
Open University

Social Worker Degree Apprenticeship webinar

Angela Gill – Open University

Good morning everybody. Welcome to our webinar today on the Social Worker Degree Apprenticeship. My name is Angela Gill, and I'm the Apprenticeship Development Manager here at the Open University. I'm pleased to be joined by Ann Flynn, who is the Regional Lead for Social Work for London and the South East, and she's going to be talking through in a lot of detail about our delivery model today. I'm also joined by Kate Fawcett, who is our Head of Operations for Social Work, and Kate will be answering all of our questions on the text messages. So if you want to ask any questions as we go through, Kate's the person there who will be responding to you.

Before we start, I'd just like to wish you a happy World Social Work Day today. I'm going to move on now. We are planning to run a few polls throughout the webinar. The first question that we're going to be asking today is just to find out who we've got with us today. If you can indicate whether you are a local authority; private, voluntary or independent organisation; or whether you're an individual; or perhaps none of the above, and then we'll see who we've got with us today. I'll give you a few seconds to do that. This webinar is aimed at employers, so if we have got anybody on the line that is interested in finding out about the Social Worker Degree Apprenticeship you're more than welcome, but what you will need to do is make sure that your employer will support the process.

I'm going to gather the results now and I'll share those with you. 31% of people here today are from a local authority, welcome. 14.3% are from a private, voluntary or independent sector organisation. 23% individuals. And 31% are none of the above, so it'll be interesting to find out who you are.

This is what we're going to be covering today on the agenda. I've got one more poll to ask you before we get into the main presentation, and that is to find out really about whether you've used the Open University for social work before. If you can indicate whether you've used the Open University for Social Work Degrees: either yes we've used the OU within the last three years; yes we have used the OU over three years ago; or no we have never used the Open University. I'll let you enter those results now. I'm going to give you a few more seconds, and that will just give us an understanding of whether people have used us before or not, and how recently.

Interestingly, 29% have used us before, so thank you. Over 70% have never used the Open University before. So welcome, I hope you find this presentation useful and informative. As I say, Kate will be on hand to answer any questions as we go through.

About the University

So before we start, I'd like to introduce the Open University. It is our 50th year. We came into being in 1969. It was really the idea of Harold Wilson who was the Prime Minister at the time, who felt that it was only the affluent classes that were able to attend university, so he wanted to create a university that would be open to people from all backgrounds. Our mission then, to be open to people, places, methods and ideas, still stands firm today. Over 50 years later and two million learners later, we're still going strong.

I think what's an interesting fact about that is over three-quarters of those students will be balancing study with work and other family commitments. This puts us in a really strong position to support the apprenticeship programme, and actually we're very experienced at supporting people who are having to balance that work and study and sometimes having a bit of a social life as well.

I suppose the biggest difference between the Open University and most other universities that are in existence, is that the Open University comes to you. What that means is all of the study materials come to you through our virtual learning environment, and it means that you're saving time in terms of travel, but it means that it can also be delivered very flexibly, not only around the learner but also the employer as well in terms of the demands on the workplace.

Social work with The Open University

Now onto facts and figures about social work. I suppose what we're really trying to emphasise here is that the Open University is the expert at working with employers to deliver work-based practice Social Work Degree programmes, and we've been doing this for a long time. It's flexible and supported by qualified social workers, and the OU can support organisations to attract people to social work that perhaps haven't been able to access that learning before. It can help address some of those workforce challenges and meet the needs of a diverse workforce.

In terms of apprenticeships, we have over 1,000 apprentices running. Not in social work yet, obviously. 95% of those students are still on programme. In the world of apprenticeships that's a really strong message because our programmes are longer. Because they are Degree programmes they are longer. I think that's because of the support that those individuals are given on that programme that we are still maintaining a very high success rate in terms of people staying on programme.

Also recently through an ESFA survey we achieved 98% employer satisfaction, and that puts us as the second highest university in England delivering apprenticeships. The Open University was involved in the trailblazer for the social work apprenticeship, so we've been involved in this right from the very start.

Social work for everyone

Before I hand over to my colleague, I just wanted to mention a HEFCE funded project. HEFCE was the Higher Education Funding Council, which is now the Office for Students. We were awarded some funding to develop a programme that would support the wider sector and all universities. So I'd recommend that you have a look at this website. It's promoting the benefits to not only employers, but also to potential applicants, and provides a wide range of resources available for individuals and employers around the social worker apprenticeship route. So I'd recommend that you have a look. If anybody is particularly interested in finding out more about this project, please let us know and we can put you in touch with somebody who is part of the project team.

Key differences between the Social Work Degree Apprenticeship and a Degree

What I'm going to cover here really as a high level piece, is really the key differences between the Social Worker Degree Apprenticeship and our traditional Social Work Degree. I suppose one of the main differences is that actually it can be funded through the Apprenticeship Levy, either directly through the levy or as a co-investment model for smaller employers. As opposed to the Degree which can be either sponsored by a corporate organisation or self-funded.

One of the biggest differences as well I think is that a learner has to sign up to a three year programme, whereas through the Degree route with the Open University it can be delivered on a part-time basis. And that is a big commitment, and I think people need to make sure that they're aware of what that commitment is, that they're signing up to a three year programme. Obviously if there are breaks in learning due to extenuating circumstances, that is absolutely fine. But generally speaking it is an intense three year programme, and we need to make sure that everybody on-board is committed and aware of that expectation.

We have obviously the end-point assessment which is integrated within the Social Worker Degree Apprenticeship, which is different to the Social Work Degree. And we have to make sure that we are compliant with ESFA requirements, so we will have to make sure that we have the appropriate ESFA documentation and contracts in place.

Before I go any further I'd like to do one last poll with you, and this is to really find out about what you expect the impact of the Social Worker Degree Apprenticeship to be on your approach to social work training in your organisation. The answers you can

respond with is: it will replace other training routes we currently use, ie., traditional university Degree; we will continue to use other routes alongside the apprenticeship; you plan to stick with what you currently do for the time being, there's no plans to use the apprenticeship route; or you're not decided yet. So I'll just give you a few more seconds to respond to that poll before I go to the results.

That's a fairly even split. We've got about 41% who haven't decided yet, and hopefully after today you'll have the information to help you with that decision making process. 30% of you expect it to replace other training routes. Another 30% are expecting to continue to run it alongside existing routes. That's really interesting for us to see that.

I'm going to now hand over to my colleague, Ann, who's going to talk through more details on the apprenticeship programme.

Ann Flynn – Regional Lead, Social Work

Key features of the programme

Good morning. My name is Ann, and I work in London and the South East for social work as well as nursing. Just to check out some of the key features of our programme. As you can see on the screen, it's work based and it's flexible learning completed in three years. There's a readiness for practice in the very first stage, but there's support with that, and certainly people who are already in employment in a social care scenario very easily meet those requirements.

There are two practice placements: 70 days in Stage 2; and 100 days in Stage 3, and you'll see shortly we've done a visual for you on how that is planned out in the overall of the course. There are skills days and tutorials built into the programme across all three years with support across those three years. The assessment is against the Professional Capabilities Framework, as you'll already know. But the emphasis for us is that the apprenticeship in the OU model of delivery can support development of existing workforce, those that as Angela said earlier may not have a chance to go to university, and can certainly improve engagement for different groups within the workforce.

It is flexible, although there is a framework and demands within that. The Open University has a strong and established track record of delivering social care education that is work based in partnership with employers, and I'm really pleased to see some of the people that we work with today as attendees on the list. The programme has been developed in collaboration with employers facing shortages in their social work workforce, and all social work students are constantly refreshing how our course is as they bring knowledge, skills and experience from their previous role into their study.

Partnership delivery

So just a few words now about our partnership delivery. As you can see, this picture here gives you the full cycle, if you will, of how we all work together. We are flexible. It is supported blended learning, allowing the apprentice to undertake formal study at a time and a place most suitable to their needs and to the needs of their service. It reduces the time required to attend classroom based learning, but it still maintains high levels of support for apprentices and thereby lessens the impact on service delivery.

The timings of the placements in Year 2, so March to August, don't clash with other HCIs needing to find placements for their BCA students, so particularly if you're going to be looking at different portfolio routes of supporting your workforce. The module tutors and practice tutors are able to flex core content so you contextualise for the needs of employers and/or local requirements. There is flexibility on apprenticeship numbers, so we have no minimum number as we speak. The flexibility is highly appropriate for some learners returning to study. It allows learners to balance their work and personal responsibilities, removing the barrier to entry to traditional higher education, and it offers equality of opportunity certainly in terms of the different support that we offer as well to enable people to gently come back to studying. We also add value in bringing nearly 50 years' expertise in supporting non-traditional learners into and successfully through higher education.

We have a consultative approach to working with employers, and we're constantly trying to understand requirements and where possible bespoke provision to meet local needs. We have good experience of working with new employers as we successfully establish the programme, and we have resources to support employee engagement at all levels. We also offer curated no cost online content through our Open Learn system, which is aimed at supporting potential social work apprentices to develop understanding of social care provision and develop functional and study skills and undertake career planning.

How the OU deliver

I'm just going to move on to the next slide now, how do we deliver? This is an example of our home screen. In essence the student can access everything online. There are some things that are sent out to them, for example the practice guidance manuals with the practice educators as well as the student ((0:17:16?)). But anyway, they are also accessed online. This is a quick snapshot of how we help the students break down their studies. For example, week one it tells them what type of week that is, week two what the topic is going to be. Basically we break up the whole of each module into a week so the student at any one time can see where they need to be.

On the right of the screen there are special messages that might be popping up for the students. They can be generic, but they can also be very specific. There are forums that the students can access where they can gain online support, either with their community of practice across the country, for example in a Welcome Cafe that runs for a month at the beginning of most of the modules, and then goes on to move into the tutorials that

the students have got and their own tutor groups with students that they'll know and be more familiar with, and they're smaller groups. The students access the library online, and can access Open University materials, but also the Open University has bought into most typical academic journals and academic readings that actually students will need.

There are examples of activities that help embed the learning for students. We use a lot of high quality multimedia resources. I'm sure most of you will have seen some of our BBC productions, for example on K113. Certainly the child protection series that we undertook with Bristol local authority some years ago. We use those as case studies. Ann and Angus who you've been introduced to today on screen, are two key people that you meet in K101, a gentle introduction to health and social care for the students.

What do students study?

So what do the students study? This visual allows us to see two starts: one is a soft start if you'd like to call it that perhaps on the top screen. It's an October start where currently the Introduction to Health and Social Care commences. Then by the February the Foundations for Social Work Practice module starts. So there's a little bit of an overlap. Obviously that can be pressured for students, but there's lots of support around that. We know that anyway, it's happened for years, so that both the module for the Stage 1 Introduction to Health and Social Care, as well as the Foundations' module, work with the students to balance their time management for that.

Then Social Work Law commences in the September/October of that same year that those two modules end. Then again the following year in February you have the Applied Social Work Practice, which is the first social work practice course proper if you will where the 70 day placement takes place. Then following that there's a short break. Then in the October of the same year you have the Stage 3 with the Critical Social Work Practice, which is the final placement, as well as academic work that the student will do on the programme, and that's a 100 day placement. Then in end of that year about August/September time, there's preparation for the end-point assessments which is completed then the following January.

We have other options. Because we know particularly at the moment because apprenticeship is new to agencies, what we're offering is a harder start, if you will, so that the Introduction to Health and Social Care as well as Foundations for Social Work Practice will start at the same time. Obviously the same support will be available to students in terms of time management support. Then they'll go straight into Social Work Law. Then the rest of the apprenticeship will be the same as other students, and they'll be working within their cohort again.

Within each of the different workshops there are face-to-face workshops. For example, Foundations for Social Work Practice in Level 1, there are three workshops within that six month module. There are six workshops of which four are face-to-face in the Applied

Social Work Practice, and again there are another four in the Critical Social Work Practice. The other modules are all online ((0:23:03?)) start the whole of their university career in the Introduction to Health and Social Care. The workshop structure actually offers a lot of flexibility for the social work apprentice in terms of gaining support, doing their study, but also building up communities of practice with other people in a similar situation to them.

The assessments. Each of the modules has an academic assignment, and these are uploaded online and they're marked online by the tutors, who put a lot of emphasis in terms of feedback and feeding forward for the students so that they're constantly improving. That's the way that we take them steep-by-step through their module showing progression and success. We do enable credit transfer. Prior credits must be less than five years old for undergraduate, and less than four years old for postgraduate.

I have a few words about the end-point assessment. It's a new concept to all of us, we're all working together to get this right, and we will work with you as well. But a gateway assessment is undertaken between the employer, the OU staff tutor, to decide if a learner is ready for this end-point assessment, and if they are then a date is arranged for the assessment to take place. The OU's methods of continuous and regular assessment of students ensures that apprentices are thoroughly prepared for end of module assessments and exams, and ultimately for the end-point assessment. The OU will offer opportunities for mock presentations to support preparation of the apprentice ahead of the actual end-point assessment presentation. Throughout the apprenticeship the student will have had many professional discussions about their studies with the practice tutor, checking competence, understanding, and also building confidence in the apprentice's ability to talk confidently about their work.

Recruitment and selection

Moving on to the next slide and to look at recruitment and selection. Our entry criteria is Maths and English Level 2 or equivalent, with evidence of ability to study at Degree level, as well as a declaration of suitability to social work, an enhanced DBS ((0:25:43?)) and medical fitness to practice. All concepts that you're typically used to seeing for recruitment to social care. An interview for selection will be conducted jointly with the sponsoring agency together with the Open University. This interview process will include a formal application with written statement, a panel interview, a written test, as well as service user involvement, which is something we have a strong base in and a long history in working with service users. We select for values and experience and not just for academic achievement. We're always screening for potential.

I have a poll which I'd be really interested to find out at this point really. Do you plan to offer the Social Worker Degree Apprentice to existing staff; to recruit new staff into the

organisation; to recruit new staff and to offer to existing staff; or not decided yet. I wonder if you could let me know.

This is really interesting. Existing staff is coming through at 47%. Recruiting new staff and offer to existing staff at 21%. And 31% of you aren't yet decided. So quite a good split there. It's good to see agencies wanting to support existing staff at this point.

I just want to make a note at this point about the entry criteria. We are likely to change it. We have asked previously about UCAS points, but at this point we're looking at evidence of ability to study at a higher level, at Degree level, and as we have said before, we are constantly talking to employers about what is going to suit employers as well as for our students best.

Support to apprentices

What is the support to apprentices? I think we've established today it's going to be quite a fast paced demand on the student. We want to stress here about how much support students get. Again, this visual sets issues out. A lot of it is Open University based. We have a practice tutor. We have an academic tutor. We have an employer link person. We have a practice educator. We have student support team who can then signpost and filter students towards the right area of support they require. For example, if students have special learning needs that they may know about, but may also arise as they pick up with their academic studies. But also from the employer's point-of-view there'll be a line manager and work based mentor.

I'm now going to pass back to Angela, and she can look towards support for employers.

Angela Gill – Open University

Thank you, Ann. I hope what Ann's been able to describe to you there is our experience at delivering social work Degrees, and the support available not only to the students but also employers as well. Our Social Worker Degree Apprenticeship is HCPC approved already. You can find details, we are already on the Find an Apprenticeship Training Provider government website.

Support for Employers

Just building on what Ann's been saying there, our success rate for the Social Work Degree programme is 93%, and I think that just demonstrates the amount of support that is available to students whilst they're on programme. But we also offer support for employers throughout the apprenticeship, and here if you decide that you want to work with us in the delivery of your apprenticeship, I've detailed some of the people. You'll have regional social work leads, so somebody like Ann. We have Ann's all over the country, and they will help design and develop your social work programme. We have

an admissions team to support the learner application. But then you'll also have somebody like myself who can work with the organisation not only looking at the Social Worker Degree Apprenticeship, but our other apprenticeship provision and learning opportunities outside of apprenticeships as well. Then we have a fantastic operational team supporting the apprenticeship delivery, and they can provide management information and sort out all the contracts and paperwork, and everything else that goes with apprenticeship programmes.

Procuring for the Social Worker Degree Apprenticeship

I just wanted to touch on procurement for the Social Worker Degree Apprenticeship. If I can remember the stats, I think over 30% of people online today are from local authorities. This slide is really directed at people from local authorities. I'm sure if you're the apprenticeship lead and have already procured for other apprenticeships across your organisation, you'll be familiar with this. But perhaps if you're a head of service or work within the social work team, it might not be as familiar to you.

So I'm just going to spend a couple of moments going through that there are rules and regulations around public sector procurement, and anything that a local authority is procuring over a certain value means that it generally has to go out to tender. Different organisations are going to have their own guidance of what those thresholds are. But what I would say is that actually procurement exercises do take a long time, typically round about three months, sometimes longer by the time that you've written the spec, allowing organisations to respond, scoring presentations. And that's even before you start the recruitment process.

Our Social Worker Degree Apprenticeship, we're looking to start it this October. If you are thinking about using us, we would recommend that conversations take place. That you identify who those key decision makers are early in this process, because it will be a wider decision than perhaps it has been in the past when the head of service would just decide who they want to use. Typically it will be an apprenticeship lead, it will be the procurement team within your organisation.

There are certain rules around procurement as well. Once an invitation to tender has been issued we can only have discussions about that through formal clarification channels. If there are questions that you have for either us or any other university about their delivery programme, you need to have those conversations before the procurement process goes live. It's really useful to let organisations know in advance how you plan to procure, because there can sometimes be quite a bit of background work in terms of getting onto frameworks or dynamic purchasing systems that organisations tend to use.

Before we finish and answer any questions, I'm going to ask one more poll question for you if you wouldn't mind responding. This is about when you're thinking about offering

the Social Worker Degree Apprenticeship. Are you thinking ASAP, ie., spring or summer; are you thinking about later this year, autumn or winter; next year; or undecided. As I said, the Open University are looking to deliver our first cohort from October and we'd love to have conversations with you about how we might be able to partner with you. I'm going to close the poll now and see what the information is.

9% are looking at ASAP, spring or summer. 36% later this year. 15% next year. And about 40% still undecided. So that's really interesting to hear.

Any questions?

Now what we're going to do is we've got some time left to answer any questions that people might have. Please send them through. I'm going to look over to my colleague Kate now to see if there are any questions that we perhaps could look at answering.

Kate Fawcett – Head of Operations, Social Work

I've got one here from Steven Morrow about any training or support available for preparing workplace assessors and supervisors for implementation of the apprenticeships. Ann, I know we offer development to our workplace practice educators, at the moment anyway. Do you want to talk a bit about that?

Ann Flynn – Regional Lead, Social Work

It's standard practice at the moment when the student is in placement that we offer a few briefings over the module to the practice educators. Because the apprenticeship itself is very new, we will be working with employers to look at what type of support people will need leading up to the practice placements that may be different to what they require at the moment.

Also quite often, particularly in the private and voluntary sector where they have perhaps less established learning and development parts of the organisation, we do offer one of the practice tutors to make contact in Level 1 for the readiness to practice, just to ensure that the students, particularly in the private and voluntary sector, are on target to complete that. At the moment we have strong support for the practice educators in the field supporting students. But going forward we will look at how we can build in any further support that may arise from the apprenticeship agenda.

Angela Gill – Open University

Thank you, Ann. Just to add on that as well, we realise that many people, particularly if you're looking at your existing workforce, may have been outside of formal learning for some time and may be nervous about undertaking higher level study. What we can offer are some free resources in the lead up to the formal start date of the training

programme to help support them not only get used to the Open University way of delivery, but also getting used to studying again, and preparing them for that transition into more formal study.

I'm just going to see, have we any other questions that we'd like to answer?

Kate Fawcett – Head of Operations, Social Work

Are we signing up to the dynamic procurement thing.

Angela Gill – Open University

We are registered on a number of different procurement systems and DPS services and frameworks. If there are particular ones that you would like to send through in terms of your own organisation's procurement system, please send that over, either email me directly, or as a message here, and we can check with our commercial team who look after that side of the business to make sure that we're signed up to it.

Kate Fawcett – Head of Operations, Social Work

Another question here from Victoria, who says how many hours a week do you recommend to study?

Angela Gill – Open University

That's a very good question. Ann, can you answer that please?

Ann Flynn – Regional Lead, Social Work

I suppose obviously it's very different in each situation. For each module I think that the student should be studying for about eight hours a week as a minimum.

Angela Gill – Open University

Thank you, Ann. Obviously as part of an apprenticeship they need to be given 20% off the job. What we would say though, there will be times that they will need more than their 20% off, when assignments are due, end of module assessment. So people do need to be aware that they will need to give some of their own time as well at those critical periods.

There's a question come in from Jo Mills. Do you support non-levy paying employers? Yes, we can. We have levy funding for employers that aren't contributing towards the levy. So yes we can support apprenticeships for non-levy employers.

Kate Fawcett – Head of Operations, Social Work

I've got a question here, how do I find out which social work organisations are going to be providing it?

Angela Gill – Open University

I'm assuming that's come from an individual. What I would do is speak to your local authority and local organisations in your area that perhaps offer fostering services, and charity organisations that may offer that. You can check on the Find an Apprenticeship website if any organisations are offering opportunities. But what I would say is from the polls that we've done today, the majority seem to be looking at developing existing staff in the first instance. So I would suggest making contact with your local authority or local authorities in the area, and any of the private, voluntary and independent sector organisations in the area, and seeing whether there is any opportunity to work for them to progress on to the Social Worker Degree Apprenticeship.

Any other questions there, Kate?

Kate Fawcett – Head of Operations, Social Work

There's a question from Maria about the £23K banding, and just checking what our process is going to be?

Angela Gill – Open University

The cost of the Social Worker Degree Apprenticeship is £23,000 with the Open University. There are a lot more costs involved in delivering and supporting the Social Worker Degree Apprenticeship, so we will be charging the £23,000. But there won't be any additional costs over and above that.

Maria, just picking up on your next point there, there is an opportunity. So if you are a non-levy paying organisation it is worth speaking to your local authority, because some will transfer their levy fund to non-levy paying organisations. And yes, the EPA cost is included within that £23,000 as well.

I think that's probably about it now. We will have a look through and any questions that we've not been able to answer we will respond to. I'd like to thank everybody for your time this morning. I hope that's given you lots to think about. We'd welcome receiving any further questions, or if you want a face-to-face meeting or a telephone call to discuss in any more detail, please let us know and we'd be happy to facilitate that.

Kate Fawcett – Head of Operations, Social Work

And can we recommend again that I think there are quite a few individuals have been on the webinar. If you do have queries we would really recommend that you speak to your employer in the first instance.

Angela Gill – Open University

We will be sending out the slides after this and if you want to circulate the webinar you will be able to access that on demand as well. So if there's anybody else within your organisation that you think would find that useful, we're happy to share that on.

That's all from us now. I hope you found it useful and informative, and we hope to hear from you soon. Thank you very much.