

**TOP  
TIPS**

November 2024

# For the Government to Make Time for Social Work a Reality



Part of BASW England's 80-20 Campaign



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**Campaign**  
Promoting relationship  
based practice

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**BASW**  
**England**

The professional association for  
social work and social workers

## What is this resource?



Therapeutic, reflective, relationship-based practice is the best way for social workers to bring effective and positive change to the lives of children, families and adults.

The BASW England 80:20 Campaign Top Tips for the Government to Make Time for Social Work a Reality sets out the priority areas that need to be addressed at a national level to create the right conditions to develop, support and embed relationship-based social work practice.

## Who is it for?



National and local government, organisational leaders, trade unions and other stakeholders.

## How can it be used?



The BASW England 80:20 Campaign Top Tips for Government can be used to lobby local MP's and Ministers to highlight the barriers that need to be addressed at a national level to make time for social work reality. This includes addressing the recruitment and retention crisis, committing to and resourcing a national social work workforce strategy, reviewing employment arrangements, workload, pay and working conditions.

The Top Tips resource can be used to challenge, campaign and lobby for change in conjunction with other 80:20 campaign Top Tips resources or by itself.

The statements made in the following Top Tips resource have an evidence base. Reference material is included throughout.

## Top Tips

### **1 Government commitment to Time for Social Work through direct work and relationship based social work practice**

In the spirit of multi-agency working, a partnership approach from the Department for Education and the Department for Health and Social Care to issuing and reinforcing key messages to the sector about the value of time for social work and relationship-based practice.

### **2 The Standards for Social Work Employers to be made mandatory**

These standards issued by the Local Government Association<sup>1</sup> support best social work practice and provide clear guidance on what is needed and expected from employers.

The standards include requirements relating to supervision.<sup>2</sup> This crucial element of social work can be interrupted due to high workloads. Social work supervision and critical reflection are key to a relationship-based culture.

### 3

## **Implement standards and a whole system approach to managing safe workloads for social workers at every level of their career as set out in the Professional Capabilities Framework<sup>3</sup>**

### Key messages

Government must evidence to the profession that it is valued by:

- Developing and implementing a national workforce strategy.
- Adopting a joined-up approach between government departments in relation to social work policy, reform and practice.
- Increased mental health support in the workplace.
- Adopt anti-poverty as an underpinning principle at the heart of all reform.

### Evidence Base

- 46% of social workers who responded to the 2023 BASW survey felt that excessive workload was their biggest pressure. 50.21% reported not feeling able to manage their current workload. This issue has been consistently highlighted in the BASW survey for the last three years.<sup>4</sup>
- Research undertaken in 2017/2018 by UK Bath Spa University, the Social Workers Union (SWU), and the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) into social worker wellbeing across the UK, showed that coordinated action is needed to improve social

workers' working conditions across the UK.<sup>5</sup> This is to enable social workers to thrive, to prevent burnout and loss of staff, particularly from statutory roles.

- In the government response to the Children's Social Care Review: Stable Homes Built on Love<sup>6</sup> addressing workload issues and bureaucracy are identified by respondents as key priorities to free up time to enable practitioners to build and sustain meaningful relationships.

## 4 **Develop and Embed a National Workforce strategy for social work**

### Key messages

- To include a national recruitment campaign to bolster the social work workforce.
- Develop a national workforce strategy in partnership with the sector and those accessing social work services and adopt the Professional Capabilities Framework as **THE** career pathway for social work that promotes and recognises the value of relationship-based social work and direct work.
- Bursaries are critical for the pipeline of the next generation of social workers in promoting equity and access. A full review of the current social work student bursary is called for.<sup>7</sup> Parity of access to funding for course participants is needed to attract people into the profession.

- Clear career pathways that are resourced and enable progression into social work must be available, including an expansion of 'grow your own' and apprenticeship schemes. Funding and training to be made available to properly equip the workforce.
- Funding and equitable access to pathways into post qualifying courses to be included as part of the profession specific national workforce strategy.
- The development of career pathways for social workers, including supporting their development as managers and leaders. More must be done by the government to utilise social work skills and knowledge in management and leadership capacities.
- The leadership of the sector is still not fully representative of the community of social work. The Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES)<sup>8</sup> to be made mandatory.

## 5

## Take action to support social worker wellbeing and improve professional working conditions

### Key messages

- Social workers must have positive working environments for psychological and physical welfare and in order to practice safely and effectively in a relationship-based way.<sup>9</sup> Making the Local Government Association Employer Standards Health Check<sup>10</sup> mandatory would enable robust data capture about working conditions at a national level identifying where changes and improvements are needed to safeguard the social work workforce.
- Challenges to traditional ways of working have arisen through the wholesale introduction of hybrid working linked to the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>11</sup> Whilst there are positive outcomes in term of flexibility of working arrangements, hybrid working requires a different skill set. For the profession loss of office space, lack of informal support and reduced opportunities for modelling and observing best practice have a direct impact upon the quality of social work practice and the ability to create and sustain relationships.<sup>12</sup> These opportunities are essential for those just entering the profession. National policy directives and guidance need to be developed based up on the evidence from research.<sup>13</sup>
- Racism in the workplace - differentials on the basis of workers identity and culture<sup>14</sup>. The government should make good it's commitment to provide funding for the implementation of the Workforce



Race Equality Standard and make this a mandatory requirement for social work employers.

- Salaries must be increased in line with other professional occupations, this remains a significant barrier to recruitment and retention. Public sector workers employed and paid by Local Authorities, including the majority of the social worker workforce, who have suffered the [worst pay growth](#) compared to other public sector professions since 2010-11.<sup>15</sup>
- The government must review salaries and other allowances for social workers to demonstrate that social workers are valued alongside allied professions.

6

## **Address approaches to the recruitment and retention crisis**

- There is currently a 17% vacancy rate in children's statutory social work roles. Adult social work has seen a slight decrease in vacancy rates from 10.6% to 9.9% in the year leading to March 2023.<sup>16</sup> The instability of the workforce is due in part to the increased pay and flexibility offered by agencies which is far more appealing than the offer from local authorities.
- At present, more and more social workers across the sector are leaving.<sup>17</sup>
- This has a direct impact on the profession and the ability to be able to provide high quality relationship based social work which, when supported, can achieve positive outcomes.<sup>18</sup>

## Key messages

- The provision of effective, relationship-based social work relies on a workforce of skilled, confident, and committed professionals.
- Social work must be properly funded and resourced to retain the workforce and enable the positive difference to the lives of children, families, adults and communities that relationship based social work can achieve.<sup>19</sup>

## **7 A national approach to post-qualifying training to ensure consistency across the sector**

There are inconsistencies and variation in social work specific post qualifying learning and development opportunities across the country.<sup>20</sup>

## Key messages

- The promotion of approaches to relationship-based practice should be core requirements of any post qualifying learning opportunity and/or training programme alongside key areas such as domestic abuse, poverty, disability, social justice.
- Post qualifying training that strengthens relationship-based practice to be supported by key stakeholders.
- To include bespoke support for those at management and leadership levels, to ensure they are fully equipped to develop and embed a culture of relationship-based practice.

**8**

## **There should be a government-led commitment to improving the media portrayal of social workers**

### **Key messages**

- Only 44% of people think social work is well-respected in society.<sup>21</sup>
- There is support for educational government campaigns on the role of social work.<sup>22</sup> Across multi-media platforms (social media, literature, television, music) to foster understanding of the profession with the public. This would include a focus on social workers skills, knowledge and approaches to building and sustaining relationships with young people, adults, families and communities to promote societal inclusion and create the possibility for positive change.<sup>23</sup>

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Published by BASW England, November 2024

**Cite as:** BASW England (2024) *Top Tips for the Government to Make Time for Social Work a Reality*. Birmingham: BASW England.

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