

Step Up to Social Work

Training Programme: Cohort 6

Frequently Asked Questions Document

Overview

Step Up to Social Work is an intensive, 14-month, full-time programme for trainee social workers.

Trainees will work in a local authority, gaining hands-on practitioner experience and academic learning. Students who finish the programme successfully will qualify with a postgraduate diploma in social work, enabling them to register as a qualified social worker with the HCPC.

Trainees will receive a bursary for the duration of the course. See Q53 for details

Office Helpline

Opening hours are Monday to Friday 08:30 - 17:30

Tel: 03300 412 352

Email: StepUp@capitaras.co.uk

Applying

Please note you may only apply once to the programme, specifying your preferred Regional Partnership (RP) but have the opportunity to indicate flexibility regarding location within the chosen RP when completing the application form.

Eligibility Criteria

Applicants must have one of the following in any discipline except social work from a UK higher education institution or an approved overseas equivalent, as well as GCSEs in English or English language and Mathematics at grade C or above, or the new grade 4 and above (or an approved equivalent)

- a minimum 2:1 level 6 degree qualification, for example, a honours degree or a graduate certificate
- a minimum 2:2 honours degree plus a higher degree (level 7 or above), for example, a Master's degree or a Postgraduate Certificate in Education

Applicants must also:

- have a minimum of 6 months full-time (or equivalent) direct experience of working with vulnerable children, young people and/or families/Carers, either in a paid or voluntary capacity?
- live in England
- the right to remain and work in the UK

Step Up Website:

www.gov.uk/guidance/step-up-to-social-work-information-for-applicants

Reasonable Adjustments:

We will facilitate reasonable adjustments required to complete the application process and liaise with RP's to facilitate reasonable adjustments at the assessment centre stage.

Application Form - Upload of Qualifications / ID documents:

Not mandatory at the application stage, except for overseas qualifications, but we strongly encourage candidates to ensure they have all certificates and ID documentation at the time of applying to prove eligibility. We reserve the right to not let candidates progress any further if proof of academic achievement or identity cannot be provided when asked. This will apply to the assessment centre stage.

Quick answers:

1) How many places are available?

The Government plans to fund up to 700 places for cohort 6 of the Step Up programme - an increase of 27 % from cohort 5.

2) When will the course start?

We anticipate training will begin in January 2020.

3) When will I be able to apply?

The application window for candidates to apply will open on Monday 4 February 2019 and close on Monday 18 March 2019.

4) Which local authorities will be taking part?

137 local authorities will be taking part in cohort 6. Details of which regional partnerships (RPs) and local authorities are taking part in cohort 6 will be made available as part of the online application process. Please visit the Regional Partnership maps section of the application site.

5) Which Regional Partnership should I apply for if my home address is not currently fixed or if I am planning to move?

Please consider carefully where you expect to be based upon commencement if successful as you may only apply to one Regional Partnership, and it will not be possible to amend this choice in the future for those relocating.

6) How will my application be assessed?

The application process will consist of the following stages:

- Online application form
- First stage (eligibility checking application forms) – Capita
- Second stage (shortlisting stage) – local authority Regional Partnerships
- Third and Final Stage (Assessment Centre) – majority of LA's have one stage AC but some have a 2 stage AC process
- Offer / on-boarding (subject to satisfactory DBS and health checks- see below)

Capita conduct an initial (first) shortlist of all submitted applications forms, ensuring that applicants meet the essential eligibility criteria for the programme (for example academic criteria, nationality / residency status and criminal record check).

The second stage (shortlisting stage) is carried out by the Regional Partnership (RP) (local authorities where the candidate applied to). The candidate assessment framework used for cohort 6 of the Step Up programme is based on the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) www.basw.co.uk/professional-development/professional-capabilities-framework-pcf which links into the [Knowledge and Skills Statements for Approved Child and Family Practitioners](#) (KSS) and has been adapted for entry into social work for the purpose of assessing Step Up candidates. Candidates are required to achieve at least the benchmark score of 3 on all four questions, in order to be considered for the assessment centre stage.

The final stage of the process is the assessment centre. Some local authorities use a two-stage process where applicants may have to take an extra on-line test before being invited to attend an assessment centre. As with the application form questions, candidates will be assessed against a framework based on the Knowledge and Skills Statements for Approved Child and Family Practitioners. If successful at the assessment centre stage candidates will be offered a 'provisional' place on the programme, this is subject to a number of thorough checks then being performed. This includes an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service Check (DBS – formerly CRB check) and an occupational health check, as well as reference checks. If all checks are satisfied candidates will be expected to commence the programme in January 2020.

7) When are assessments taking place?

Assessments are expected to be held from May - July 2019. Available dates within this three month period will vary by Regional Partnership.

8) What if I am unavailable for the assessment period?

Applicants must attend an assessment. We would advise that you do not make an application should you expect to be unable to attend assessment due to any existing commitments during the assessment months.

Eligibility answers

9) I have a 2:2 degree, but no other post-graduate qualification. Would you consider me if I have the right experience working with children and young people?

A minimum 2:1 Level 6 honours degree qualification or a minimum 2:2 qualification plus a higher post-graduate Level 7 qualification is a pre-requisite for the programme set by the Government. The degree must not be in social work. If you don't possess either of these, unfortunately you would not meet the entry criteria for Step Up.

10) What if I only have an honours degree at 2:2 but also gained a PGCE. Am I eligible to apply for Step Up?

The Postgraduate Certificate in Education is a level 7 qualification and therefore you are eligible to apply for Step Up. However, the Step Up programme is intense and high-pressured. Applicants need to be confident they can pick up ideas, put them into practice quickly and perform consistently at this level for the whole 14-month course.

11) I have GCSE English Literacy at the required grade, does this meet the requirements?

GCSE English Literacy is not accepted at any grade.

12) I don't have a 2:1 degree but I have a Master's/Doctorate.

You will still need to possess a minimum 2:2 Level 6 degree qualification as well as your Masters/Doctorate in order to be eligible to apply for the Step Up Programme. The degree must not be in social work.

13) Why have you set the academic bar so high for this programme?

The Government has made clear its commitment to maintaining high standards of social work training and practice. Applicants with a 2:1 level 6 degree-i.e. honours degree (or a higher level post-graduate qualification), will have proven academic resilience to perform at a high standard for a sustained period of time.

14) Can the programme be completed on a part-time basis?

No. Whilst a range of post-graduate courses can be part-time, running simultaneously with other activities, the intense demands of Step Up both academically and practically mean candidates could not undertake it on a part-time basis.

15) My degree is in Social Care, can I apply?

Yes. A degree in Social Care does not preclude you from applying.

16) I hold Qualified Teacher Status but only hold a 2.2 degree; does this mean that I am not eligible to apply for Step Up?

Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) is a formal accreditation, awarded to individuals who have been assessed as meeting all of the standards required to teach in a school in England. Therefore, QTS itself is not a qualification and cannot meet the level 6 or above eligibility criteria for Step Up. If you gained QTS as part of your first degree or through school-based training but do not hold a 2:1 or a first, then you are not eligible. However, if you also hold a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (a level 7 qualification), then you are eligible for Step Up.

17) Can I apply for Step Up to Social Work if I have a criminal record?

For the last cohort of Step Up to Social Work, convictions did not preclude anyone from applying for the programme. However, we strongly advise that once applications open you contact the local authority to which you would like to apply to discuss your convictions and establish whether it is in your interest to submit an application form. Universities usually require Step Up trainees and other student social workers to undergo an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check before being accepted on the programme. Unfortunately, we are unable to list the sorts of offences that would deem someone ineligible for the programme as each case is individual.

18) Can I apply for Step Up if I don't have a driving licence?

For the last cohort of Step Up to Social Work, not having a driving licence did not preclude anyone from applying for the programme. However, we strongly advise that you consider the section of the application site that details where a driving licence is required, or not required, before making an application to a particular RP. For example, if you apply to a local authority which has rural areas or does not have good public transport networks, they may require candidates to have a driving licence, the location of the University you will have to attend for the course may also have a bearing on whether a driving licence is a necessity.

19) Can I still apply if I am due to graduate but will not know my grade until after the application window has closed?

No. You must meet the eligibility criteria and have received your degree at the **time of submitting** an application form, and you will be required to provide evidence of your qualifications. Application forms that **do not** meet the eligibility criteria will not be assessed.

20) If Step Up starts in January 2020, why can't I apply now on the basis of my predicted grades?

Competition for places onto the Step Up to Social Work programme is very high and we are unable to offer the concession of conditional offers. Therefore, whilst we understand students will be disappointed that they are not eligible to apply for cohort 6 of the programme, applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria cannot be considered.

21) I don't have English/ English Language and/ or Maths GCSE at grade C. What are the equivalents?

Information about other English/ Maths qualifications equivalent to GCSE level can be found here:

www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels

If you do not have an English/ English Language and Maths GCSE at grade C or above (or an approved equivalent) then you will not be eligible to apply for Step Up.

22) Can I do an English or Maths GCSE course whilst applying for Step Up?

No. You must already have these qualifications at the time of submitting your application form for Step Up to Social Work. You will need to evidence your qualifications with dated original certificates if you are invited to an assessment centre.

23) Will I have to provide proof of my qualifications?

Yes. You will need to provide **original** certificates for all of your qualifications for you to proceed any further at the assessment centre.

24) I don't have my original certificate, what can I do?

Exam boards do not normally issue replacement certificates if originals are lost or missing. If you do not have an original certificate, you will need to contact the exam board you took your qualification with as soon as possible. They can arrange for a certified statement of results or a letter confirming your results. Both of these are recognised by universities, colleges, professional bodies and employers. Full details of how to contact your exam board, or which organisation your old exam board now belongs to, can be found on the Ofqual website at: <http://ofqual.gov.uk/help-and-advice/getting-a-replacement-certificate/>

Please note that a fee for this service may be charged by exam boards – which the Department cannot reimburse regardless of whether a place on Step Up is ultimately offered or not. Please also note that it can take time to receive the required paperwork, so it is essential you apply for it as soon as possible.

25) Do I have to produce certificates right away? Surely, it's better to wait until I know I have been invited to an assessment centre?

You will be expected to provide your original certificates if you are invited to the assessment centre. Failure to do so may result in you being asked to leave the assessment process.

If you have to obtain a certified statement of results or letter from the exam board but are thinking about waiting until you are invited to an assessment centre, we would advise against this. Firstly, because obtaining such documents can be a lengthy process and secondly because we reserve the right not to proceed with applications at any point. If you cannot satisfy a regional partnership that you possess the required certificates (either before or after assessment centre), you may be asked to leave the process. This is an unnecessary risk to your application.

26) I have recently graduated from university; can I still apply for Step Up?

As long as you meet the eligibility criteria, you can submit an application form.

27) Is there is an upper age limit of who can apply?

No. As long as you meet the eligibility criteria, you can apply.

28) Do I already have to be employed by a local authority in order to join this programme?

No, you do not have to be currently working for a local authority.

29) What kind of experience of working with children and families is required and would it matter if the work was voluntary or unpaid?

You will need a minimum of 6 months full-time (or equivalent) direct experience of working with vulnerable children, young people and/or families/Carers, either in a paid or voluntary capacity. For example, you could have teaching, youth work or experience of working in an Early Years setting. The important thing is that you are able to demonstrate the value of that experience and how you think this would relate to social work.

30) Are there any conditions around eligibility for international students?

Universities and local authorities apply conditions around eligibility and tuition fee payments. **You should note that any international student, including those from and residing in, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, will be required to pay their own tuition fees if their application is successful. UK nationals would need to be residing in England for the duration of the programme, in order for their tuition fees to be covered by DfE.**

Non-British EU nationals are only eligible to apply if they have been a resident in the EU for three or more years, unless they have the appropriate study visa.

All other non-British applicants must have been granted Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK (and provide passport details for checks). Details about the different types of immigration status, can be found on the GOV.UK website at: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-visas-and-immigration

Programme specific answers

31) How long will a training programme take to complete?

The duration of the programme is approx. 14 months. There may be a short extension to allow for holidays to be taken at a predetermined point. It is important to stress that this programme is very intense and applicants should be prepared to work at pace for sustained periods.

32) Can I take time off for future arranged commitments, i.e. holidays, getting married?

It will not normally be possible to negotiate individual periods of leave.

33) Am I able to do the course as well as work at my current post?

No. The Step Up to Social Work programme is a full time course lasting approx. 14 months and is not available alongside current employment. It is an intensive course and candidates should be prepared to commit wholly to around 14 months of study and practice.

34) Is this course available for on the job training at my current employment?

No. The course is full time. You need to be prepared to put the commitment in for around 14 months of study and practice. It is an intensive course and only those candidates that are eligible and able to demonstrate commitment will get through the assessment process. The funding is designed to enable participants not to work while completing the programme.

35) If I was accepted onto the course, would I have to terminate my existing employment?

Yes, as the programme is for 14 months, is not available alongside current employment.

However, if you already work for a local authority, we would recommend speaking to them to see if they offer any work break schemes.

36) What will the programme look like?

The programme curriculum will be mapped against the Chief Social Worker's Statement of Knowledge and Skills. It will also cover social work ethics and practice, child development, assessment of risk and the legal framework. All programmes must meet the social work regulator (Health and Care Professions Council) and QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) approval. It will combine periods of academic study with periods of placement with social work teams. The exact timetable varies according to which local authority and university you are registered with.

You can get more information on this from the local authority you are interested in joining. Please note that at the assessment centre stage, all elements of the day will be mapped against the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) www.basw.co.uk/professional-development/professional-capabilities-framework-pcf

37) Will prior learning be taken into account?

Where previous formal qualifications overlap with elements of the Step Up course, some universities may take these into account through a process known as Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning (AP(E)L). AP(E)L allows for previous certified and experiential learning to be accredited and set against one or a number of modules. Effectively, this means a candidate who has recently completed a child development module, for example, could effectively submit evidence of completion and not have to repeat this module on the Step Up programme. If you are successful your chosen university will be able to provide more information on whether it operates AP(E)L.

38) What qualification will trainees receive?

On successful completion of the programme, the trainees will receive a Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work from the relevant Higher Education Institution (HEI). This qualifies the holder to apply to the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) to be registered as a social worker. The HCPC is the independent regulator for social work in England.

Please note that HCPC will be replaced this year by Social Work England who will become the new regulator.

39) What will a Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work enable me to do?

The Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work is a level 7 qualification and therefore carries the same rigour as an MA in Social Work. Diploma programmes offered by universities for Step Up to Social Work are subject to approval by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), the body which regulates social work training and qualifications. HCPC approval entitles successful trainees to register and practise as social workers. The Diploma therefore fulfils the aims of Step Up to Social Work of enabling high-calibre trainees to begin a career in social work, subject to successful HCPC registration. Furthermore, the Diploma programme enables successful participants to begin practising earlier than those on 18-month or two-year MA courses.

40) After completing the programme and receiving a Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work, am I able to progress onto a Masters?

You should find out whether your local authority you are applying to offers this through the university it chooses to deliver the Step Up programme. DfE does not fund extensions to a Masters qualification.

41) Do you have an example of the course syllabus?

The bespoke, tailored nature of the programme means that precise programme content varies from area to area in the same way that university courses vary between different establishments. If you receive an offer of a place on the course, then you should ask your allocated local authority (LA) to provide an outline of the programme of study.

Given that cohort 6 of Step Up will look to embed the knowledge and skills statement within the curriculum, you should become familiar with the published statement at:

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/379033/Consultation_on_knowledge_and_skills_for_child_and_family_social_work_-_government_response.pdf

42) What is the contact time of the course?

The course is full time. You need to be prepared to put the commitment in for around 14 months' study and practice. It is an intensive course with at least 170 days' placement and only those candidates that are eligible and able to demonstrate commitment will get through the assessment process.

43) How is the course assessed?

The structure and assessment of the course is agreed locally by the local authorities and universities. It is likely to be a mixture of written assignments and exams.

44) What kind of support is available during the course? Do I get assigned a mentor?

You will be assigned a supervisor for your placement and the universities will supply a tutor for academic supervision. Many local authorities also offer additional support and you can find out about this from the local authority you apply to.

45) How much time is spent in a placement and in the classroom?

The programme is designed to complete in approx. 14 months and placements are set by the local authority you are placed with, along with lectures at the appropriate university within your chosen region. Every region is different, but you spend around 2-3 months within an academic setting along with 120 day, on average, on placement.

46) How much funding do trainees receive?

This is determined at a local level, however, current trainees are guaranteed approx. £19,833 for the duration of the course by local authorities (LAs).

47) Do trainees pay tuition fees?

No, the Department for Education provides funding to local authorities to cover all tuition fees for the duration of the programme. **To qualify for having tuition fees paid, candidates must be living in England at the start, and for the duration, of the course.**

48) Is the funding paid to trainees taxed?

This depends on the set up with the local authority (LA). All cohort 5 Step Up trainees were given a tax-exempt bursary and cohort 6 will be developed along similar lines. Step Up trainees are not eligible for bursaries or allowances from NHS Business Services Authority (BSA) because Step Up is a work-based training programme. If the local authority chooses to award an employment contract to their trainees, then payments will be subject to national insurance and tax. If the LA awards a training contract, then the payments may be classed as a bursary and exempt from tax and national insurance. Individual local authorities will decide on their own local arrangements around contractual relationships with trainees, and you should discuss this with them if you are offered a place on the course. Taxation always depends on an individual's circumstances and so you should also discuss this with your local tax office.

49) What does the trainee funding pay for?

The funding is awarded to trainees to cover their costs whilst on the Step Up programme. It could cover items like books, rent, travelling costs or living expenses.

50) Will I be guaranteed a job upon completion or have to work for the training local authority for a specified length of time?

This is up to the local authority (LA) where you are placed and is a matter entirely between the trainee and sponsoring local authority. Step Up trainees are highly employable and statistics show that over 80% of graduates have so far gained jobs in child and family social work at the end of the programme.

Other answers

51) What other options are available for me if I do not meet the criteria of the Step Up to Social Work programme?

Step Up to Social Work is only open to applicants that meet these eligibility criteria. If you do not meet the criteria of the Step Up to Social Work programme, you may find it helpful to contact the British Association of Social Workers which is the professional association for social workers <http://www.basw.co.uk> as they may be able to provide guidance on the various entry routes into the social work profession.

52) The Step Up to Social Work programme and Frontline sound very similar, what are the differences?

Both programmes attract very able candidates with an accelerated process to qualification as a social worker. Some of the factors that make Step Up different from Frontline are:

For cohort 6 Step Up will operate in 137 local authorities in England from January 2020 and is run centrally by government. Frontline is a pilot which operates in six areas of England (in over 51 local authorities) and run by an organisation independent of government.

Step Up trainees are tutored by a university selected by the local authority where they are based and on a course shaped by local authorities. Academic input on Frontline is provided by a consortium of universities with a large element of remote learning, combined with a leadership training element.

Step Up is work-based with trainees spending some of their time at university and the rest in placements or work-based study in the local authority. For Frontline, following a five-week intensive summer institute, participants will co-work cases in local authorities with consultant social workers from day one.

53) Bursary

The bursary payment is £19,833 in total for the 14 months.

54) Is there an appeals procedure if my application is unsuccessful?

There is no formal appeals procedure for unsuccessful applications; however, Capita and/or the Department for Education will review all individual appeals on a case-by-case basis. Due to the high level of applications anticipated for cohort 6 individual feedback will not be provided for candidates who are unsuccessful at first or second sift.