

Profile report Full Professor Social Work

University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht

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Introduction

There is an urgent need for a full chair in social work at a Dutch university. Research on social work does take place at many universities of applied sciences and at several universities, but, apart from two temporary endowed chairs, scientific attention to social work depends heavily on the casual expertise of individual professors and their staff members. They produce a great number of high-quality academic publications, including a substantial number of dissertations each year. Considerable research has also been conducted on social work effectiveness, which requires synthesis and further theory formation. However, solid embedding of scientific research and teaching in the area of social work is lacking, both for Bachelor's programmes and Master's programmes. Nor does the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) as yet have a programme dedicated to social work.

An ad hoc committee of the Health Council of the Netherlands has already previously advised that it is essential to have a solid knowledge infrastructure for the social domain. Additionally, a social work knowledge and research agenda has been developed in a multi-stakeholder collaboration, which also emphasises the importance of the full chair at a university. Indeed, the internationally widely accepted definition of social work also implies that social work is, among other things, an academic discipline.

Internationally, the lack of structural academic attention for social work has also put the Netherlands out of sync with other European countries. In nearly all European countries, social work has its own place in the university systems. Internationally and nationally, there is an extensive knowledge domain with considerable academic theory formation and with hundreds of peer-reviewed journals, including a dozen A-listed journals broadly focused on social work and many dissertations.

Considering all these developments, a full chair and an academic Master's programme in Social Work in The Netherlands is of vital importance. This chair can develop the research agenda and contribute substantially to the strongly perceived need for synthesising activities pertaining to research on social work, by means of conferences, symposiums and producing publications.

Various organisations in the field of social work – including the Dutch professional association for social workers (BPSW), the sector association Sociaal Werk Nederland, the Sociaal Werk foundation, the Sterker Sociaal Werk foundation and the Marie Kamphuis Foundation have joined together with the University of Humanistics to install a chair at this university.

Social work in The Netherlands

The domain of social work has expanded considerably in recent decades as a result of social and policy developments, including the move towards extramural care, the decentralisation of the social domain, and increasing social inequality and polarisation.

The domain of the envisaged chair concerns both empirical and normative questions related to social work practice. Empirical questions concerning effective interventions and normative questions concerning the relationship between social developments and current and preferred responses to them from the professional field, as well as empirical and normative questions about the position of social work in relation to adjacent professional fields.

Social work has been in place for over one hundred years in the Netherlands. It is estimated to employ around 124,000 persons¹, who work in a wide range of areas, from helping refugees, debt assistance, youth care, mental healthcare services, social assistance benefits to rehabilitation. Social work focuses mainly on citizens with a disadvantaged social position: the less well-educated and lower-income workers, or citizens who, due to their health, disability, age, cultural background, struggle to cope with the daily complexities of life. They are often hampered in their social participation. They participate less in education, in the labour market and in politics, and are therefore more likely to be isolated. Social work's mission is to support socially vulnerable citizens, both individually and as groups, in their social functioning and to strengthen social quality. Social work is a core profession in primary care – alongside general practitioners, district nurses and district police officers, for example – aimed at humanising society. The professional code refers to the promotion of human rights and human dignity.

Social work at the University of Humanistic Studies

The University of Humanistic Studies has decided to establish the envisaged chair. A full chair should be accompanied by academic teaching in the same field, either through a track programme in existing Master's programmes or preferably through an independent Master's programme. This would ensure that the knowledge acquired by means of the research led by the full professor also benefits the professional field, and that structural funding for research and education developed from the chair is provided. The plan is to first establish a chair and to then assign the full professor the task of establishing an academic Master's programme in Social Work at the University of Humanistic Studies.

A full chair and a Master's programme in Social Work correspond well with the teaching and research within the University of Humanistic Studies. The orientation of the University of Humanistic Studies in the field of normativity, a sense of purpose and humanisation is a source of inspiration for social work. Much research on social work is also already being performed within the University of Humanistic Studies, particularly for the chairs Citizenship and Humanisation of the Public Sector, Humanism and Social Resilience and Humanist Chaplaincy studies for a Plural Society. Conversely, the chair could add great value by means of the knowledge and experience in the social domain and professional field. Already highly developed themes at the University of Humanistic Studies, such as spiritual care, care ethics, citizenship, Bildung, ethical, normative and democratic professionalism, humanisation of the public sector, sense of purpose and

¹ There are different figures in circulation. The estimate is based on a combination of 74,000 social workers according to Sociaal Werk Nederland and 50,000 youth care workers according to Jan Willem Bruins of BPSW (oral information). Also see <https://www.movisie.nl/sites/movisie.nl/files/2020-03/Notitie-Sociaal-werkers-2020.pdf> and <https://www.fcbmagazine.nl/sociaalwerkwerkt/jaarbeeld-2021> (available in Dutch only).

vulnerability, are linked together through the theme of social work.

More specifically, the Master's programme in Social Work would tie in perfectly with the three Master's programmes already established at the University of Humanistic Studies. First, social work matches the professional field of spiritual care that is central to the Master's programme in Humanistic Studies. There are important similarities between spiritual care and social work. Both focus on life issues and, unlike mental healthcare services and medical care, they do not depend on diagnoses. Concurrently, social developments and developments in the professional field are also increasing the convergence of social work and spiritual care. For instance, both have seen increasing demand for science-based methods. In terms of their professional fields, they are gravitating towards one another, since spiritual care is moving towards a more extramural approach. This professional field has traditionally been based on intramural care, however, the move towards extramural care has led to spiritual care expanding into extramural support, for example, with the general practitioners and in the social domain with social community teams, among others. There is also a great need for questions that relate to the sense of purpose and existential questions in new areas in which social workers were already active but in which spiritual caregivers could potentially play a role, such as labour market rehabilitation, grief counselling or quality of life after retirement. Attention to issues pertaining to a sense of purpose forms part of social workers' professional profile. Attention to how organisations can foster issues pertaining to the sense of purpose for clients and professionals fits seamlessly with this.

Social work and the Master's programme in Care Ethics and Policy (ZEB) of the University of Humanistic Studies also have common ground. This Master's programme focuses on normative and empirical questions in the field of proper care and support, questions that are also at the core of the Master's programme in Social Work. And finally, there are important overlaps with the Master's programme in Citizenship, Professionalism and Civil Society (BKS). This latter Master's programme focuses on themes like meaningful participation, ethical and democratic professionalism and interactions between citizens and professionals. Those issues are also at the centre of social work.

Conversely, the Master's programme in Social Work adds particular value to the Master's programmes already in place. First, expertise on the professional field of social work in a broad sense. Although aspects of social work are always discussed in the other Master's programmes, they are not highlighted individually. However, they will be in the envisaged Master's programme in Social Work. For example, the Master's programme in Social Work will pose questions on how social developments generate new issues for social work and for the development of social workers' professionalism. Specifically for the Master's programme in Humanistic Studies, an important addition of the envisaged new Master's programme is that social work focuses not only on life issues but also on social issues that may generate or reinforce life issues. The Master's programme could thus strengthen the social orientation and embedding of the Master's programme in Humanistic Studies. In this respect, expertise in the social domain is also a crucial component of the Master's programme in Social Work that complements the Master's programme in Humanistic Studies. Relative to the Master's programme in Care Ethics and Policy, the knowledge about social work in care is complementary, as the Master's programme in Care Ethics and Policy is more focused on care providers, while healthcare institutions also employ many social workers. Relative to the Master's programme in Citizenship, Professionalism and Civil Society, specific knowledge on expertise and

methods of social work and on the social workers' professional ethics in the public domain are a welcome addition.

A full chair and an academic Master's programme are also very important from a societal perspective. There is a serious shortage of social workers, who regularly leave the profession due to a lack of in-depth knowledge. An academic Master's programme may partly respond to this. In addition, a chair and a Master's programme contribute to the recognition of social and scientific importance of social work, an area that also requires a great deal of theoretical in-depth understanding. Social workers with an academic Master's programme could also further develop this in their work.

Social developments

A number of recent social and policy developments have heightened the urgency of more science-based knowledge in the area of social work. In terms of society, the past decades have first seen increased social inequality, including inequality of opportunities. Awareness of this has also increased in recent years. Traditionally, social workers have played a crucial role in combating social inequality and inequality of opportunities, by encouraging and equipping citizens to develop themselves and by helping them overcome social, emotional and material obstacles. As the urgency of this becomes more widely recognised socially, scientific knowledge of practical methods also becomes a matter of great urgency.

Second, the past decades have also seen an increasing polarisation between population groups, in terms of cultural and religious backgrounds and/or migration backgrounds, but also in terms of age and educational and professional qualifications. This is accompanied by tensions, which are regularly made painfully apparent in neighbourhoods and districts but also on social media, leading to conflicts. From the outset, social workers play a crucial role in countering polarisation and, again, scientific knowledge is thus of increasing importance, for instance on radicalisation, diversity and super-diversity.

Third, for several decades now, there has also been an increasing process of individualisation and liberation from self-evident and often coercive and oppressive group identities and group habits, while at the same time losing self-evident frameworks of a sense of purpose and forms of participation. Citizens now need to design their own lives and bear the responsibility for it themselves. This raises new questions regarding a sense of purpose, participation and solidarity: where do you belong, how do you want to belong and can you contribute to society, and what makes your life meaningful? This is a relatively new area of expertise for social workers, but one that fits well with their expertise in empowerment, participation and social cohesion.

Fourth, the past twenty years have seen increasing digitalisation, which on the one hand facilitates communication from all to all, but on the other hand also complicates communication and makes participation more difficult, especially for citizens who already encounter barriers to participation. This, too, is a relatively new area of expertise for social work, but it aligns well with long-standing themes in social work such as tackling semi-literacy and promoting empowerment.

A final key social development comprises the now widely recognised major societal task of reducing global warming and environmental damage, including through

lifestyle changes and energy transition. This task puts pressure on social cohesion and mutual solidarity. The question of how to promote social cohesion, social justice and solidarity is a long-standing area of expertise of social work that can be put to good use for these new tasks, but which require support from scientific research. A pressing question, for example, is how social workers can contribute to a socially fair energy transition and how all citizens can access information and have a say in the energy transition.

Policy developments

In addition to these social developments, there are also a number of policy developments that add urgency to research and teaching in the area of social work. Firstly, policies place great emphasis on resident participation/civic participation, ranging from citizens' initiatives and municipal talks to civic forums and the right to challenge. However, research shows that theoretically educated people make much more use of this than practically educated people. Social workers are thus tasked with promoting equal participation of the practically educated as well.

Second, the move towards extramural long-term care and the de-institutionalisation thereof in recent decades have led to a new population of care-dependent people in neighbourhoods and districts: people with psychiatric problems, people with mental and/or physical disabilities, and elderly people in need of help. The equally relatively new task for social work is to promote the ability of these groups to feel at home in the neighbourhood and to develop positive contacts with neighbours. This requires new community-building expertise from social workers. Next to promoting civic participation, social workers now also have a task in promoting quality community living between different groups of citizens: not only citizens with different cultural and religious backgrounds, but also between citizens with and without physical or intellectual disabilities or psychiatric problems. How can social workers contribute to forming inclusive neighbourhood networks that also include vulnerable groups? There is an urgent need for more scientific knowledge about the factors of success and failure of interventions in this area.

A third policy development is partly a response to this move towards extramural care, i.e. decentralisation of care, rehabilitation and welfare for the purpose of coherent local social policy in the so-called 'social domain' for all ages, including parenting problems and domestic violence. Social workers, too, play a central role in this development, for example in contributing to the prevention of placing children in care. In doing so, they are tasked with not only referring to professional support but first and foremost to informal support. And again, there are many methodological and normative issues here that require more scientific research, for example to address the question of why integrated working methods and cooperation between care (including youth care) and welfare are so difficult to get off the ground and how this can be facilitated.

A fourth policy development involves a new approach between mental healthcare (including youth care) services and social work, partly under pressure from the major issue concerning waiting lists. Consequently, cooperation has intensified between the sectors of social work, youth care and mental healthcare services. There are also more social workers employed in youth care and mental healthcare services, aimed at both

prevention as well as assistance.

A fifth policy development of recent decades concerns a more activating welfare state that not only helps but also activates and corrects people. In recent years, the ideal of self-reliance has been leading in this. This requires social workers to engage in a morally complex combination of assistance, enforcement and activation. It also requires social workers to make complex considerations on what they can ask of citizens, and when self-reliance leads to the risk of demanding too much from them, resulting in loneliness or guilt and shame about failing self-reliance. How can social workers activate citizens and at the same time mitigate these risks? How can social workers give shape to their task of activating 'social networks'? Social workers' core task is to help support, strengthen, expand and sometimes wind down relationships. While policy has high expectations of this, its feasibility has also been criticised. Scientific research by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) and the University of Humanistic Studies in collaboration with the University of Amsterdam (UvA) has already shown that self-reliance is not feasible to many people and its pursuit poses problems for social workers. What can and may be expected of self-reliance and of social networks? At what point does the pursuit of parental self-reliance come at the expense of children's wellbeing? What role can social workers have in this, and do they want to?

A more general question pertains to the ideals that social workers pursue, or should or could pursue, and what the relationship of those ideals is against what policy requires of them. For example, is self-reliance an aspirational or perhaps in fact a problematic ideal? Should human rights be more at the centre, or should the focus be on 'human capabilities', or 'human dignity'? What does it mean to reintroduce the human scale into society and thus into care? And if these are ideals that are ignored or perhaps in fact imposed by policy, what would this mean for social workers? To what extent is resistance against inhumane or unworkable policies also part of the social workers' task? Or is it rather the social workers' task to put individual clients' problems on the social work agenda, or encourage clients to do so? In other words, what is social work's political role? This discussion is partly held under the name of 'politicisation of social work'. There is a need for more knowledge on how social workers can give substance to the pursuit of social justice.

Developments in social work

In addition to abovementioned social and policy developments, there are also major developments in social work that require further research and in-depth education.

First, there is the trend of an integrated approach. During the first decades of the last century, social work took a strong holistic and integrated approach: social workers usually had a broad range of tasks on behalf of socially vulnerable people in a broad sense. Increasing differentiation of facilities, professions and positions emerged after World War Two. Three main directions emerged: social services, social pedagogical assistance and social cultural work, including community work, with numerous differentiations within them. These differentiations made social work opaque and complex. In response, there has been a movement in the opposite direction in recent years, reverting to general social work, with a broad integrated task. There is also the emergence of the 'T-shaped professional' who combines general and specialist work. In practice,

many social workers struggle with this broad profile and, in practice, tend to nevertheless largely focus on a target group. The professionalism of general versus specialist work therefore requires further research: what are real expectations that present social workers with opportunities leading to professional pride?

Another key development is the professionalisation (or de-professionalisation) of the trade. At the beginning of the 20th century, most social work was carried out by volunteers. After that, the work became highly professionalised. Over the past decade, there has been a renewed emphasis on the role of volunteers and informal carers, and thus, according to some, of de-professionalisation (or the risk thereof). In any case, there has been increased cooperation with volunteers and informal care, and, for that matter, with citizens' initiatives. This gives rise to new questions about the role of social workers, such as what can and cannot be done by volunteers and what this means for support from social work. How can social workers optimally cooperate with volunteers, informal carers and citizens' initiatives?

A third development concerns the shift of area of work of some social workers to 'in home care' or 'neighbourhood-oriented care'. What does a neighbourhood-oriented approach mean in terms of coordination with other professionals in the neighbourhood? Moreover, this development has introduced new moral developments. For example, as a social worker, how involved at home do you have to become, how do you deal with everything you see and experience there? And how do you draw the line on what you involve yourself in? Or how does building a relationship of trust relate to identifying and, if necessary, reporting domestic violence?

In the fourth place, local governments have a greater impact on the contents and working methods of social work. Since the turn of the century, welfare organisations have increasingly had to account for themselves through performance indicators, as well as relying increasingly on tendering procedures. This hampers one of the social workers' core tasks, i.e. to be the neighbourhood's eyes and ears by having in-depth knowledge of the residents and their networks. It also compromises the pursuit of professional direction that meets its own standards, and accountability that is meaningful to the work. Consequently, the question of how organisations can promote sense of purpose among clients and social workers is a pressing one. Scientific research can help provide answers to this question, inter alia, by further exploring the normative professionalism, and more meaningful forms of accountability.

Finally, experiential knowledge is gaining an increasingly important role in social work. On the one hand, this involves the use of experiential knowledge from the target group itself. Consider, people with psychiatric problems, intellectual disabilities, or people with first-hand experience in youth care. On the other hand, it also involves the use of experiential knowledge that social workers themselves have, because they might be parents of a child with a disability, struggle with psychiatric problems or have experienced forms of racism, for example. That is a relevant discussion given the increasing societal attention to diversity and inclusion. This raises new questions about how experiential knowledge could or should have a place in social work and education in social work, and about how social workers can collaborate with experiential experts.

The aforementioned social and policy developments impart great urgency to scientific research and education on social work practices.

Candidate profile, requirements and responsibilities

Profile:

The full professor is a leading researcher in the area of social work in the Netherlands who is also internationally recognised. In research, the full professor explicitly addresses moral questions and moral dilemmas, and the sense of purpose and humanisation, primarily for the benefit of citizens/clients but also for the benefit of social workers themselves. The full professor has a broad international scientific network in this area, as illustrated by high quality international academic publications. (S)he is also a highly experienced, competent, and inspiring lecturer. The full professor has an extensive network within the social work practices and is recognised as an inspiring expert, partly evidenced by public performances and publications, both for a wide audience as well as for social workers.

The full professor promotes scientific research on social work, practices, provides support in PhD research, conducts fundraising to this end, initiates PhD research and supervises PhD students. Furthermore, the full professor works together with professors of universities of applied sciences in the area of social work. The full professor profiles as an expert in scientific research on the practice of social work in the social domain in a broad sense, including mental health services, intellectual disability care and youth care.

Given the ambition of the University of Humanistic Studies to strengthen social work teaching and research, one of the core tasks of the new full professor of Social Work is to realise, in close cooperation with internal and external partners, a Master's programme in Social Work, by initiating and successfully completing the necessary (accreditation) procedures to this end.

Responsibilities: the full professor

- initiates, promotes and supervises scientific research on social work in a programme-based approach, in relation to national and international developments. Demonstrates initiative, leadership and vision.
- actively and systematically engages in fundraising for research and supervises and encourages colleagues to do the same.
- has a critical mind while being a connector at the same time, with a proven ability to cooperate, encourage others and achieve results.
- develops academic teaching in the area of social work; preferably develops an academic Master's programme in Social Work within two years. Manages the complete process from planning to accreditation and implementation.
- plays an essential academic and social role in creating a perspective on the meaning of social work within the context of an evolving and pluralistic society. In so doing, puts social work both scientifically and socially on the map.
- is a familiar and inspiring point of contact for external partners, including media, with regard to social, policy and professional developments and the role of social workers within these developments.
- contributes to synthesising activities related to social work research in the Netherlands and Flanders, and internationally, by organising conferences, symposiums and publications.
- is a familiar, accessible and inspiring leading figure for the professional field in terms of teaching, research and valorisation in the area of social work.

Requirements: the full professor

- has obtained a PhD in Social Sciences.
- has extensive experience in setting up, implementing and supervising academic research in the area of social work, including through the supervision of PhD students.
- has extensive experience and a good track record in relation to fundraising for research from indirect funding and contract funding.
- has a strong publication record with regard to international academic discussions on current matters of concern to social work in a broad sense.
- has a proven up-to-date knowledge and vision on relevant national and international scientific and societal debates related to social work and has a clear vision of the meaning of social work in relation to the major questions of our time, and of ways to express and develop this vision through higher education, research and societal impact.
- enjoys recognition and appreciation as an expert in the area of social work thanks to academic publications, publications in professional journals and publications for a wider audience.
- has excellent interpersonal and communicative skills with respect to different target groups, ranging from students, colleagues and social workers to research funders and policy makers. Has a proven ability to connect and inspire internal and external cooperation.
- has a wide network in social work researchers and social workers.
- is an enthusiastic and inspiring lecturer, with ample experience with and vision on the development of new areas of high-quality academic higher education.
- has affinity with humanistic sources of inspiration and experience with research and teaching on moral dilemmas in social work, and opportunities for humanisation and sense of purpose of citizens/clients as well as social workers.
- has at least English language proficiency at C1 level.

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