

PSYCHOLOGIES

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I'm a 55 year old female with a background in administration and office management. I also do some relief work with youngsters with learning difficulties. I got my degree at the grand age of 50. I would love to apply for a post-graduate course in social work – I would still have a few years to give by the time I have finished the course. Am I mad? Any advice would be much appreciated.

Well, first of all congratulations on pursuing your degree at 50 - you really demonstrate that it's never too late! It does sound as though you've already made up your mind to apply, and after all, what's the harm in applying – it's always good to have a choice.

Even so, I'm not clear what's causing your doubt and perhaps neither are you? Concerns about money or whether you'll find a job? Or something else?

Perhaps it's the reactions or likely reactions of those around you? Those around us who care about us will always have an 'agenda' of their own for us and because we generally resist change, they also imagine that our choices will have a negative impact on them. Yet that doesn't mean it will be and it doesn't mean that we shouldn't pursue our own dreams and desire for a fulfilling and rewarding life.

Given your relief work, it certainly sounds as though 'giving back' and working with young people with some real challenges are linked to some of your values. I believe that living your values as fully as you can is what brings us a sense of inner fulfilment so who could really criticise you for following your heart.

Fran McDonnell, social care workforce development consultant and chair of *British Association of Social Workers'* learning and development committee, responding to debate this year about the entry age for social workers wrote:

"I think what matters is a thorough selection process to ensure applicants are suitable and that they have shown interest and aptitude in working with others: such as whether they have done some voluntary work. You might also if you can volunteer or do some part time-work in a social work environment, utilising your existing skills as a 'bridge', that would bring you a step closer again to the type of role you want and gain more experience in the area than other potential applicants.

Getting Practical

That said there are some practical considerations that I'd encourage you to think about so that you at the very least can satisfy yourself that you have a plan.

How do you plan to finance your studies? According to the government's website if you are studying for a career in social work, you may be able to get a non-repayable bursary through the NHS Business Service Authority's Prescription Pricing Division. These bursaries are available to eligible students who don't get funding from their employer and are studying an approved undergraduate or postgraduate course in social work. Your university or college will tell you if your course qualifies.

Assuming you successfully applied and completed your course, you'd be 52 at the earliest before you could apply for work in this field. What arrangements have you in place for your retirement, and how much of that is linked to the value of your pension from your existing employer. What are the pension benefits likely to be in your new role?

Finally, what's the demand for social workers in your local area? Are you prepared to relocate to find a role? If you couldn't find a job immediately how would you plan to support yourself and any dependents?

Whatever you decide to do, the best of luck.

For more information about studying for a career in Social Work visit http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/ChoicesAfterYou/Graduate/DG_10012475

More information can be found at <http://www.socialworkcareers.co.uk/>
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