



UNIVERSITY OF
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Is AI your new critical friend in social work practice?

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CELCIS Emerging Insights Series:
AI & Children's Social Care

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HOW OUR PERSPECTIVE IS SHAPED

PRACTICE

WE WORK WITH MULTIPLE
LA ORGANISATIONS
THROUGH OUR REGIONAL
SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP



RESEARCH

SOCIAL WORK &
HEALTHCARE FOCUSED

EDUCATION

AS EDUCATORS OF SOCIAL
WORK PRACTITIONERS BOTH
AT PRE AND POST
QUALIFYING LEVELS

WHAT DOES THE USE OF AI
MEAN FOR WORK THAT IS
FOUNDED ON RESPONDING TO
HUMAN NEED, WHERE
ETHICAL PRACTICE IS
ESSENTIAL?



A FRAMEWORK FOR AI INTEGRATION

AI is being
integrated into
social work
practice in
different ways...

Business Support Functions...

AI as a personal office assistant. This could include tasks like managing our diaries or booking systems, meeting or telephone call transcription, providing support to compile chronologies etc.

Client Facing...

AI in client facing (support) roles. This could include tasks such as using AI tools for translation, providing chatbots for initial client interface, transcription of home visits, providing reminders to service users etc.

Improving & Enhancing Service Provision...

AI to enhance service provision (direct or indirect). This could include using AI tools for prediction and decision making (early intervention) or providing targeted interventions for specific issues or conditions (direct support)

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Where does AI add value, and where must humans remain central to practice?
 - What ethical principles should AI use in social work be based upon?
 - How do AI-enabled tools impact power, bias, and accountability in social work?
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HOW DOES RELATIONSHIP-
BASED PRACTICE REMAIN
THE CENTRAL TENET OF
PRACTICE WHEN AI IS
USED?



CONTEXT: PAPERWORK VS CLIENT ENGAGEMENT

**The Munro Review
of Child Protection:
Final Report**
A child-centred system
Professor Eileen Munro

- The system had become too focused on compliance and procedures rather than the quality of help provided to children and families.
- Excessive form-filling and performance targets were diverting social workers' time away from direct work with children.

Department for Education (2011) *Munro review of child protection: final report – a child-centred system*. London: Department for Education. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/munro-review-of-child-protection-final-report-a-child-centred-system> (Accessed: 24 November 2025).

JOURNAL ARTICLE

Social Workers' Experiences of Bureaucracy: A Systematic Synthesis of Qualitative Studies

Katheryn Margaret Pascoe ✉, Bethany Waterhouse-Bradley, Tony McGinn

The British Journal of Social Work, Volume 53, Issue 1, January 2023, Pages 513–533,
<https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcac106>

Published: 23 June 2022 **Article history** ▼

- A systematic review of 39 UK qualitative studies finds managerialism and bureaucracy have intensified since the 1990s, leading to overwhelming paperwork and risk-management demands for frontline social workers.
- Concludes that such administrative overload **forces practitioners to choose between compliance with paperwork and bureaucracy over meaningful client engagement.**

Pascoe, K.M., Waterhouse-Bradley, B., and McGinn, T. (2023) Social Workers' Experiences of Bureaucracy: A Systematic Synthesis of Qualitative Studies, *The British Journal of Social Work*, Volume 53, Issue 1, pp. 513–533, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcac106> (Accessed: 24 November 2025).

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- What does relational social work look like in an AI-supported practice environment?
 - How can AI enhance (not erode) the human connection?
 - Where does AI stop and relational practice begin?
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**WHAT ARE THE
IMPLICATIONS, CHALLENGES
& OPPORTUNITIES FOR
IMPROVING BOTH THE
QUALITY OF SOCIAL WORK
PRACTICE AND QUALITY OF
SUPERVISION?**



CHALLENGES

JOURNAL ARTICLE

'Magic moments': AI and the 'disappearance' of social work ethics?

Paul Michael Garrett 

The British Journal of Social Work, bcaf230, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcaf230>

Published: 30 October 2025 **Article history** 

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Abstract

The increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) in social work prompts concerns pertaining to confidentiality and privacy; self-determination and the right to participate; and engaging with individuals as 'whole persons'. Moreover, the deployment of AI may run counter to policy aspirations articulated by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) emphasizing social workers' ethical obligation to preserve the natural environment and to safeguard and sustain the planet. Turning to current developments, this contribution critically examines the use of AI assistants such as 'Magic Notes' and 'Copilot' in Britain. The notion, promoted by the AI industry, that the 'human in the loop' has the ethical capacity to override AI is questioned in the context of what Elish (2019) refers to as the 'moral crumple zone'.

Magic Notes Powered by 



Transform social workers' productivity with AI

Just hit record and let Beam's cutting-edge AI automatically generate detailed assessments customised for your teams

OPPORTUNITIES



KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- How do we bring AI literacy into professional development?
 - Where does AI help practice and supervision become richer?
 - What new risks must practitioners and supervisors navigate?
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**CAN THE USE OF AI
CO-EXIST WITH WAYS
OF WORKING IN SOCIAL
CARE THAT REQUIRE
CRITICAL THINKING?**



CONCERNS: PROFESSIONAL SKILLS & ACCOUNTABILITY

Social workers split over impact of AI on professional skills

Following social work bodies' calls for the regulation of artificial intelligence - as councils test various AI tools - practitioners debate its implications for the profession

by Anastasia Koutsounia on October 25, 2024 in Workforce

Readers' Take



- **Concerns on AI Reliability** - GenAI outputs might increase risk aversion and undermine strengths-based and human rights approaches in complex cases. A lack of transparency means that we do not know how GenAI makes decisions.
- **Impact on Professional Skills** - GenAI tools may save time but risk diminishing critical social work skills like note summarising and reflection, all important in developing relationship-based practice.
- **Reflection and Decision-Making** - Writing notes encourages deeper thinking and reflection, essential for meaningful relationship-based social work practice.
- **Human Judgment Importance** - Maintaining human judgment and reflection is crucial despite technology streamlining administrative tasks.

Community Care (2024) 'Social workers split over impact of AI on professional skills', 25 October. Available at: <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2024/10/25/social-workers-split-over-impact-of-ai-on-professional-skills/> (Accessed: 18 November 2025).

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- What does critical thinking look like with AI in the room?
 - How do practitioners stay reflexive, not passive?
 - How do we prevent AI from becoming a cognitive shortcut?
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QUESTIONS

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