Planning your career

Choosing a career involves more than just finding out what is open to you. Knowledge about yourself is central to the process. It’s worth looking at your personal goals, abilities, values, interests, and skills to relate study and career options to you. The suggestions here are only an aid to this decision-making process. Most employers look for generic skills such as leadership, communication skills, interpersonal skills, customer-focus and the ability to work in and contribute to a team. Some of these are developed during your degree, while others have been developed through extra-curricular activity such as sports, community, or cultural groups.

As more and more employers are developing jobs that are particular to their own environment, it is more difficult to provide a definitive list of possible career options. The ones that follow are illustrative rather than exhaustive. Some career opportunities may require graduate or postgraduate study or additional work experience.

Some career paths and degrees have recommended pathways from school. To download the ‘Best Preparation for University’ information sheet go to www.canterbury.ac.nz/liaison/best_prep.shtml

What is Social Work?

Social workers provide professional assistance to those experiencing difficulties in their lives and in their communities. They work with individuals, families, groups and organisations in a wide range of social service and social policy fields. The Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) is a great option to consider if you are interested in working in a people-focused career.

Professionally trained people are needed in increasing numbers to work in the social services nationally and internationally.

You will study a variety of courses from the social sciences as well as studying specialist Social Work topics and completing fieldwork practice. At the end of the programme you will have the experience, skills and knowledge to provide professional assistance to people who are experiencing difficulties in their lives.
Social workers provide professional assistance to those experiencing difficulties in their lives and in their communities.

What skills have our graduates gained?

Through their Social Work degree, graduates develop a valuable set of skills that are transferrable to a range of careers, including:

- Professional engagement, social assessment, and clinical intervention
- Empathising and empowering
- Self-awareness and non-judgemental attitude formation
- Interviewing skills
- Indigenous awareness and cross-cultural sensitivity
- Thinking critically and creatively, and challenging ideas
- Advanced listening and verbal communication skills
- Problem-solving skills adaptable to diverse contexts
- Negotiating and advocacy
- Interpretive and analytical thinking
- Appreciation of discrimination and structural inequalities
- A framework for values and ethics.

Opportunities to apply your learning outside the classroom through work and other experiences also exist and can deepen your skills set and employability. Work and other experiences can also support and inform learning and skill development in the classroom.

Where have our graduates been employed?

In New Zealand, social workers are employed in both statutory and community sectors, providing direct and indirect services. Direct services include those for children, families, the aged, people who have committed offences, and people experiencing disabilities. Social workers practice in not-for-profit agencies, schools, hospitals, the criminal justice system, and the Child, Youth and Family Service. Indirect services encompass social sector planning, administration and research.

Direct services may include protection of children who have been abused, providing group or family therapy, educational programmes for at-risk adolescents, supporting adolescent parents, working with groups aiming to achieve community development, providing interventions for people who are experiencing mental health issues or sudden trauma, providing assistance with housing needs, mediation and resolution of family conflict, facilitating access to benefits and other financial resources and assessment of home and family support for older people.

For more examples of employers who recruit UC students and graduates go to www.canterbury.ac.nz/careers

For more information about UC student and graduate opportunities, go to UC CareerHub: www.careerhub.canterbury.ac.nz
Art in the job market. Postgraduate study may be a prerequisite for certain jobs. Motivation and ability to persevere at a high level academically and can make you more competitive contributes to your employability. It enables you to extend your knowledge and skills, indicates your motivation and ability to persevere at a high level academically and can make you more competitive in the job market. Postgraduate study may be a prerequisite for certain jobs.

Social worker
- Connects people with needed resources, services and support
- Talks to people about the difficulties they are facing and empowers good decision making
- Writes reports and manages case notes

Policy analyst
- Researches and analyses information to assist in policy planning and development
- Reviews and interprets existing policies
- Prepares and presents reports

Community development worker
- Recognises problems and concerns within communities
- Assists in the development of local programmes to address community issues
- Raises awareness of issues to promote community cohesion

Residential support worker
- Cares for and supports clients in a residential setting
- Manages relationships and conflicts between clients and ensures safety
- Spends time with clients in order to work through problems

Hospital/medical social worker
- Works with people who suffer from illness or trauma
- Develops support plans for clients as they return home
- Provides support to reduce stress of family and carers of clients

Youth worker
- Ensures that young people are informed and supported
- Establishes and maintains relationships with young people and the people around them
- Plans youth programmes and connects young people to information and services

Social researcher
- Designs and develops research projects to meet specific objectives
- Understands and uses a range of quantitative and qualitative methods
- Analyses and interprets data to be written in published reports

Care and protection worker
- Gathers information and is involved in the investigation of families
- Ensures the protection, safety and wellbeing of children
- Assists and participates in family group conferences

Industrial relations officer
- Manages problems or conflict in the workplace
- Develops strategies to minimise workplace stress and conflict
- Assists with human resources functions

Probation officer
- Manages, supervises and monitors the behaviour of offenders
- Provides offender risk assessments for the likelihood of recidivism and the suitability for parole
- Provides and monitors access to services and programmes

Entrepreneurship and innovation are increasingly becoming an important part of the world of work and should be considered as a career option. For more information about UC student innovation & entrepreneurship, related internships, scholarships, courses and activities go to www.canterbury.ac.nz/careers

For further information on job titles, please see the latest UC Graduate Destinations Survey (www.canterbury.ac.nz/careers)
For additional graduate destination information go to www.graduatecareers.com.au or www.prospects.ac.uk

What professional bodies and organisations do our students and graduates link to?
As they progress in their studies and into a career, our students and graduates often join professional bodies specific to their area of interest. These organisations offer graduates the opportunity to network and collaborate with others within the same community. Other relevant organisations are also listed.

- Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (www.anzasw.org.nz)
- New Zealand Council of Social Services (www.nzcoss.org.nz)
- Social Services Providers Aotearoa Inc (www.sspa.org.nz)
- New Zealand Association of Counsellors (www.nzac.org.nz)
- New Zealand Childcare Association (www.nzcac.ac.nz)

Social media networks, such as LinkedIn (including LinkedIn groups), Facebook and Twitter can provide avenues for students and graduates to keep up-to-date with current industry knowledge and ‘best practice’, networking opportunities, industry-related events and job vacancies.

What further study can I do after my degree?
It is possible to study at postgraduate and graduate level in subjects both directly and indirectly related to your degree. For a list of postgraduate and graduate study options, go to www.canterbury.ac.nz/courses

Social Work graduates are encouraged to undertake further studies. The School offers a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Social Work, the Master of Social Work (by thesis) and the Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work. Postgraduate study can also lead to an academic career pathway in teaching and research.

Carefully consider your motivation for study, how it fits in with your long-term career plans and whether it is likely to enhance your employment prospects.

What jobs and activities do our graduates do?
Graduates with this degree are employed in a range of jobs including field worker, case manager and counsellor.

Some of the jobs listed may require further study at postgraduate level. Postgraduate study can contribute to your employability. It enables you to extend your knowledge and skills, indicates your motivation and ability to persevere at a high level academically and can make you more competitive in the job market. Postgraduate study may be a prerequisite for certain jobs.

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Joanna Lockhart

Towards the end of her secondary education, Joanna was considering whether to go immediately into a job by joining the police force or to study criminology. Her decision was helped by an exchange trip to France organised through AFS.

‘After the exchange I stayed on in France and lived in a poor area of Marseille with a friend. The living conditions were very different from New Zealand and there were many people living on the street and begging every day. It opened up my eyes to different ways of living, and the extent of poverty that many people live in, even in countries that are considered rich such as France. After this experience I decided that I wanted to study social work so that I would have a career where I could help improve the lives of others.’

Joanna says she chose to study Social Work at UC because, by offering four years of academic learning across all the different fields of social work, it would open up many different job opportunities ‘that are meaningful, different, and do not involve sitting behind a desk’.

Following her first year of study, Joanna’s career goals started to become more specific.

‘I love how interesting all of the papers are. One paper in the first year was on violence in society, which fuelled my passion for work in the sexual offending field of social work. I would like to work somewhere like Kia Marama [a special treatment unit for child sex offenders based at Rolleston Prison].’

Although she comes from New Plymouth, Joanna was already familiar with UC. ‘I chose UC because it offers the best social work degree in New Zealand, and also because my older brother studied at Canterbury and had great time down in Christchurch.’

So far, life at UC has lived up to Joanna’s expectations. In addition to studying towards two degrees, she finds time to go wakeboarding and running, and also likes reading, cooking and music.

‘I love how beautiful the campus is and how close everything is to each other – it makes coming to university every day very easy. I also love the sense of community that Christchurch has shown since the earthquakes.’

Joanna doesn’t hesitate to encourage others to study her subjects, and her advice is: ‘Do it. It’s fantastic. And be open-minded to learning and constructing different viewpoints and ways of thinking.’

‘After this experience I decided that I wanted to study social work so that I would have a career where I could help improve the lives of others.’

More information
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Careers, Internships & Employment offers intending and current students and recent graduates a wide range of services, including individual career guidance, seminars, career resources, and student and graduate employment opportunities.
www.careerhub.canterbury.ac.nz

Student Liaison
University of Canterbury, Christchurch
Telephone: +64 3 364 2993
Email: liaison@canterbury.ac.nz
www.canterbury.ac.nz/liaison

Student Liaison provides intending students with information about the university system in general and the courses, qualifications, support and facilities at the University of Canterbury.