



**south ayrshire**  
health & social care  
partnership

# South Ayrshire HSCP TRAINEE MENTAL HEALTH OFFICER SCHEME 2024 - 2026



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## Introduction

Interest in the MHO award has not been consistent among social work staff in South Ayrshire. The development of a trainee MHO scheme is essential in generating this interest and ensuring that enough staff are trained and supported to become MHOs. This training scheme would place social workers within the MHO service on a full-time basis. In addition, there are very significant challenges with completing the supervising officer (SO) role and trainees placed within the MHO team would have the core function of completing SO review under the supervision of the MHO team so that 100% return on the SO role would be provided by the trainees. Every trainee offered a position within the team would have a significant portion of their caseload dedicated to the SO role. The trainee role then would provide an opportunity not only to support several new MHOs but would also fulfil the partnerships statutory duty to complete the SO role.

Several MHO posts will be made available to qualified social workers, subject to specific requirements outlined within this document. Successful applicants without a recognised MHO qualification will be fully supported to complete the MHO Postgraduate Certificate with the Strathclyde university MHO award. In addition to learning support provided by the university, close support from a locally based Practice Assessor (PA) and Line Manager will be available throughout the duration of study and the social worker would be placed in the statutory MHO (SMHO) team throughout the duration of the course.

Given the nature of the course, a significant amount of study will take place out with the timetabled study days. Trainee MHOs must be committed to attending Strathclyde university for the timetabled study days, of which there are twenty throughout the academic year. Currently there are five practice assessors located within the SMHO team and a PA would be provided for each of the trainees. Furthermore, each trainee would be fully immersed in the practice of the MHO team and spend time with the MHO group in covering the three major pieces of legislation related to MHO work.

Upon successful completion of the course, the individual will continue in their role as a Mental Health Officer within the SMHO team. Continued employment is dependent on successful completion of the MHO Postgraduate Certificate, although redeployment would be considered in other circumstances.

Prospective applicants must demonstrate at least two years of qualified social work experience. Experience in any area of social work practice is acceptable in this instance with previous mental health experience being desirable but not essential. Trainee positions may be advertised individually or concurrently alongside qualified MHO positions. Concurrently advertised positions will contain a separate job specification for Trainee MHOs.

The financial cost of supporting Trainee MHOs to achieve the necessary qualification is a significant investment of South Ayrshire resources and, for this reason, priority will be given to applicants who are able to demonstrate a strong commitment to MHO practice. If applications were limited internally then the trainee post would be advertised externally.

## Recruitment and Selection Process

The Trainee MHO scheme formalises a process where the employment of a Trainee can be considered for any vacant MHO post. It will be possible for the MHO Practice coordinator to consider the recruitment of Trainee MHOs from Autumn 2024 onwards.

Successful recruitment to Trainee MHO posts has previously depended on both the timing of job adverts and the university student intake process. By developing a more flexible partnership agreement with Strathclyde university, it would be possible for MHO course applications to be considered at any time. However, irrespective of when applications are made, the course itself starts in September each year. This is subject to prospective applicants expressing their interest in the Trainee MHO Scheme and gaining endorsement from the relevant MHO Practice Lead. The applicant is expected to secure their placement on the course before employment as a Trainee MHO is formalised. Very specific guidance regarding this process will be available to applicants within the Trainee MHO job advert.

After making relevant enquiries and receiving endorsement from the relevant MHO Practice Lead, the process of applying for a Trainee MHO position is two-phased:

1. MHO course interview at Strathclyde:  
This process would involve preparing a piece of written work before attending an interview. The interview would be led by a university representative and supported by a member of the local MHO Practice Lead Team. If successful at this phase, course placement is dependent on successfully gaining employment as a Trainee MHO (see Phase 2 below), unless other arrangements have been made with your current employer.
2. Job Interview (South Ayrshire):  
After successfully completing Phase 1 and submitting a Trainee MHO application, the short-listing and selection process will be undertaken by a panel consisting of the senior manager, MHO coordinator and the MHO Practice Team Lead.

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## Employment Terms

The Trainee MHO Job Description is included in a separate document attached alongside the Person Specification. The Trainee MHO will be employed by South Ayrshire HSCP (Health and Social Care Partnership) at Grade 10. Successful applicants will be ordinarily appointed at the starting spinal column point for this grade and will be eligible to receive annual salary increases. All Trainee MHOs will be subject to South Ayrshires Terms and Conditions of Employment.

Trainee MHOs will be paid travel and subsistence in accordance with the Travel and Subsistence Policy with mileage paid at the Business Mileage rate.

Once the Trainee MHO has successfully completed their academic qualification and achieved registration as a qualified MHO, the post will revert to that of an MHO and a new contract of employment will be issued. The expectation is that the person will remain in that post.

Trainee MHOs are expected to complete their training in within one year, with the potential need for an extension period, depending on practice experience opportunities. The need for an extension period is dependent on the decision made by Strathclyde University and the Practice Assessor in consultation with the Trainee MHO. South Ayrshire support will be withdrawn after one year or following any agreed extension period. If the trainee is not successful in obtaining the MHO award after this period, then redeployment will be considered.

South Ayrshire HSCP may seek to recoup all, or part, of financial costs accrued by supporting the Trainee MHO if they fail to complete the academic programme or do not remain employed as an MHO with South Ayrshire for a period of two years thereafter. If the Trainee MHO fails to obtain the relevant qualification, their contract of employment as a Trainee MHO will be terminated and efforts will be made, in accordance with South Ayrshire HSCP Redeployment Policy, to redeploy the individual into another post proportionate to their qualification, skills, and experience.

## Practice Experience

An important component of gaining the MHO Postgraduate Certificate is the gaining of relevant practice experience, which is formally assessed by a designated South Ayrshire Practice Assessor. The Practice Assessor is a qualified MHO with significant experience in this role. Trainee MHOs will be supervised to undertake elements of the statutory role relating to each module of study. The modules covered throughout the academic year are briefly detailed below:

1. Mental Well-being and Mental Disorder
2. Adults with Incapacity
3. Mental Disorder - Offenders, Young People and Family

Relevant practice competencies must be met in accordance with each Strathclyde Module Proforma. All Trainee MHOs can expect to undertake practice experiences with South Ayrshire and planning will be undertaken to identify opportunities to meet their training needs. In addition, Trainees will be expected to complete at least two supervising officer reviews per week.

The main support for the Trainee MHO will come from the SMHO team in which they work, their practice assessor and their line manager. Individuals will receive a planned workplace induction, managerial supervision, and practice assessor supervision, in addition to collegiate advice, support and guidance, on a routine basis.

Overall management and coordination of Trainee MHO workload will be carefully considered by the practice assessor and line manager.