for agencies, increasing competition for jobs.

- The pressure on social workers has increased because of cut backs and therefore there is less capacity to take students on placement, thereby depriving students of statutory placements.

- Some local authorities are reluctant to employ people who have not had a local authority placement even though they have cut back on the number of placements they offer.
Improve your job chances

– advise from NQSWs in BASW

It is important to **stand out**

- BASW can help you develop a whole range of skills – including getting involved in running conferences, seminars and involvement on policy advisory groups and committees. BASW also offers you the chance to network, to keep up-to-date on policy issues and to be involved in campaigning. BASW gives you the chance to get involved in a supportive national and international community of social workers.

- If you are a member of BASW you can get advice and backing to help you if you feel that you are being discriminated against in job applications (using equality legislation).

- Employers are impressed by applicants who are engaged with society. This could be voluntary work, including campaigning.

- BASW can give you advice, guidance and support about CPD and achieving competencies for the time after you graduate.
Are you restricting your options?

You need to think do you want to work for a local authority, or would you have more opportunities and job satisfaction in the voluntary sector, or provider sectors?

List the pros and cons for you regarding what sector you would like to work in.

In a nutshell

- Local Authority social work tends to have better terms and conditions of employment, but you may prefer the flexibility of voluntary organisations.
- As one social worker, who transferred to working for a carers organisation, said recently: “I love it – I am doing real social work”.
- It is not impossible to transfer from one sector to another, but it can be difficult.
- There are promotion possibilities in both sectors, however you may be able to take on more responsibility more quickly in the voluntary sector.
- In both sectors there are a range of operational, management and policy jobs. Both the voluntary and local authority sector look favourably on the skills and knowledge of social workers and there are many Chief Executives of small and large organisations who are qualified social workers.
- Government policy is to increase the number of jobs in the independent sector, including developing social work social enterprises (which BASW are involved in).
- There are increasing numbers of social workers operating as independent practitioners.
- The social care provider sector has interesting jobs and career opportunities.
Advise from NQSWs in BASW

- Don’t leave job hunting until the last minute – the best jobs, or all the jobs may have gone.

- Attend the job fairs and talk to people there.

- **Get help with your application form** – you may have excellent pre-course experience that you are not portraying sufficiently well. [A useful article.]

- Applying for jobs is a skilled task; many applications get rejected because the application form is poor – don’t be too proud to ask for help.

- **Interviews need a lot of preparation** – get help and advice in preparing for them.
**Network, network, network**

- Use Twitter, Social Networking (BASW has a twitter account).
- Keep up contact with people on your placements and at universities.
- Network with current and former students, support each other.
- Keep in touch with people on your former placements – you may find out about job vacancies that way.
- Most people like to help.

**Location**

- Do think hard about whether you can be flexible regarding location. It is hard to uproot and for some impossible, but other professions have to consider doing this.

- The problems of shortage of jobs is countrywide, but some areas are recruiting more than others.

- It is no consolation, but newly qualified occupational therapists, nurses, psychologists, doctors and nurses are all finding it difficult to find jobs.
Advantages and disadvantages of working for an agency

**Advantages**

- Gives you the chance to experience a variety of employers without committing yourself.
- Can give you a lot of experience quickly.
- It is a way to find out about job vacancies and to demonstrate your abilities.
- Usually better paid because of short contracts.

**Disadvantages**

- Employers expect you to be able to hit the ground running.
- You may not get as much support and good quality supervision.
- It is difficult to access post qualifying qualifications.
- Agencies may not want you unless you have experience.
Your application form and CV

Always tailor your CV or application to a **specific job** and do your research about the job and the employer.

Concentrate on **demonstrating** that you meet the competencies, or requirements as set out in the person specification.

- If you have not been able to complete your NQSW year, but can demonstrate competencies and experience that show you have achieved the standards then spell it out and give examples. Get advice on this, including from BASW.
- Use your pre-course experience, placements and any post qualification work as evidence. The people shortlisting will have preconceptions in their head that they are only looking for someone with x amount of experience, you may be able to demonstrate that you have relevant experience, but over a period of time.
- Spell out some of the advantages of taking you on – your characteristics, that you are wanting to commit long term to a good employer.
- Don’t make mistakes in your application form, make sure it is properly proof read and that you have not missed any sections. When there are a lot of applications for one post little things, such as spelling mistakes and punctuation, can put the reader off.
Your interview

- First impressions count. Be positive, demonstrate your good communication skills. Try to be concise, but also demonstrate that you are reflective.

- In the past many employers did not encourage you to visit before the interview, some employers will allow this now – find out if it is allowed and if you can visit.

- Spend time thinking of what questions you may be asked and give thought to your responses.

- Give examples – again think of scenarios you may be asked. Scenarios could include:
  - illustrate your decision-making in relation to risk
  - evidence of knowledge of legislation.

- Evidence of experience of using assessment and recording systems is likely – find out what systems the employer uses beforehand if you can.

- You will be expected to be aware of national policy issues.

- You will need to demonstrate that you are a team player and that you know the importance of supervision.

- If you are working in a role that doesn't demand a social work qualification demonstrate the experience and knowledge that this is giving you – don't express this as a negative.

- None of the above will work, however, if you pretend to be something or someone you are not.
Presentations

- If you are asked to give a presentation you have been given a great opportunity to sell yourself.

- If you are a NQSW you may well be more used to giving presentations than more experienced social workers. That is an advantage.

- Whatever medium you use for your presentation make sure that you practice thoroughly beforehand (see BASW guide to public speaking).

- Remember that although your presentation will be important don’t put all your effort and emotional energy into the presentation, it is only part of the interview. You will still need to prepare for the questions.

- If relevant, link information from your presentation to the questions that you are asked.
Should you hold out for a social work job, or try for a social care, or related job?

This is a difficult question and you will need to think carefully about your situation. Be realistic, in the present jobs climate those with most experience will be at an advantage.

**Work where a degree in social work is not a requirement**

- If you cannot find a social work job then seriously consider applying for related social care, education, youth justice, health, housing, probation jobs etc. This could provide a platform to get to the job you want.

- If there are aspects of the job that don’t enable you to get essential experience consider undertaking some part time volunteering in addition to your substantive job. Some local authorities are developing volunteer posts in social service departments – contact your nearest ones. Other sources of volunteering are probation, youth services, councils for voluntary services.

- Get help and advice from your university careers department or Next Step advisors.

- Some jobs, particularly in the voluntary sector see a social work qualification as desirable not essential. It may be worth considering such work.

- Don’t forget that there are lots of career opportunities in the independent sector. Many people say that they get more contact with service users and carers, whether this be in day services, residential care, home care, or services that are developing to support people with individual budgets.
New roles and finding work

**New jobs** are emerging in social care. For example work in the personalisation arena, advocacy, and new types of worker in mental health and children’s services. Some of these jobs don’t stipulate that you have to be a registered social worker, but they may contain many elements of social work.

The number of places that employers are advertising is increasing. Some only advertise on their own websites, many do not use the traditional big two – Community Care and The Guardian. Talk to as many social workers and human resources (HR) and workforce people as possible, find out where they advertise, what jobs may be coming up?

New initiatives for recruitment are emerging. For example there is a new consortium in the [north of England]. BASW advertises jobs as does Jobs Go Public.

If you have had a local authority placement find out who works in their workforce/learning and development department, who leads on student placements and NQSW work, see if you can meet them.

Find out about where social work and social care vacancies are advertised.
Keep your CPD up-to-date

- Whether you are working as a social worker or in social care or related work, or not working keep your Continuing Professional Development up-to-date. This does not have to be expensive. Getting involved in BASW offers great opportunities – many conferences and seminars are free or of minimal cost and BASW looks for volunteers to attend events. Also you can offer to get involved in policy work.

- You can get personal advice from BASW on CPD issues.

- Read the trade journals.

- Use CPD tools to record your learning (BASW have a CPD tool on their website).

- Attend consultation events, or to contribute to consultations e.g. SCIE, HPC, Skills for Care, CWDC etc.

- Consider blogging or writing articles – they involve research, which is real evidence for CPD.

- Campaign on social work and human rights issues.
Good luck

- Don’t give up – social work is a great profession and although we are going through difficult times there is a good future.

- Be prepared to be flexible, creative and to stand out.

- Don’t be shy about asking others for help and advice.

Stay positive
Are you a social work student?

Why not start your career in social work from a position of strength?

JOIN BASW NOW

Student benefits include:

- **50% discount** on membership for first post-qualifying year.
- Membership of The Social Workers Union at no extra cost.
- Protection during professional placements with personal professional indemnity cover (up to £5 million).
- Professional Social Work magazine each month.
- Free and discounted professional development events.
- A free confidential Advice and Representation Service (BASW members of 3 months standing).
- Discounts on books and journals, including the world-leading British Journal of Social Work.
- An Ethical Code and policy guidelines.
- Access to MyBASW, offering exclusive content and a social workers forum.

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