

Social Work Apprenticeship Roles and Career Pathways

This short guide has been developed by the Local Government Association in association with Spark & Associates, using the knowledge and experiences of Local Authorities (LAs) across England. It aims to help councils and their staff understand the career opportunities available through apprenticeships.

Building a Career in Social Work Supported by Apprenticeships

What this Career Pathway Guide Shows

This pathway shows how careers in Social Work within a council can be developed through apprenticeships, from entry and support roles through to qualified Social Worker status and senior professional, specialist and leadership positions. This guide provides a broad Social Work career pathway, illustrating how careers can develop across adult and children's social work services. It highlights routes from support, safeguarding, family, youth justice and community-based roles into professional social work practice and leadership.

Social workers play a vital role in supporting children, adults, families and communities. They assess needs, safeguard vulnerable people, support independence, manage risk and coordinate services to improve outcomes. Apprenticeships provide structured routes into the profession, support career progression and can lead to recognised professional qualifications and registration.

Why this matters (for councils and learners)

Local authorities continue to face significant recruitment and retention challenges within the social work workforce. Apprenticeships provide a practical way to attract new talent, develop existing employees and create sustainable workforce pipelines into qualified social work roles.

The Social Worker Degree Apprenticeship has become an important route into the profession, enabling councils to develop existing staff and attract career changers while retaining valuable knowledge and experience within the organisation.

Clear and well-communicated progression routes:

- support recruitment and retention
- create opportunities for professional qualification and career progression
- help build sustainable in-house social work capability
- support workforce diversity and social mobility objectives.

How to use this Guide

This guide outlines typical entry points, progression routes and relevant apprenticeships linked to Social Work and related professional roles. Entry routes may include A Levels, T Levels, foundation apprenticeships, higher education, career change or progression from support, safeguarding, youth justice, community or operational roles. Development pathways are not always linear. Individuals may:

- move between adult and children's social work specialisms
- progress into safeguarding, youth justice, early help or specialist practice areas
- progress into professional qualification, management or leadership routes
- take sideways steps to build broader experience across different service areas.

Job titles and roles may vary between councils, so apprenticeship suitability should be reviewed against role requirements and prior experience. Training providers and employers can support this through initial assessment and guidance.

Details of apprenticeship standards and career progression routes can be found on the [Skills England website](#), including their [Occupational Maps](#).

Understanding progression

The pathway diagram on page 4 illustrates how careers can develop across Social Work and related services, from entry-level support roles through to qualified Social Worker status and senior professional or leadership positions. It highlights:

- typical entry routes into social work careers
- progression to professional qualification and registration
- development into specialist, management and leadership roles
- relevant apprenticeships supporting workforce development.

Progression may involve changes in role, responsibilities or specialist area, or increased responsibility within similar roles as skills develop.

Typical Career Progression Routes – Adult Social Work

This table shows typical job roles by level within Adult Social Work and related services in a council, alongside examples of relevant apprenticeships. It provides an overview of how individuals can enter adult social work careers, develop specialist knowledge and skills, and progress into professional or leadership roles.

Guide to typical progression in Adult Social Work careers linked to apprenticeship / qualification levels:

- **Entry (L2–3):** Build core skills supporting adults, communities and wellbeing services
- **L4:** Develop specialist expertise in safeguarding, mental health, assessment or community-based support
- **L5–6:** Progress into professional qualification, advanced practitioner, management or specialist roles
- **L7:** Progress into senior professional, strategic or leadership roles (subject to policy / funding availability).

Career Stage	Typical Roles+	Example Relevant Apprenticeships
Entry and Early Careers (Level 2/3)	Social Work Assistant / Adult Support Worker Community Support Worker / Reablement Support Worker Mental Health Support Worker / Care Coordinator Business Support Officer / Customer Contact Officer	Health and Social Care Foundation Apprenticeship (L2) Adult Care Worker (L2) Healthcare Support Worker (L2) Lead Adult Care Worker (L3) Community Health and Wellbeing Worker (L3) Business Administrator (L2 / L3) Customer Service Practitioner / Specialist (L2 / L3)
Technical and Developing Roles (Level 3/4)	Adult Social Care Officer / Community Care Officer Safeguarding Support Officer / Mental Health Practitioner Reablement Worker Assessment Officer / Intervention Practitioner Social Work Assistant (advanced)	Community Health and Wellbeing Worker (L3) Safeguarding Support Officer (L3) Domestic and Sexual Abuse Support Worker (L4) Early Intervention Practitioner (L4)
Professional and Specialist Roles (Level 5/6)	Social Worker / Senior Social Worker Practice Educator / Advanced Practitioner Approved Mental Health Professional Principal Practitioner	Social Worker (Integrated Degree) (L6) Public Health Practitioner (L6) Occupational Therapist (L6) Leader in Adult Care (L5)
Strategic and Leadership Roles (Level 6/7)	Principal Social Worker Head of Service Service Manager / Head of Adult Social Care Strategic Commissioning and Social Work Leadership roles	Social Worker (Integrated Degree) (L6) Senior Leader (L7)* / other specialist or leadership development (subject to availability) Health and Care Intelligence Specialist (L7)*

Typical Career Progression Routes – Children’s Social Work

This table shows typical job roles by level within Children's Social Work, Safeguarding and Family Services in a council, alongside examples of relevant apprenticeships. It provides an overview of how individuals can enter children's social work careers, develop specialist knowledge and skills, and progress into professional or leadership roles.

Guide to typical progression in Children's Social Work careers linked to apprenticeship / qualification levels:

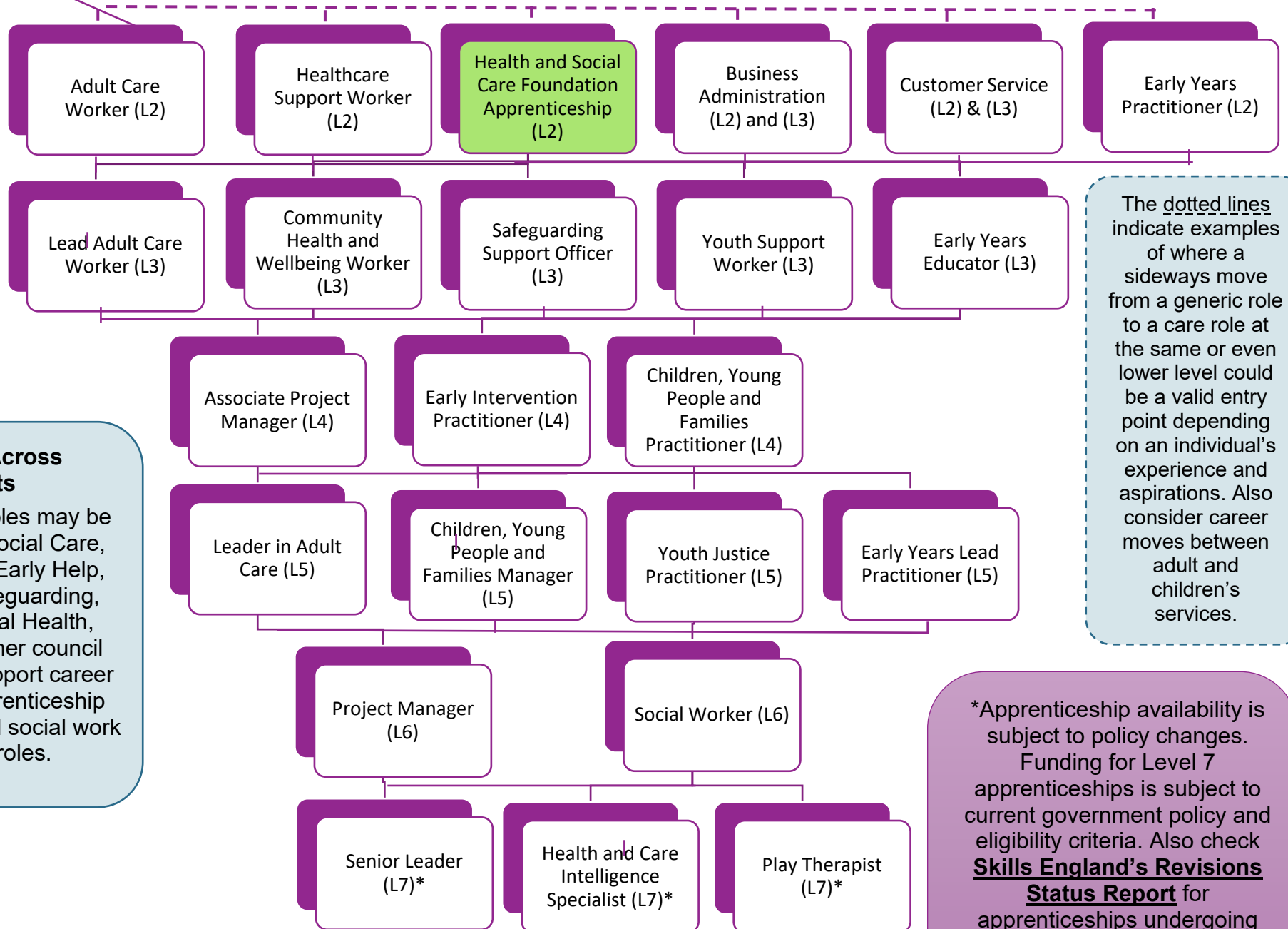
- **Entry (L2–3):** Build core skills supporting children, young people and families
- **L4:** Develop specialist expertise in safeguarding, early help, family support or youth justice
- **L5–6:** Progress into professional qualification, advanced practitioner or management roles
- **L7:** Progress into senior professional, strategic or leadership roles (subject to policy / funding availability).

Career Stage	Typical Roles+	Example Relevant Apprenticeships
Entry and Early Careers (Level 2/3)	Family Support Assistant / Children's Support Worker Social Work Assistant Residential Childcare Worker Early Help Worker / Youth Support Worker Business Support Officer / EHCP or SEN Support Officer	Health and Social Care Foundation Apprenticeship (L2) Playworker (L2) Youth Support Worker (L3) Community Health and Wellbeing Worker (L3) Business Administrator (L2 / L3) Customer Service Practitioner / Specialist (L2 / L3)
Technical and Developing Roles (Level 3/4)	Family Support Worker / Family Practitioner Early Intervention Practitioner Children, Young People and Families Practitioner Residential Childcare Worker (advanced) Youth Justice Officer Youth Offending Team (YOT) Worker	Children, Young People and Families Practitioner (L4) Early Intervention Practitioner (L4) Safeguarding Support Officer (L3) Domestic and Sexual Abuse Support Worker (L4)
Professional and Specialist Roles (Level 5/6)	Social Worker / Senior Social Worker Practice Educator / Advanced Practitioner Youth Justice Practitioner Youth Offending Team (YOT) Manager Safeguarding Practitioner / Safeguarding Specialist	Children, Young People and Families Manager (L5) Youth Justice Practitioner (L5) Social Worker (Integrated Degree) (L6)
Strategic and Leadership Roles (Level 6/7)	Principal Social Worker Head of Children's Social Care Head of Agency (Regional Adoption Agency) Service Manager / Group Manager Strategic Children's Services Leadership roles	Social Worker (Integrated Degree) (L6) Play Therapist (L7)* Health and Care Intelligence Specialist (L7)* Senior Leader (L7)* / other specialist or leadership development (subject to availability)

Social Work Career Pathway

Pre-Entry, e.g.:

- ✓ A Levels
- ✓ T Levels (e.g. Health; Education and Early Years)
- ✓ Other relevant academic / career entry routes.



Opportunities Across Departments

Social work-related roles may be found across Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Early Help, Family Support, Safeguarding, Youth Justice, Mental Health, Public Health and other council services. This can support career progression and apprenticeship pathways into qualified social work and leadership roles.

*Apprenticeship availability is subject to policy changes. Funding for Level 7 apprenticeships is subject to current government policy and eligibility criteria. Also check **Skills England's Revisions Status Report** for apprenticeships undergoing revision, showing the review stage and reason for review.