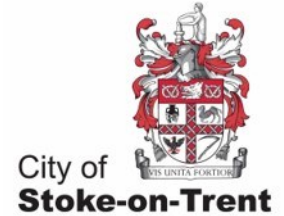




# Step Up to Social Work – West Midlands Regional Partnership Frequently Asked Questions



## What is Step Up to Social Work?

- Step Up to Social Work is a Department for Education (DfE) initiative to encourage people to change their career/retrain or take up a career in social work, working with vulnerable children, young people and families.
- It is a 14-month intensive study/placement postgraduate course in social work, which will enable you to apply for a job as a social worker.
- The degree programme is delivered by a University which has been contracted by the Partnership and will be delivered face to face in a central regional location.
- Cohort 8 is a new cohort, applications will open in early February 2023. Interviews will take place in June/July 2023 and this cohort will start in January 2024 and finish March 2025.

## How is SUTSW different from other social work programmes?

- Step Up to Social Work is a pre-qualifying social work programme developed through a partnership between the 13 Local Authorities (LA) within the West Midlands Region and a University partner.
- It is an intensive 14-month programme, starting in January 2024 and leads to a Post Graduate Diploma in Social Work.
- It covers the same curriculum as other PG qualifying social work programmes but within a shorter timescale. Therefore, it is a more intensive and emotionally demanding learning experience and you will need a good support network.
- Students will have a contract for the duration of the programme with the host LA and both placements (70 days adult services and 100 days children's statutory services) will be provided by the LA.
- If you currently work for your host Local Authority you could enquire at the possibility of having a sabbatical arrangement but this is at the discretion of each Local Authority.

## What funding is available?

- Tuition fees are paid directly to the University provider
- Students will receive a tax-free bursary of £19,833.
- This will be paid by BACS directly into your bank account; £1322 per calendar month for 15 months.
- You will be paid around the 24<sup>th</sup> of each month and should plan this in order to change any direct debit payments.
- Your first payment will be on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024 and therefore you should ensure you have enough money to pay for your travel/expenses to the University from January 2024 prior to your first bursary payment.
- To save on travel expenses, some student's car-share. You will receive a student card from the University which will allow you to apply for discounted train travel as well as many other student discounts and a reduction in council tax.

### **Do I have to pay course fees?**

- No. The DfE are funding your course fees.
- You should read your contract carefully to ensure you are aware of all the conditions.

### **What qualifications do I need for Step Up to Social Work?**

- Honours degree with either a 1<sup>st</sup>, 2:1 or 2:2 degree classification (level 6).
- Have GCSEs in English Language and Maths (or equivalent) at a C grade or above
- Have relevant experience (voluntary or paid) working with vulnerable children, young people and their families for at least six months
- Live in England
- Possess the right to work and study in the UK (including access to public funds) for the duration of the programme (until March 2025)
- Not already have a social work qualification
- You **must** have your original certificates to bring to the assessment centre otherwise we will not be able to interview you

### **I don't have an Honours degree but I do have another type of qualification in Health and social care, can I apply?**

In order to be eligible, you must have

- an honours degree qualification (such as a BA or BSC) at 2:2 or above
- You must also have a GCSE in Maths and English grade A-C or equivalent and be able to upload your certificates onto the application site and bring the original certificates for these and your degree with you to the Assessment Centre.
- We won't be able to interview you without these certificates so don't be offended if we decline your application. You must also have significant experience with vulnerable children and families. This can be in a work or a voluntary capacity.

### **I can't find my English and Maths GCSE certificates, what should I do?**

- You must be able to upload your certificates with your application form and produce the originals on the assessment centre day, otherwise we will not be able to interview you.
- If you cannot find your certificates, there are a number of internet sites to help you, but please bear in mind the time it takes to order new copies (4 weeks) as the closing date for applications will be in approximately late March.
- Unfortunately, we are unable to process your application if you do not have these certificates.

### **Do I need to have a driving licence?**

- Yes, apart from those students who are hosted by Birmingham Children's Trust which has a good transport links, you must have a driving licence for your placement.
- You must also have 'for business use' stated on your car insurance.

### **I plan to take my driving test in Autumn 2023 – will you accept this?**

- You must be able to produce your driving licence at the Assessment Centre, unless your host LA is Birmingham Children's Trust.
- No offer can be made without this for other LA's.

### **What are Step Up to Social Work applicants expected to know?**

In addition to academic qualifications and experience, you should also make sure that you are able to demonstrate the following skills and knowledge:

- Emotional resilience, the ability to cope with and adapt to the emotional impact of helping children and young people who are often in very stressful situations
- You should be aware of the risk indicators of different types of harm in children and young people
- You need to demonstrate that you are able to think intuitively and logically to make decisions
- Good, accurate report writing is a key skill for the job
- You should also show understanding of the entry-level Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) for social workers
- You can find these statements, frameworks and more information on the [British Association of Social Work \(BASW\)](https://www.basw.co.uk/) <https://www.basw.co.uk/>

### **What is the assessment process? What does the assessment centre consist of?**

- You should expect to attend an assessment centre in either June or July. This will probably last all day or be over a couple of days.
- There will be a formal one to one interview with a manager from your preferred authority and a university representative and this will last up to 45 minutes.
- There will be other tests including a one hour written exercise, a group panel exercise with young people and a role play. Your answers will be assessed against the entry criteria of the PCF.
- All exercises will be marked against the PCF so you need to be knowledgeable and evidence your current experience around these domains.
- There may be delays between exercises so please be prepared to wait.

### **Who will tell me if I have been invited to the assessment centre?**

- You will be notified via the DfE support contractor with the date, time and agenda for the assessment centre and remind you of the documents you should bring with you.
- Please make sure that you give a timely reply in order to secure your place at a suitable assessment centre.
- If you are unable to take part on that day it may be not be possible to change the date and time within the assessment centre period.
- If you change your mind and are unable to attend then we ask you to let us know at least 24 hours prior to the interview.

### **Can I be seconded to the SUTSW programme from the LA I am currently employed by?**

- No, if you are offered a place on the SUTSW programme following the Assessment Centre you will be required to resign from your current post. However, individual LAs may consider a sabbatical arrangement.

### **Can I have a career break from my current employment?**

- If you are employed in any of the LAs within the West Midlands Regional Partnership you may be considered for a career break. However, this is at the discretion of the individual LA.

### **I have booked to go to a music festival in one of the placement periods, can I still go?**

### **I am getting married in the summer, can I still apply to do the degree programme?**

- If you commit to the programme you will be expected not to book any holidays or events outside of notified leave, i.e. Easter, Christmas etc., of which you will be given a list of dates in the timetable.
- This programme is highly intensive and different holidays cannot be arranged outside of the programme. You may wish to delay your application for the next cohort.

### **If I am offered a place but can't start in January 2024, can I defer my place until the next cohort?**

- No as there is only funding for the current Cohort of SUTSW.

### **How many days holiday will I have and can I take my holiday at any time?**

- The holidays are timetabled and therefore cannot be changed due to the condensed nature of the programme.
- Holidays are around Easter time, end of summer, Christmas and all bank holidays.
- There are additional reading weeks. These will be clearly marked on your official timetable.

### **Can I have a part time job whilst I am on the SUTSW programme?**

- From our experience of previous SUTSW cohorts, we would advise against taking a part time job as the programme is so demanding.
- There can also be tax implications as the bursary is tax free as you are classed as a "student".
- Being in employment will change your employment status and you are advised to contact HMRC to find out the tax implications.
- You will be required to study and complete assignments in your own time and it is unlikely that you will have any spare time for a part time job.

### **What will my status be?**

- You will be a University student and will be issued a student card.
- You will be entitled to access any benefits that students get e.g. discount on council tax, shop discounts, etc.

### **Where and when is the programme taught?**

- From January to May 2024 and September to middle of October 2024 you can expect to be in University for up to 5 full days teaching per week.
- The first week will be a **five**-day induction week.
- There will be regular drop-in sessions with the programme manager throughout the programme; these will be marked on the timetable.
- A full programme and calendar of events will be given to you prior to the start of the course.

### **When will I be on placement?**

There are two periods of assessed practice:

- 70 days within an adult setting: May 2024 – August 2024
- 100 days within a children & families setting: October 2024 – March 2025. Placements also include a number of University Placement Consolidation days.

### **Can I choose where I have my placement?**

- You will sign a contract with one of the Local Authorities within the Regional Partnership.
- This LA will identify and provide your placements.
- You will be asked to complete a personal profile to help the learning team identify suitable learning opportunities for you.
- Placement opportunities will be based on availability at your LA.

### **Can I have a placement in the same team as I was previously employed?**

- We won't place you in a team where you were previously employed. This would be a potential conflict of interest, and we want you to be able to experience as wide a range of settings as possible to get the most out of the course.

### **What hours will I be required to work when I am on placement?**

- A placement day is a minimum of 7 hours excluding breaks. You will be expected to be at your placement during the same "office hours" as the team you are based in.
- The needs of service users can mean that it is sometimes necessary for social workers and social work students to work extended hours, sometimes at short notice. If this happens, student social workers will be able to "take back" this time in line with the host LA policies and practice.
- You cannot accrue hours and take a whole day off as to meet the requirements of the placement you must do 70 or 100 days

### **What support is available to me whilst I am on placement?**

- You will be assigned a practice educator and sometimes a work-based supervisor whilst you are on placement with your host authority and will continue to have a University Practice tutor.
- Each authority has a Step Up to Social Work representative and you will be notified of who this is when you sign your student contract so you can contact them at any time.

### **Will I be paid travel expenses when I am on placement?**

- You will not be paid for any travel to and from placement as your bursary covers this.
- You will be paid the student rate for business miles in line with the policies in your host the LA.
- Please note that these may differ across LA's.

### **What happens if I fail my placement?**

- You will be assessed by the University for "Readiness to practice" prior to going on your first placement. You will be given two opportunities to pass this. However, should you fail on your second attempt we regret that this would mean that your contract will be ended.
- If you fail a placement, you will have the opportunity to attend a meeting with the University. This allows for a full discussion of the reasons why the placement has failed.
- The University will advise you on the appeals procedure and how to go about submitting an appeal if you are eligible.
- You'll still receive your bursary until after the appeals process is finished.

### **Am I guaranteed a job at the end of the programme?**

- The Partnership is set up to enable successfully qualified step up social work students to obtain a Social Work position at the end of the course within their host LA. Though this cannot be guaranteed
- However, your host LA will let you know what vacancies there are or are expected to be within the last three months of your course.
- The employability rate for Step Up students is currently 99% in this region.

- The application process will be discussed with you nearer the time.

### **What happens if I am ill and need to take a break from the SUTSW programme?**

- Your LA, Regional Partnership representative and University will work together to support you on the programme.
- However, because the programme is externally funded there are no opportunities to extend the funding.
- As all participants are registered students with the University, the University will support any student who is unable to complete the SUTSW programme due to ill health.

### **I have additional support needs and will need special equipment and/or reasonable adjustment plan (RAP) to undertake my course – how will I get this?**

- The University will have a dedicated Student Support Service. You will learn more about this during your induction week.

### **When will I find out if I am successful and have been offered a place?**

- Assessment Centre's for Step Up to Social Work across the region and will finish by the end of July 2023.
- The lead authority for the West Midlands Regional Partnership will contact you at the beginning of August to inform you of the outcome of your assessment centre.
- Due to the high numbers of applicants we won't be able to give you feedback.

### **What happens if I am successful but all the places in my preferred authority have been offered to others who have scored higher than me?**

- If you have met the benchmark then your name will go on a waiting list for your host LA and/or you may be offered a place in another authority.
- You are strongly advised to work out your finances carefully before accepting any place offered.

### **What will happen after I receive an offer?**

- All offers will be conditional subject to references, academic checks and DBS checks.
- We will hold a "Keeping in Touch" event in the Autumn.
- You are reminded that if you accept the offer of a place on this programme that you must resign from your current employment ready to start your programme in January 2024.
- You are advised to find out how much notice you need to give your employer.

### **When will I receive the student contract?**

- Student contracts are typically sent out in October, dependent on checks, references etc.
- This gives you plenty of time to work out your finances and decide whether to accept the offer.
- You are advised to consider your finances very carefully including any travel costs.

### **Do you have a suggested reading list?**

- You will be given a copy of the reading list as part of your induction day at the University.

### **Will I have an opportunity to ask further questions before starting on the course?**

- There will be a "Keeping in Touch Day" in Autumn 2023.

- Representatives from your host LA and University will attend in order to answer any further questions about the programme you may have.
- You are free to contact Michelle Jones or Charlene Stapleton for further information at any time.

### Useful Contacts

- **Charlene Stapleton, Programme Manager:**  
[Charlene.stapleton@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:Charlene.stapleton@stoke.gov.uk) 01782 236769
- **Michelle Jones, SUTSW Programme Administrator:**  
[michelle.jones@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:michelle.jones@stoke.gov.uk) 01782 232242

Should you be interested in applying to the programme please contact Michelle with your email address and we will add you to the mailing list to be notified when the application process opens.