

Module code: MOD007806	Version: 6 Date Amended: 03/Aug/2026
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1. Module Title
Contemporary Issues in Social Work

2a. Module Leader
Ruth McManus-O'Connell

2b. School
School of Allied Health and Social Care

2c. Faculty
Faculty of Health, Medicine and Social Care

3a. Level
4

3b. Module Type
Standard (fine graded)

4a. Credits
30

4b. Study Hours
300

5. Restrictions			
Type	Module Code	Module Name	Condition
Pre-requisites:	None		
Co-requisites:	None		
Exclusions:	None		
Courses to which this module is restricted:	BA (Hons) Social Work		

LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

6a. Module Description

This Level 4 module provides a foundation for learners' academic and professional development by fostering an understanding of the complex interplay between social policy, inequality, and lived experience. Learners will develop an emerging understanding of how to challenge dominant discourses and advocate for more equitable and inclusive approaches to practice. The module prepares learners for more advanced study at Level 5, where they will go beyond description and engage in deeper critical reflection on their personal and professional values. Furthermore, it establishes the conceptual groundwork for the exploration of macro-level issues such as sustainability and lifecourse theory that will be examined in greater depth in the final year of the programme [Level 6].

Social work has a long-standing commitment to addressing poverty and working with the most marginalised and disadvantaged communities. While the profession is rooted in values of social justice and equity, it operates within a broader political context where dominant ideologies, particularly neoliberalism, have shaped increasingly punitive and individualised narratives around poverty. These ideologies often inform policy decisions that shift responsibility for hardship onto individuals, obscuring the structural causes of inequality.

Co-production:

Contemporary Issues in Social Work has been co-produced with our team of lived experience educators, partners and learners to promote a curriculum that is academically rigorous and grounded in the realities of contemporary social work practice. Embedding lived experience into module design and delivery aligns with Social Work England's (2019) Professional Standards and their commitment to equity, inclusion, and social justice. This collaborative approach supports meaningful engagement for learners in readiness to work ethically and effectively across diverse communities, in accordance with Social Work England Qualifying Education and Training Standard 2 (2021).

Mission Statement:

The module is underpinned by our commitment that people studying at ARU will be supported to become inclusive, compassionate and relationship-based professionals who strive to enact positive change in people's lives.

6b. Outline Content

Learners will be introduced to key concepts including:

Narratives and discourses of poverty: definitions, causes and consequences

Stress theory and wellbeing across the lifecourse

Inequality and marginalisation

Climate-induced poverty

The impact of austerity and neoliberalism on social policy and practice

The role of social justice and equity in social work practice

Ethical engagement with Artificial Intelligence

As part of the assessment, learners will select a specific social group to focus on. For example, people with protected characteristics, people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage and/or those affected by adverse social and societal circumstances.

Where appropriate, there is scope to utilise tools in virtual and simulated interactive learning.

6c. Key Texts/Literature

The reading list to support this module is available at: <https://readinglists.aru.ac.uk/>

6d. Specialist Learning Resources

None

7. Learning Outcomes (threshold standards)

No.	Type	On successful completion of this module the student will be expected to be able to:
1	Knowledge and Understanding	Describe the causes of poverty and social exclusion and their impact on a selected social group.
2	Knowledge and Understanding	Outline the spatial dimensions of poverty and the neighbourhood effect, and how these shape the lived experiences of people accessing services.
3	Intellectual, practical, affective and transferrable skills	Explain how community social work and collective methods can be used to identify need and resources.
4	Intellectual, practical, affective and transferrable skills	Demonstrate an understanding of the wider context, identifying the political, economic and social factors that shape practice.

8a. Module Occurrence to which this MDF Refers				
Year	Occurrence	Period	Location	Mode of Delivery
2026/7	ZZF	Template For Face To Face Learning Delivery		Face to Face

8b. Learning Activities for the above Module Occurrence			
Learning Activities	Hours	Learning Outcomes	Details of Duration, frequency and other comments
Lectures	0		
Other teacher managed learning	0		
Student managed learning	0		
TOTAL:	0		

9. Assessment for the above Module Occurrence					
The assessment for some modules includes a presentation (see below for details on how this particular module is assessed). We recognise that presenting, especially to a large group, can cause significant anxiety or distress for some students. If this may affect you, please contact your Module Leader or the Disability and Neurodiversity Service as early as possible. We will work with you to consider appropriate reasonable adjustments. Depending on your individual needs, these might include, for example, presenting to a smaller group or presenting only to a member of academic staff.					
Assessment No.	Assessment Method	Learning Outcomes	Weighting (%)	Fine Grade or Pass/Fail	Qualifying Mark (%)
010	Coursework	1-4	0 (%)	Pass/Fail	100 (%)
Up to 3000 word coursework					

In order to pass this module, students are required to achieve an overall mark of 40% (for modules at levels 3, 4, 5 and 6) or 50% (for modules at level 7*). In addition, students are required to: (a) achieve the qualifying mark for each element of fine graded assessment as specified above (b) pass any pass/fail elements [* the pass mark of 50% applies for all module occurrences from the academic year 2024/25 – see Section 3a of this MDF to check the level of the module and Section 8a of this MDF to check the academic year]
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