

Profession: Social Work

Roles and responsibilities of the professional

Social work internationally is described as:

'a profession which promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.'

(International Association of Schools of Social Work/International Federation of Social Workers.)

In England, these aims are expressed in terms of six 'key roles' for social workers:

Key role 1:

Prepare for, and work with individuals, families, carers, groups and communities to assess their needs and circumstances

Key role 2:

Plan, carry out, review and evaluate social work practice, with individuals, families, carers, groups, communities and other professionals

Key role 3:

Support individuals to represent their needs, views and circumstances

Key role 4:

Manage risk to individuals, families, carers, groups, self and colleagues

Key role 5:

Manage and be accountable, with supervision and support, for your own social work practice within your organisation

Key role 6:

Demonstrate professional competence in social work practice

(National Occupational Standards for Social Work, 2002)

Modern Perspective

Social work involves the carrying out a wide range of activities, incorporating the assessment of risk and need, and the planning and delivery of services to safeguard and promote the well-being of service users.

Central to its purposes are the principles of recognising and challenging those factors which generate disadvantage and inequality, and it is therefore committed to speaking out with and on behalf of people whose life chances may be limited in

various ways. Like other professions, social work often encounters an inherent tension between the rights of service users and the priorities and limited resources available to provide appropriate services – practitioners are expected to square this circle as a matter of course.

Social work is often seen as a function predominantly carried out and resourced by statutory agencies, but it is also practiced in both voluntary and private sectors, where expectations and constraints may be somewhat different.