



The professional association for  
social work and social workers

## Looking for social work knowledge?

### Introduction

There is an increasingly large range of social work knowledge and there are many ways of classifying this knowledge. One approach is given below. This is not a comprehensive guide to every resource – since that would be impossible. But it does give some ‘hacks’ for finding your way around what is available.

It’s worth noting that:

- There are a range of different resources, not all of them are well known, not all resources are of the same quality, and some of them are plain wrong. So, it makes sense to use material that comes from a reputable source;
- There are a range of very different views. If you are going to rely on a resource, it makes sense to know what the other views are;
- Material is written for different audiences so material might well be good but might not always fit with what you need;
- Social work is often undertaken within a legal framework; and the legal frameworks of the four countries of the UK are increasingly diverging; and,
- Social work is often practiced within government policies. Again, the different government policies of the four countries of the UK are increasingly diverging.

The resources set out below focus on the printed word, but as appropriate technology becomes increasingly available podcasts and webinars are increasingly being used. Check out BASW webinars and podcasts for interesting speakers and a range of views.

### Finding resources

The first step is to decide how you are going to *use* the knowledge. Are you looking for specific advice on how to handle a situation in your social work practice? Do you want to develop your knowledge about a certain social work technique (e.g. Family Group Conferencing)? Do you need the knowledge for a specific purpose (e.g. writing an essay?) Are you looking because you are simply curious? Do you simply want to remain up to date on the latest issues? Deciding how you will use the knowledge will help you determine which of the resources listed below will best suit you.

If you are looking for a specific book, report or article, and know the title, you can look on the BASW ‘Search’ function, which has a large range of resources, or do a search on a general search engine. But bear in mind that a specific book, report or article might be just *one* view; there might be other equally valid views out there.

If you don’t have a specific book, report or article in mind, simply a general area, it makes sense to be clear about the specific area you are interested in. So, for example, if you are interested in the area of disability it makes sense to think of whether you are interested in service user perspectives, or disability and austerity, or disability and human rights etc. The more specific you are the easier it will be to find the resource you really need.

For searches there is the BASW 'Search' section.

If you are a social work practitioner, or manager, via your workplace you might have access to Research in Practice (RIP) ([www.rip.org.uk](http://www.rip.org.uk)) which focuses on social work with children and families or Research in Practice for Adults (RIPFA) ([www.ripfa.org.uk](http://www.ripfa.org.uk)) which focuses on social work with adults. RIP and RIPFA are subscription only services, and employers may or may not subscribe to the service. While a lot of material is applicable across the UK it is also worth remembering that in terms of legislation and policy there is increasing divergence across the four countries of the UK. For those in Scotland there is IRISS ([www.iriss.org.uk](http://www.iriss.org.uk)).

Much social work 'cutting edge' knowledge is published in **journal articles**. If you are a social work student (i.e. registered for a course with a university) or are otherwise registered on a course with a university (e.g. post qualifying) you will have access to the on-line library which will allow you to search for books, journal articles and reports. University libraries generally provide the most comprehensive access to resources, and, very important, if you are registered with the university this service is free.

The sheer number of journals, the costs of subscribing to any one journal and the cost of buying individual articles means that getting copies of specific journal articles can be difficult without access to a university library. However, BASW owns two social work journals: *The British Journal of Social Work* (BJSW) and *Practice*. BASW members receive a substantial discount on both. BJSW is one of the world's leading social work journals. However, journals are generally not themed, so, for example, if you are interested in articles about 'care leavers' it might be many editions of the journal before there is actually an article on the topic. However, subscribing to BJSW allows you to access the back-catalogue which allows you to access many 'classic' social work articles. Journals are also increasingly using free articles online (sometimes on a time-limited basis) so you can get a feel of a journal to tempt you to subscribe. Whether you do subscribe or not, occasionally there are real gems available.

**Social work text books** – i.e. primarily aimed at individuals on courses – can be invaluable to both seasoned practitioners and managers too. Text books often are a good introduction to a subject by balancing a range of views as well as providing signposts to more specialist resources. If you know what you are looking for, **social work books** and **social work text books** can often be bought on-line second hand. Second hand books may not necessarily be 'old' books, many brand-new copies turn up online as well. However, this does rely on availability, and the text you want may not be available – ever. If you are after a **new book** being a BASW member offers substantial discounts on some major publishers of social work and related titles. Browsing an **on-line book catalogue** often is a good way of understanding a range of books on a particular topic. On a related topic, if you are interested in a carefully curated list of social work 'classic books' the University of Edinburgh undertook this work as part of its social work centenary in 2018. You can access a range of key texts at [www.socialwork.ed.ac.uk/centenary/learning/academic\\_learning](http://www.socialwork.ed.ac.uk/centenary/learning/academic_learning)

You do not have to be registered with a university to access a variety of books and reports by using the British Library web-portal on social welfare – which you can access here: [www.bl.uk/social-welfare/subjects](http://www.bl.uk/social-welfare/subjects)

Much of social work is practised within the framework of the **law**. If you know the specific law you are looking for you can read the legislation here [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk) for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The advantage of reading the legislation is that you see what it actually says, rather than relying on what someone else says the legislation is saying. Much law is determined by 'case law' e.g. judgements on particular cases; for example, 'Cheshire West' in the case of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DOLs) or the Merton judgement for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. You can find **case judgements** at Bailii: [www.bailii.org](http://www.bailii.org)

The four governments of the four nations of the UK publish their **social-work related policies** on-line and for a comprehensive up to date list these are best accessed by going to the relevant government portal and then accessing the documents. (Accessing specific policies direct via a general search engine can result in an out-of-date copy).

(Employers, of course, also produce their own policies and procedures. However, since these reflect government legislation and policies and are primarily operational tools they are not included here).

Then there are **think-tank reports**. These are invariably free to download. While there are no 'social work specific' think tanks, think tanks often address issues that are central to social work: poverty and the provision of social care are good examples. They can be more partisan than books or journal articles since they often aim to influence party-political thinking but they are often more up-to date and topical than books and journal articles which can often take two years or more between conception and being in press.

That leaves the **media and blogs**. The BBC news website remains an invaluable source of information and sign-posts to a range of social work-related issues and the relevant reports e.g. around mental health, children's services, equality and a host of other issues. The same goes for the Guardian. Blogs are tricky, they can capture the moment and be very powerful. But for every good blog (accurate and relevant) there are too many blogs that are not good (inaccurate and/or irrelevant).

### **Matching the resource to the need**

Earlier the idea was introduced that the first step for finding an appropriate knowledge was to think how the knowledge was going to be used.

- Are you looking for specific advice on how to handle a specific situation in your social work practice? Types of resources that might be particularly relevant here include: law, case law and government policy, RIP/RIPFA (and your organisations' policies and procedures).
- Do you want to develop your knowledge about a certain social work technique (e.g. Family Group Conferencing)? Types of resources that might be particularly relevant here include: text-books.
- Do you need the knowledge for a specific purpose (e.g. writing an essay or thesis?). Types of resources that might be particularly relevant here include: Books, journal articles, reports.
- Are you looking because you are simply curious? Types of resources that might be particularly relevant here include: Books, journal articles, reports...
- Do you simply want to remain up to date on the latest thinking? Types of resources that might be particularly relevant here include: the BBC, *The Guardian*.

### **And finally ...**

On-line resources change regularly. While this information was correct at the time of going to press material can and does subsequently change. BASW is not responsible for content hosted by other organisations or websites.

Do let us know if this resource is useful and how it could be improved.

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