

Applying to the Apprenticeship in Social Work through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

A guide for applicants to the Apprenticeship in Social Work, applying via the Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work Studies (PDSWS)

If your degree is not recognised as equivalent to the BSocSc, or you do not hold a degree, you can still apply to the Apprenticeship in Social Work, via the PDSWS through RPL. RPL lets the UCC review panel recognise what you have learned through paid work, volunteering, training and life experience. This guide shows you how to present that learning clearly in your application.

Apply for the PDSWS, not the MSW. RPL gives access to the PDSWS only. There is one selection process for both options, so apply for one only. If you achieve an aggregate score of 50% or more in Year 1, you have the option to transition to the MSW in Year 2.

1. Check which RPL route fits you

You may be considered under RPL if you meet one of these routes:

Your qualification	Social work-related experience needed (full-time equivalent)
NFQ Level 8 honours degree or NFQ Level 9 major award in any discipline	At least 12 months (1680hrs for 12 mths (48 weeks to allow for 4 weeks' holidays)
Ordinary degree (NFQ Level 7) in social science or equivalent, with at least a Second Class Honours Grade 1 overall	At least 3 years (5,040 hrs for 3 years (allowing 4 weeks' holiday per year for 3 years)
No degree	At least 5 years of professional and/or volunteering/lived experience (8,400 hrs for 5 years (allowing for 4 weeks' holidays per year for 5 years).

Experience is measured as **full-time equivalent**. Part-time roles count in proportion: for example, two years working half-time equals 12 months full-time equivalent. Experience does not need to be paid, continuous or in a social work post, but it must be clearly linked to social work practice.

To be eligible for the apprenticeship you must also meet [UCC's English language requirements](#) where relevant.

2. Know what counts as social work-related experience

Relevant experience is any role where you worked directly with people facing disadvantage, vulnerability or exclusion, or worked to change the conditions under which they live. Past applicants have drawn on roles such as:

- Homeless services, residential care, healthcare, care work and foster care.
- Special needs assistant, early years educator.
- Disability, mental health, addiction and older people's services
- Youth work, family support, community development, advocacy and helplines (e.g. Samaritans)
- Observational placements (e.g. Probation, HSE, Tusla) and volunteering in Ireland or overseas
- Volunteering with charities or non-profit organisations.
- Working in climate activism or other campaigns related to the mission, values and ideals of social work.

This list is not exhaustive. RPL is about **learning, not just time served**. The panel wants to see what each role taught you about people, systems and practice.



3. Evidence your experience in the application

The UCC review panel reviews every application for the relevance of its experience before shortlisting. Applications that are vague or incomplete are not offered interviews. For each role, listed newest first, include:

1. **Organisation and job title**, with start and end dates (month and year).
2. **Paid or voluntary**, and **full-time or part-time**.
3. **Hours**: average hours per week and the total for the role. Show the sum, for example “8 hours per week × 40 weeks = 320 hours”.
4. **Who you worked with**: the service users or community, and their circumstances.
5. **What you did**: specific duties, using action verbs such as assessed, supported, advocated, recorded, referred, facilitated.
6. **How it connects to social work**: the skills, values and knowledge you used, such as relationship-building, safeguarding, anti-oppressive practice, interagency work or reflective supervision.

Give your **totals** in the summary questions, checked against your RPL route.

Tips that strengthen an entry

- Describe your own role, not the organisation’s mission, and show any progression in responsibility.
- Mention supervision, team meetings, case notes or policies you worked within.
- Be accurate. You do not need to submit certificates of hours, but the panel may contact the organisation if anything is unclear.

4. A weak entry and a strong entry

Entry	Example text
Weak	Volunteer, homeless charity, 2023–2025. Helped out at the drop-in centre.
Strong	Drop-in Volunteer, [Organisation], March 2023 – June 2025. Voluntary, part-time, 6 hours per week × 110 weeks = 660 hours. Supported adults experiencing homelessness, many with addiction or mental health difficulties. Built rapport through repeated contact; helped people complete housing and social welfare forms; referred people to the key worker and external addiction services; recorded contacts in line with the service’s data protection policy. Attended monthly debriefs; completed Children First training. This role developed my understanding of trauma-informed, non-judgemental practice and of the structural causes of homelessness.

The strong entry gives dates, status and hours, shows the calculation, and links tasks to social work.

6. Checklist before you submit

- ☐ I have applied for the PDSWS, not the MSW
- ☐ I meet one RPL route on a full-time equivalent basis
- ☐ Every role, newest first, has dates, status, hours, people supported, duties and the link to social work
- ☐ My totals add up, and I have listed relevant training and independent learning
- ☐ My motivation statement explains why social work, and why now

Questions on UCC eligibility: apprenticeship@ucc.ie

