



**AASW**  
Australian Association  
of Social Workers

# Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards

(ASWEAS)

NOVEMBER 2024

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# Preamble

## AASW

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) is the professional body for social workers in Australia. With more than 17,000 members it represents and supports an active and vibrant community of social workers in their essential work, and sets the benchmarks for professional education and practice in social work.

Membership of the AASW is available to applicants holding either: an AASW accredited social work qualification from an Australian tertiary institution; or Qualifications from overseas that have been recognised by the AASW as comparable to an AASW approved social work qualification.

## AASW Strategic Plan 2024-2027

### Our vision

Wellbeing and social justice in Australia.

### Our purpose

Empowering social workers to make a difference.

### Our strategic priorities

- champion the social work profession
- drive professional growth
- create a better future.

### Our commitment to reconciliation

The AASW acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their families and communities, the First Australians, whose lands, winds and waters we all now share, and pays respect to their unique values and their continuing and enduring cultures that deepen and enrich the life of our nation and communities.

The Australian Association of Social Workers' vision for Reconciliation is one where all Australians hear and learn the truth of our past, act in the present to progress a just society which represents all of us.

To achieve this vision, the AASW commits to elevating and amplifying the voices, cultures and knowledges of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to foster a better, fairer society led by our values of caring for everyone.

# Introduction

## Global definition of social work

The following definition of social work was approved by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) in July 2014:

"Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing."<sup>1</sup>

## New directions for social work and education

Social work is a growing and rapidly evolving profession facing major changes on many fronts. The workplace is increasingly complex and challenging with communication technologies not only impacting on how social workers engage and deliver services but potentially reshaping the nature and scope of their work. The AASW seeks to ensure that Higher Education Providers ("Providers") equip the next generation of social workers for more complex and diverse roles in a changing workplace including:

- a significant increase in awareness of public safety and risk mitigation across all health-related professional accreditation programs
- a heightened awareness of the need to protect vulnerable people
- a shift in emphasis from planning for single professions towards multi-disciplinary team-based care
- increased collaborative work across diverse social work context and the need to maintain distinct social work identities
- new service funding models and increased privatisation of social work services
- changes to the profile of the workforce
- growing numbers of social workers involved in private practice
- expanding range of services available to people experiencing disabilities through the National Disability Insurance Scheme and other government schemes
- the use of technologies related to telehealth, e-health and case management
- the transformative potential (and risks) of AI-based systems in social work practice.

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<https://www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work/>

For social work education the challenges include:

- expansion of programs by existing Providers and growth of new Providers
- increased enrolments and demand for placements
- limited availability of suitable social work practice placements
- increased demand for flexible and collaborative digital learning
- increasing costs of degree programs and associated student living costs
- the introduction of practicum payments
- the promise and challenges of using simulation-based learning
- the impact of generative AI on curriculum design, delivery and student assessment.

## **Purposes of program accreditation**

The professional accreditation process has several purposes. These include:

- delivering an independent quality-assurance process for assessing social work programs
- ensuring social work programs fully equip graduates with the confidence and competence to enter the profession
- providing assurance to the public, employers, regulators, accrediting agencies, and government that graduates are ready to practise safely and effectively
- maintaining the integrity and accountability of the profession against its own standards
- supporting and enhancing the professional identity and standing of social workers
- encouraging innovation while maintaining a set of shared core elements underpinning all programs
- assisting student and graduate mobility to study and practice within Australia and overseas.

The accreditation process aims to determine whether:

- the program submitted by a Provider is capable of producing social work graduates with the skills and attributes identified by the ASWEAS for entry-level social work
- graduates will possess the capabilities specified by the Provider
- the integrity and quality of the program is sustainable over the period for which it is accredited.

The outcomes-based focus of ASWEAS is designed to accommodate a range of educational approaches, models, variations and innovations in curriculum design and teaching methods appropriate to the Provider context. Providers are expected to demonstrate the ways in which the program design and delivery will achieve the outcomes proposed.

## The AASW as professional accreditor

In the absence of a legislated regulatory framework in Australia, the social work profession is self-regulating. Over time, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) has become the body nominated by members, HEPs and the broader professional community to set and maintain standards of professional conduct for social workers educated or seeking to work in Australia. Since 1998, the AASW has had a Services Contract with the Commonwealth Government, whereby the Government devolved assessment of international qualifications to the AASW.

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) is Australia's independent national regulator of the higher education sector. The role of TEQSA is to safeguard the interests of all current and future students studying within Australia's higher education system. It does this by regulating and assuring the quality of Providers. TEQSA is responsible for the registration and re-registration of Providers and the academic accreditation and re-accreditation of courses of study. It applies the Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF) Threshold Standards 2021<sup>2</sup>. ASWEAS does not seek to duplicate the role of TEQSA, however, it does acknowledge the baseline acceptable requirements for the provision of higher education in or from Australia under the seven domains of the HESF.

ASWEAS 2024 aligns with the TEQSA 'Guidance Note Work Integrated Learning' (May 2022) as it applies to the effectiveness of social work placements, specifically that which directs Providers to consider if the activity:

- is a seamless and integral part of a course of study
- is of benefit to all parties involved
- assists students in their development of work-readiness and employability.

ASWEAS 2024 has also been designed in the context of new and emerging developments in the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) accreditation standards for health professions, the requirements of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law<sup>3</sup>.

## Towards regulation across the nation

The AASW has actively been pursuing national registration for social workers in Australia. The establishment of the Social Workers Registration Board of South Australia (SWRB SA)<sup>4</sup> marks a major step towards regulation across the nation. The purpose of the SWRB SA is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the public by upholding high standards of competence, accountability, and professionalism among social workers.

From July 2025, the SWRB SA will have oversight of approval of courses that lead to accreditation of social work programs in South Australian institutions, and access to the accreditation reports from all other jurisdictions. Registration in South Australia will strive to enhance quality and effectiveness of social work practice. It will restrict the use of the title "social worker", determine the qualifications, pathways to registration, and other requirements appropriate for registration, particularly definitions of Social Work Services and Scope of Practice.

2 [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021](https://www.ahpra.gov.au/Accreditation/Accreditation-standards.aspx)

3 <https://www.ahpra.gov.au/Accreditation/Accreditation-standards.aspx>

4 <https://www.swrb.sa.gov.au>

For Providers in South Australia there may be requirements, additional to ASWEAS, prescribed by the Social Work Registration Board.

### **A new approach to the AASW accreditation process**

In 2023 the AASW established an **Accreditation Council** signalling the formation of a more independent, rigorous and cohesive accreditation process. The Council will, in conjunction with the **Accreditation Assessment Panels** and **AASW Accreditation Team**, significantly reinforce the AASW Accreditation Framework for evaluating social work programs. This strengthened approach is designed not only to uphold high-quality standards but also to support ongoing enhancement in professional social work education and training.

By focusing on a process that is both positive and constructive, and grounded in peer review, the Council and Panels work in tandem to ensure that social work graduates meet the competencies and learning outcomes necessary for safe and effective practice as required by the Australian Social Work Education Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS). This approach aims to enhance the credibility and integrity of the accreditation framework while also highlighting the expertise of the Accreditation Assessment Panels to ensure the process meets the needs of the community and the demands of professional social work practice.

# Focus of ASWEAS 2024

The 2024 accreditation standards aim to provide a strong, coherent and forward-looking statement of AASW's aspirations for the high standing and expertise of the profession, fostering high levels of public trust and serving the public good over the next decade and beyond.

The core guiding principle underpinning ASWEAS is that the public, particularly vulnerable people, are protected and have confidence in the safety of services provided by social work graduates.

In keeping with national and international trends, ASWEAS 2024 shifts the focus of accreditation away from compliance with program inputs to student learning outcomes. It invites Providers to demonstrate that their graduates are ready to commence their professional roles as competent and confident entry-level career social workers.

The final section of ASWEAS specifies the expectations of entry-level social workers in relation to the Practice Standards 2023. Assessment of student performance against these elements is central to ensuring that professional learning outcomes have been met and that graduating students are equipped to practise ethically and safely as entry-level social workers.

ASWEAS 2024 is also now more directly aligned and in step with the recently published core suite of AASW documents including: the **Code of Ethics (2020)**, **Practice Standards (2023)**, and the new **Accreditation Framework (2023)**. ASWEAS 2024 provides clearer direction about service-user involvement in Australian social work education and the importance of the lived experience of service users (and their families or carers) forming an important part of the knowledge and skills underpinning social work education.

In revising the ASWEAS 2024, AASW acknowledges the increasingly diverse contexts and approaches of Providers and encourages a range of educational models and variations in curriculum design and teaching methods. It removes real or perceived barriers to innovation in educational programs, and differentiation of curriculum and pedagogical approaches by programs, and is sufficiently flexible to allow for the development of distinctive degree programs aligned with the Provider's context.

# ASWEAS 2024 Standards

## Domain 1: Readiness for professional practice

<b>Standard 1: Knowledge, skills and attributes</b>	Graduates are equipped with the knowledge, skills and attributes needed to assure the public they are fit for safe, effective and ethical practice as entry-level practitioners.
<b>Standard 2: Professional identity</b>	Graduates have a clear sense of themselves developing as professional social workers with the confidence and competence expected of them by colleagues, employers and the public.

## Domain 2: Alignment of theory and practice

<b>Standard 3: Knowledge for practice</b>	Graduates have acquired a coherent and contemporary knowledge base of theories, principles and concepts informing social work practice.
<b>Standard 4: Practice education</b>	The structure, developmental cycle and range of authentic practice-based learning activities are integrated with all elements of the overall program.
<b>Standard 5: Assessment</b>	Assessment strategies and tasks provide clear evidence of the progressive development of knowledge, skills, values and understandings of students as they advance through the program.

## Domain 3: Policies, processes and resources

<b>Standard 6: Equity, access and student support</b>	Across all educational settings the student experience is characterised by equitable and accessible processes, recognising and supporting students as active contributors to their learning outcomes.
<b>Standard 7: Admissions, credit decisions and degree requirements</b>	Students are admitted to the program on the basis that they have the capability and suitability required to achieve the specified academic and practice learning outcomes.
<b>Standard 8: Leadership, staffing and resources</b>	The program is governed, managed and administered to a consistent quality, and is appropriately staffed by social work qualified staff who are eligible for membership of the AASW, and resourced to ensure it fully supports the preparation of entry-level social workers to practice safely and effectively.

## Domain 1: Readiness for professional practice

### Standard 1: Knowledge, skills and attributes

**Graduates are equipped with the knowledge, skills and attributes needed to assure the public they are fit for safe, effective and ethical practice as entry-level practitioners.**

#### Criterion

Providers are able to demonstrate that, at specified milestone points, and on completion of their program, students will have attained the outcomes at an entry level that AASW considers appropriate for each of the nine **AASW Practice Standards 2023** as listed in the appendix to this document.

#### 1. Mapping core attributes

Providers should be able to map the development of students' core attributes across the program, specifically, their skills, competence and confidence, including but not limited to:

- a. engaging people and structures to address life challenges, understand the causality of vulnerability and enhance wellbeing
- b. being informed by a critical understanding of contemporary social work theory and research
- c. forming and applying a coherent set of social work values, philosophy and understandings
- d. working ethically across a diverse range of social work practice settings
- e. articulating the application of their theoretical knowledge to professional practice experiences
- f. taking accountability for their actions and the decisions they make
- g. demonstrating the personal resilience required to meet the challenges and demands of social work
- h. seeking advice and mentoring from supervisors or senior colleagues
- i. advocating for policies, processes that impact on the people they are supporting.

#### 2. Knowledge and skills for contemporary practice

AASW expects that graduates will be fully prepared and guided by contemporary theoretical approaches and bodies of knowledge to:

- a. undertake biopsychosocial assessments including:
  - i. assessing the nature and implications of risk
  - ii. identifying strengths and resources
  - iii. applying appropriate change and intervention strategies

- iv. understanding the ethical issues associated with power imbalances.
- b. manage multiple and complex factors that impact on the safety and wellbeing of people including:
  - i. responding appropriately to trauma, abuse, danger, and accumulative harm factors
  - ii. addressing and assisting the management of crisis situations
  - iii. supporting people experiencing uncertainty, loss and grief
  - iv. strengthening their ability and capacity to manage challenging circumstances.
- c. demonstrate high-level interpersonal skills across all areas of practice, particularly:
  - i. engaging confidently, compassionately, and effectively with individuals, groups and communities
  - ii. applying effective counselling, advocacy, negotiation, mediation and conflict resolution skills
  - iii. building and sustaining relationships with service users, colleagues, support workers, volunteers and other professionals in the workspace
  - iv. contributing and advocating for a social work perspective to a multi-disciplinary team.
- d. demonstrate the skills required to communicate and interact effectively with service users, professional colleagues and employers, particularly:
  - i. oral communication skills
  - ii. listening, conversational and relationship-building skills
  - iii. the use of clear and concise English in case notes and reports
  - iv. understanding and responding to the complex language and reasoning of authorities, agencies and legal sources
  - v. keeping accurate, comprehensive and timely records
  - vi. competency across new and emerging communication platforms.
- e. apply critical thinking to structural issues, policy analysis, and social justice advocacy that impact on practice, including:
  - i. discrimination, oppression, and social, political, environmental and economic injustices
  - ii. historical injustices affecting service user communities
  - iii. gender equity
  - iv. impact of environmental degradation on the wellbeing of communities
  - v. marginalised, vulnerable and minority populations
  - vi. social welfare policies, services and laws.
- f. plan, lead and manage social work projects including:
  - i. conducting research and program evaluation
  - ii. interpreting and incorporating research into practice
  - iii. understanding the use and risks of generative AI tools in research and practice.

### **3. Cultural responsiveness**

AASW expects that accredited programs will include a significant range of learning experiences that enable graduates to work in culturally responsive ways across diverse populations, including with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. The development of culturally responsive knowledge and skills should be appropriately integrated within the program and articulated as a required learning outcome.

The learning outcomes aimed at achieving culturally responsive practice include, but are not limited to:

- a. understanding that a strengths approach of social work aims to support the aspirations of individuals and groups
- b. responding to the combination of cultural variables and the full range of dimensions of diversity that individuals and groups bring to interactions
- c. responding appropriately to the attributes and expectations of the person, family or community with whom they are working
- d. communicating in ways that is both linguistically and culturally appropriate
- e. respecting other cultures and fully cognisant of and sensitive to contrasts with their own experience and realities
- f. practising from a culturally safe framework that prioritises the physical, emotional, and spiritual safety of individuals from diverse identities and backgrounds
- g. the ability to share decision-making at all levels, and in some cases to share the power
- h. recognising the impacts of self in providing culturally responsive practices
- i. understanding the impact of culture identity, value and beliefs and experiences on practice and in training.

## **Standard 2: Professional identity**

**Graduates have a clear sense of themselves developing as professional social workers with the confidence and competence expected of them by colleagues, employers and the public.**

### **Criterion**

Providers are able to demonstrate that students completing the program have:

- a. a clear understanding of the attributes, roles, values and ethics of social workers in the community
- b. an appreciation of the history of social workers, the unique scope of their practice and contribution to the public good and improving the lives of the people they serve
- c. a commitment to challenging and transforming unjust systems, policies and practices
- d. a strong focus on promoting and achieving social justice and human rights
- e. the ability to examine their own biases, assumptions and the impact of their identities

- on their professional practice
- f. the ability to articulate their legal, ethical and professional responsibilities
  - g. the insight and emotional intelligence required for working with the public
  - h. the ability to apply and transfer knowledge and skills across different fields of social work practice
  - i. developed an intersectional perspective on the complexities around culture, social groups and diverse identities in society
  - j. a clear understanding of the boundaries of their professional role and mandate
  - k. the ability to work effectively with others in multi-disciplinary teams
  - l. the confidence needed to articulate their role and skills in the workplace.

## Domain 2: Alignment of theory and practice

### Standard 3: Knowledge for practice

**Graduates have acquired a coherent and contemporary knowledge base of theories, principles and concepts informing social work practice.**

#### Criterion

##### 1. Curriculum design

Providers are able to demonstrate that the program:

- a. is continually evolving within a coherent framework and logical development of the theories, principles and concepts
- b. structure and content are informed by contemporary pedagogical theory, research and practice
- c. clearly connects the elements of the curriculum to support student growth and development over the whole program
- d. enables students to connect and apply their learning to practice
- e. encourages students to critically reflect on their values and decision-making as social workers
- f. encourages students to question dominant ways of knowing, doing and being and to critically engage in the role of power in knowledge production
- g. is subject to a formal mechanism through which major stakeholders are consulted regularly to inform the curriculum content, design, and development including:
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
  - employers, practitioners and people with lived experience of social work

- industry partners
- students and recent graduates.

## **2. Main elements of the curriculum**

Providers are able to demonstrate that students have acquired:

- a. a coherent knowledge-base to guide their social work practice
- b. a foundation for their lifelong professional learning as social workers
- c. the ability to objectively review, analyse and evaluate knowledge to inform professional judgement and practice
- d. a deep understanding of the principles, theories and concepts guiding social work practice
- e. an appreciation of the nature and application of social work research
- f. an ability to critically appraise research findings and apply research skills to their understanding of issues
- g. the ability to translate their knowledge and understanding into social work practice
- h. a commitment to the values, ethics and ideals of the social work profession
- i. a clear awareness of the power inherent in the scope and nature of the social worker's role
- j. the ability to separate personal and professional perspectives
- k. an appreciation of the need to put in place appropriate supports for themselves for their own resilience, wellbeing and safe practice.

## **3. Required Content Area 1: Social worker values and professional identity**

Providers are able to demonstrate that students have a coherent and sound knowledge of:

- a. the foundations and scope of ethical practice
- b. empowering and anti-oppressive practice
- c. intersectionality and the compounding effects of discrimination, stigma and power imbalances
- d. principles of human rights and social justice
- e. the nature and origins of culture, identity and discrimination
- f. the value and application of critical thinking and reflection in social work practice
- g. the scope and nature of their professional role in relation to other professionals in the field of practice
- h. the principles underpinning the AASW Code of Ethics and Practice Standards.

## **4. Required Content Area 2: Approaches to social work**

Providers are able to demonstrate that students have a coherent and critical understanding of social work services and practice across a range of fields and sectors including:

- a. the evolving and dynamic roles of social workers

- b. human development, behaviour and needs across the life cycle
- c. the history and contemporary place of social work in Australia
- d. theories and methods of research and evaluation informing practice
- e. legislative, policy, legal and service contexts of social work practice
- f. the advocacy role of social workers
- g. social work organisations, leadership and management
- h. social work in the larger regional and global context
- i. the nature of, and responses to, racism, injustice and inequities
- j. understanding risk, risk assessment and practice strategies
- k. theories of trauma and its impact on mental health and wellbeing
- l. the sources and enablers that impact coercive and controlling abuse and violence
- m. the immediate and long-term impact of climate change, disasters and conflicts on individuals, communities and society.

## **5. Required Content Area 3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples**

AASW recognises that Providers have developed whole of institution and faculty approaches and expectations related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in the design and delivery of the curriculum. We acknowledge and understand the impact of colonisation and the ongoing oppression and intergenerational trauma suffered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We commit to acting in partnership as agents of change and healing with education and training to develop appropriate skills and understandings. We emphasise that all elements of the ASWEAS are relevant to preparing graduates to work alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. (Code of Ethics 2020 1.3)

We emphasise that all elements of the ASWEAS are relevant to preparing graduates to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We commit to acting in partnership as agents of change to build strong relationships to embed self-determination in education and training with appropriate skills and understandings. AASW expects that the programs will be guided by AASW Practice Standard 2:

Social workers acknowledge the learnings, strengths, capacities, abilities and contributions that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make to wider society as an integral part of social work knowledge and practice.

To ensure graduates have the breadth and depth of knowledge that equips them to work alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recognising and supporting their rights and self-determination, the curriculum is expected to focus on students acquiring a deep understanding of the:

- a. diversity among, and differences between, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures throughout Australia
- b. cultural knowledge, lived experience, and wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- c. continuing impact of colonisation, institutionalised racism and the ongoing oppression and intergenerational trauma suffered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

- d. history and power of social workers as part of the system of social policies and programs
- e. the differences in definition and benefits between cultural awareness and cultural safety
- f. culturally led and informed decision-making processes facilitating the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children, young people, families, and communities.

## Standard 4: Practice education

**The structure, developmental cycle and range of authentic practice-based learning activities are integrated with all elements of the overall program.**

### Criterion

#### 1. Practice skills programs

Providers are able to demonstrate that:

- a. students complete a minimum of 140 hours (20 days) face-to-face classroom-based learning, focused on the development of professional practice skills
- b. at least 35 hours (5 days) of face-to-face professional practice skills development are provided prior to the first placement
- c. practice-theory integration seminars may be included within the required hours of the placement up to a maximum of 7 hours per 250 hours of placement, and a maximum of 28 hours across all practice placements
- d. core student learning outcomes include, but are not limited to, the professional competencies of:
  - i. advanced oral and succinct written communication skills
  - ii. engagement, assessment, intervention and decision-making with individuals and groups
  - iii. engaging and involving service users and other stakeholders in problem identification and resolution
  - iv. working effectively with others in a team environment
  - v. case formation, case management and case assessments
  - vi. collaborating with government departments, agencies, community organisations, volunteer groups and other stakeholders.
- e. all social work academic staff contribute to structured learning activities directly supporting the integration of theory and practice
- f. the program responds to increased demand for flexible, collaborative and digital learning including:
  - i. enhancing placement preparation via supervised simulations

- ii. skills-based training using methodologies other than face-to-face service provision such as telephone, video-conferencing and online learning.

## **2. Work/Industry partnerships**

Providers are able to demonstrate that:

- a. placement partnerships are a collaborative endeavour between the Provider, the student, and workplace organisations
- b. all participating partners are fully informed of their obligations and accountabilities
- c. placement activities are clearly focused on students undertaking authentic social work learning experiences
- d. student feedback specific to the placement experience is systematically collected, evaluated and used for diagnostic and quality purposes.

## **3. Roles and coordination of practice placements**

Providers are able to demonstrate that:

- a. a **Placement Coordinator** with social work qualifications and appropriate experience is appointed. The coordinator has responsibility for:
  - i. the oversight and management of the placement program
  - ii. the quality and outcomes of each placement experience
  - iii. summative assessments of student performance at the conclusion of each placement.
- b. a **Placement Liaison Officer** with social work qualifications and appropriate experience is appointed for each placement. The liaison officer has responsibility for:
  - i. acting as the primary contact with the Placement Educator
  - ii. providing support for students
  - iii. establishing a program of meetings/visits between the parties
  - iv. ensuring at least two meetings/visits occur during the placement, one in the first 4-6 weeks of a 500-hour placement and at mid-term
  - v. assessing student progress and making any necessary adjustments to assure the learning outcomes are achieved.
- c. a **Placement Educator** with social work qualifications and at least two years' social work practice experience is appointed for each placement. As the primary supervisor the Placement Educator, is responsible for:
  - i. direct supervision of the student during the placement
  - ii. providing formative structured assessment of the student with advice and support for improvement
  - iii. providing a minimum of 1.5 hours of formal, structured supervision of students during every 35 hours of placement, at least half of which is on a one-to-one basis.
- d. where the **Placement Educator** is not a social worker, the Provider will appoint an external social work qualified person who meets the same requirements and has

- the same role responsibilities, level of oversight and support, as those employed in agency-based positions
- e. the **Placement Liaison Officer** and **Placement Educator** will have an agreed communication plan for regular consultations on student progress and meet together at least twice with the student during the placement.

#### **4. Structure and duration of placements**

Providers are able to demonstrate that:

- a. students complete a program of supervised professional practice placements of at least 1000 hours
- b. at least 500 hours of placement time is undertaken in a direct practice role including supervised interaction with individuals, families, groups or communities
- c. placements are conducted over at least two years of the program of study
- d. no more than three placements are completed across the degree program
- e. no placement is less than 250 hours
- f. at least 500 hours of placement experience is undertaken in Australia
- g. each placement has the status of at least one full academic subject.

#### **5. The placement experience**

Providers are able to demonstrate that:

- a. placements align with and are supported by institutional frameworks and management systems for Work Integrated Learning
- b. students are adequately prepared to deal with conflict and heightened emotions in social work settings
- c. placements are provided in at least two distinctly different practice settings
- d. students complete at least one placement in a professional practice setting with an onsite social work qualified Practice Educator
- e. students in employment do not have a placement in their current work role or under their current supervisor
- f. only one placement may be taken in an overseas setting:
  - i. the overseas placement provides a student experience of equivalent quality to that of an Australian setting and meets all ASWEAS requirements
  - ii. the Provider appoints a staff member to liaise directly with their international counterpart.

#### **6. Induction and preparation for placements**

Providers are able to demonstrate that:

- a. a program of induction into social work practice placements is provided from commencement of the course
- b. prerequisites are completed prior to placement or in place prior for placement units

- c. placement preparatory days and briefings are:
  - i. held prior to the start of each placement
  - ii. additional to integration seminars
  - iii. not included in the 1000 placement hours.
- g. students are provided with opportunities for face-to-face engagement in placement preparation
- h. simulation can be used to enhance the preparation for the initial placement experience
- i. simulation of placement settings is used to:
  - i. provide a safe practice environment for students
  - ii. practise situations that are potentially difficult and personally challenging.

## **7. Placement supervision**

Providers are able to demonstrate that:

- a. all student placement activity is conducted under individual and/or group supervision with clear role statements provided
- b. where the Practice Educator is not on site there must be a task supervisor/manager on site and these roles will work together
- c. assessment of student learning is informed by ongoing and direct observation of student practice throughout the placement
- d. Practice Educators are provided with induction and training.

## **8. Work experience as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for placements**

Providers are able to demonstrate that:

- a. students given credit for work experience can engage with the learning required and achieve the program learning outcomes
- b. RPL for work experience is only used for part or all of the first placement
- c. RPL is only granted for applicants who have worked for at least the equivalent of three full-time years in a field of practice that clearly aligns with social work settings
- d. students given credit for RPL can demonstrate a level of knowledge, competencies and skills consistent with those expected of a social work student at the end of first placement
- e. at least the final year of the work experience for which RPL is claimed is within five years of applying for RPL
- f. all students approved for RPL undertake a final placement with direct supervision by a qualified social worker
- g. assessment of applications for RPL is the responsibility of the social work academic lead of the Academic Organisation Unit.

## **Standard 5: Assessment**

**Assessment strategies and tasks provide clear evidence of the progressive development of knowledge, skills, values and understandings of students as they advance through the program.**

### **Criterion**

#### **1. Assessment across the program**

Providers are able to demonstrate that:

- a. staff assessing students in the program are suitably experienced, prepared for the task and hold a social work qualification recognised for eligibility for membership of the AASW
- b. protocols and guidelines are in place to ensure consistency of processes and criteria across all assessment tasks
- c. assessment of the attributes required of entry-level practitioners is evident across all aspects of the teaching program
- d. assessment tasks require a level of English appropriate to a linguistically demanding professional workplace
- e. students are not able to proceed through the program if they are assessed as not ready for practice at the expected level of performance
- f. the scope of assessment covers all intended learning and performance outcomes
- g. the forms of assessments should include a range of tasks including direct observation and testing for practical skills
- h. the forms of assessment are robust, fair, reliable and moderated
- i. assessment criteria are transparent and universally applied across the cohort
- j. there is a steady progression in the complexity and demands of assessment requirements as the course proceeds
- k. final year assessment includes tasks designed to confirm students' skills, knowledge and readiness for practice.

#### **2. Assessment of practice skills**

Providers are able to demonstrate that:

- a. both formative and summative assessment of student practice skills are used to map the development and achievement of:
  - i. competency in biopsychosocial assessment
  - ii. a theoretical and values base underpinning professional practice
  - iii. the skills required for clear and concise report writing
  - iv. multi-disciplinary collaborative competencies
  - v. a high level of interpersonal communication skill

- vi. the resilience and confidence to manage the demands of the social work workplace.
- b. practice skills are assessed across all contexts including, where appropriate, in the classroom, remote and simulated learning, and the placement experience
- c. students are able to identify and critically assess structural factors impacting on safety and wellbeing of vulnerable people
- d. students have achieved competency in a variety of modalities of interventions
- e. assessment of practice skills is standardised across the cohort
- f. the design of assessment tasks undertaken in placements is informed by advice and contributions from key stakeholders and workplace organisations.

## Domain 3: Policies, processes and resources

## Standard 6: Equity, access and student support

**Across all educational settings the student experience is characterised by equitable and accessible processes, recognising and supporting students as active contributors to their learning outcomes.**

### Criterion

#### 1. Equity

Providers are able to demonstrate that students at all sites and across all modes of delivery:

- a. have a learning experience of equivalent quality
- b. learning is supported by staffing at an equivalent level
- c. are provided with an equivalent number of hours in guided academic learning.

#### 2. Access

Providers are able to demonstrate that:

- a. students have access to appropriate learning and technology resources regardless of location, methods of delivery, or program option
- b. student support services are commensurate with the needs of students, regardless of location, methods of delivery, or program option
- c. practice placement requirements accommodate, to a reasonable level, students' personal, financial, family and work circumstances
- d. students have the information they need to fully engage in practice skills experiences including attendance and assessment requirements, and roles and responsibilities of all parties.

### **3. Student support**

Providers are able to demonstrate that:

- a. students are informed of the availability of personal and professional support services
- b. the student experience is enhanced by planned regular contact with staff qualified and experienced in social work
- c. students are provided with timely and sufficiently detailed feedback to enable them to make adjustments and improve their performance
- d. the academic learning needs of students are identified at the point of admission, and throughout the program, and academic support is provided
- e. supportive and reasonable adjustments are in place for students with health conditions or impairments to enable them to progress through their course and meet the Graduate Attributes
- f. a planned approach is in place to support graduates in their transition to the work force.

### **4. Student voice**

Providers are able to demonstrate that students have:

- a. opportunities to provide feedback specific to the design and delivery of the program
- b. formal and informal opportunities to contribute to ongoing program improvement
- c. access to advice and support from the Academic Organisational Unit to pursue grievance and appeals processes.

### **5. Program information**

Providers are able to demonstrate that information regarding the program:

- a. is accessible and accurate for existing and prospective students
- b. identifies the accreditation status of the program
- c. communicates changes in program policies and procedures to all students in an effective and timely manner
- d. specifies the entry requirements including minimum levels of English needed to successfully participate
- e. provides accurate and up to date requirements for practice placements.

## **Standard 7: Admissions, credit decisions and degree requirements**

**Students are admitted to the program on the basis that they have the capability and suitability required to achieve the specified academic and practice learning outcomes.**

## Criterion

### 1. Admissions

Providers should ensure that:

- a. applicants for BSW and BSW (Hons) programs meet the entry requirements as specified by the Provider and consistent with the requirements for admission to AQF Level 7 or 8, degree courses
- b. students admitted to the MSW (Q) are required to have completed a relevant three-year AQF Level 7 degree that contains **at least one year**, or the equivalence of full-time study in social and behavioural sciences
- c. admitted students have:
  - i. no known limitations that would be expected to impede their progression and completion (Higher Education Standards Framework 2021)
  - ii. a level of academic preparation and proficiency in English needed to participate in their intended study (Higher Education Standards Framework 2021)
  - iii. a level of English that enables them to engage effectively in practice-based learning.
- d. International students who have not completed a Year 12 or equivalent secondary school level qualification or higher qualification in the English language have a minimum score of 7.0 or higher in each component (listening, reading, writing and speaking) of the Academic International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test, or equivalent, prior to commencing the program.

### 2. Credit

Although recognising the autonomy of issuing organisations, the AASW considers that once requested by a Provider to accredit a program, the AASW has a responsibility to the public, to students and to its members to confirm that decisions on credit ensure that the integrity and standing of social work programs and qualification outcomes is maintained.

Providers should ensure that:

- a. all students undertake the core elements of the program
- b. students are not exempted from core social work subjects on the basis of the qualification that led to their initial acceptance into the program
- c. students transferring from one AASW accredited program to another of the same AQF level, are eligible for credit for equivalent courses up to the maximum credit allowed by a Provider
- d. students admitted from bridging programs cannot be given credit for any subjects in that program
- e. where work experience is recognised as credit for prior learning:
  - i. the relevance and currency of the work aligns with Provider policy
  - ii. the quality and integrity of the program is maintained
  - iii. the work experience is unambiguously related to the program objectives and learning outcomes

- iv. credit awarded in recognition of prior learning should not result in any gaps or deficiencies in student attainment of the graduate capabilities.
- f. candidates entering a Master of Social Work program who have completed a three-year social welfare program may be granted a maximum of 25% or one semester of four as long as the Academic Organisational Unit can ensure that graduates meet all required learning outcomes for Australian social work graduates.

### **3. Degree requirements**

Providers should ensure that BSW and BSW (Hons) graduates are required to complete:

Four years full-time, or its part-time equivalent, of a Bachelor of Social Work degree at AQF Level 7 or 8, that includes at least one year of full-time studies in social or behavioural sciences program. A four-year program may include an embedded Honours program in accordance with AQF Level 8

OR

Two years full-time of a Bachelor of Social Work degree at AQF Level 7 or 8, or its part-time equivalent, following a minimum of two years of a relevant undergraduate degree that includes at least one year of full-time studies in social or behavioural sciences program.

MSW(Q) graduates are required to complete two years full-time of a Master of Social Work degree at AQF Level 9 or its part-time equivalent.

Where the HEP offers multiple pathways into and through the social work program, it should demonstrate how each pathway meets the accreditation requirements set out in ASWEAS.

## **Standard 8: Leadership, staffing and resources**

**The program is governed, managed and administered to a consistent quality, and is appropriately staffed by social work qualified staff who are eligible for membership of the AASW, and resourced to ensure it fully supports the preparation of entry-level social workers to practice safely and effectively.**

### **Criterion**

#### **1. Leadership**

Providers will be able to demonstrate that:

- a. the social work program is located within a discrete **Academic Organisation Unit (AOU)** such as a faculty or school with aligned or cognate disciplines, and clearly defined governance, and direct reporting lines
- b. the organisational structure and processes of the AOU are appropriate to ensuring the achievement of the AASW standards for accreditation
- c. the overall staffing profile is sufficient to provide the collective academic leadership required to meet these Standards

- d. the designated **Discipline Lead** of the program is a social work qualified academic and:
  - i. has qualifications appropriate for the level of leadership required to develop and promote the discipline and teaching program
  - ii. has an acknowledged strong record of professional social work experience and expertise
  - iii. has a recognised record of scholarship and research, with an ongoing profile of research and publications in social work
  - iv. is represented on committees with responsibility for the discipline-specific academic components of the social work programs and input into decision-making regarding processes that directly or indirectly impact on the social work program
  - v. leads the **Academic Teaching Team** across all aspects of program design and delivery.
- e. members of the **Academic Teaching Team** are qualified social workers with wide-ranging knowledge, skills and demonstrable experience of social work practice, teaching and scholarship
- f. the **Academic Teaching Team** is actively involved in the design and delivery of all aspects the curriculum including:
  - i. selection of core and elective units
  - ii. learning outcomes and assessment methods
  - iii. program evaluation strategies.
- g. risks to the sustainable delivery of the social work program are regularly monitored and evaluated, and mitigation strategies are documented.

## 2. Staffing

Providers will be able to demonstrate that:

- a. academic staff teaching the program, including those from related fields, have the knowledge, skills and experience relevant to the general and specialist subject areas taught
- b. the research activities of staff contribute to the evidence-base of the program and more generally to the standing of the social work profession
- c. the Provider actively recruits or draws on staff or other individuals with the knowledge, expertise and culturally safe practice to support the teaching of social work practice with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander service users and communities
- d. the number and academic profile of staff teaching the program is sufficient to ensure that students are effectively prepared for social work practice across the entire program
- e. programs have sufficient appropriately qualified and experienced academic support staff dedicated to the delivery of practice placements and the management of workplace learning.

### **3. Resources**

Providers will ensure that the program has:

- a. sufficient resources to ensure the quality of the program is sustainable over the period of accreditation
- b. appropriate classroom spaces and dedicated spaces for student interaction
- c. the equipment and learning technologies suitable for the learning and teaching approaches employed
- d. communications and technology support to enable successful learning outcomes for all students across all sites and for all delivery modes
- e. the resources are accessible to students across all modalities and respond to changing contexts and expectations.

# Graduate attributes and the Practice Standards

The **AASW Practice Standards 2023** below have been selected, and in some cases modified, to focus attention on the core attributes the profession expects of entry-level social workers.

Direct assessment of student performance against these elements is central to Providers demonstrating that core professional learning outcomes have been met at a level appropriate for graduating students commencing their professional careers.

## Practice Standard 1: AASW Code of Ethics

Entry-level social workers should, at a minimum, demonstrate that they are able to:

- a. conduct themselves according to the values, principles and guidelines of the AASW Code of Ethics 2020 (PS 1)
- b. have a clear sense of accountability for their actions and accept responsibility for the decisions they make and their professional actions (PS 1.1)
- c. recognise and take responsibility for what is within their power, control or management (PS 1.2)
- d. can articulate the ethics underpinning their approach to decisions and actions (PS 1.4)
- e. are willing and able to seek advice from supervisors or senior colleagues on ethical issues (PS 1.5).

## Practice Standard 2: Working alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Entry-level social workers should, at a minimum, demonstrate that they are able to:

- a. practice in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to support their priorities and aspirations (PS 2)
- b. are aware of the diversity among, and differences between, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures throughout Australia (PS 2.1)
- c. respect the knowledge and lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and privilege their voices (PS 2.2)
- d. can recognise and draw upon the cultural knowledge, experience, and wisdom provided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to guide approaches to practice (PS 2.3)
- e. adopt appropriate cultural and communication protocols (PS 2.4).

## Practice Standard 3: Human rights and social justice

Entry-level social workers should, at a minimum, demonstrate that they are able to:

- a. advocate for human rights and practice in ways that aim to achieve access, equity,

- participation and legal protection for all (PS 3)
- b. ensure that the rights of the people they work with are promoted, protected, and upheld (PS 3.1)
- c. support action to enable people to live a life free of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence (PS 3.3)
- d. promote public policy initiatives aimed at eliminating structural and systemic inequities experienced by people (PS 3.6).

#### **Practice Standard 4: Culture, identity and intersectionality**

Entry-level social workers should, at a minimum, demonstrate that they are able to:

- a. conduct their approach to practice respectfully and inclusively with regard to culture and diversity (PS 4)
- b. apply an intersectional lens in their approach to complexities around culture and diversity (PS 4.1)
- c. respectfully engage with people who have culturally diverse identities (PS 4.2)
- d. adapt and modify their practice on the basis of a critical awareness of how their personal values, cultures and beliefs impact on their interactions with people (PS 4.3).

#### **Practice Standard 5: Critical thinking in practice**

Entry-level social workers should, at a minimum, demonstrate that they are able to:

- a. practise within a professional knowledge framework informed by a critical understanding of contemporary social work theory and research (PS 5)
- b. work from a clearly articulated framework for reflective practice (PS 5.1)
- c. contribute their critical perspectives in interactions with other professions in a positive and constructive manner (PS 5.4)
- d. practise within the limits of their professional scope, knowledge and skills and, where necessary, direct people to alternative sources of professional advice (PS 5.5).

#### **Practice Standard 6: Exercising professional judgement**

Entry-level social workers should, at a minimum, demonstrate that they are able to:

- a. make professional decisions on the basis of a holistic assessment of the needs, strengths, goals and preferences of people (PS 6)
- b. recognise, and use responsibly, the power and authority they have when exercising professional judgement affecting people (PS 6.1)
- c. critically assess the quality and veracity of all relevant information to support their decisions (PS 6.3)
- d. make decisions aimed primarily at achieving the best possible outcomes for people (PS 6.4)
- e. assess the nature and level of risk to people and incorporate that into the overall assessment (PS 6.5)

- f. make assessments and decide courses of action informed and guided by the lived experience, wishes and preferences of service users to the fullest extent possible (PS 6.6)
- g. consult with other professional practitioners who are contributing to the wellbeing of the people they serve or work with (PS 6.8).

### **Practice Standard 7: Professional identity**

Entry-level social workers should, at a minimum, demonstrate that they are able to:

- a. actively contribute to strengthening and promoting the identity and standing of the profession (PS 7)
- b. articulate and promote the unique scope and contribution of social work to the people they serve, including within interdisciplinary settings (PS 7.2)
- c. treat colleagues and all who contribute to the wellbeing of service users with courtesy, and demonstrate respect for their individual expertise (PS 7.3).

### **Practice Standard 8: Professional supervision**

Entry-level social workers should, at a minimum, demonstrate that they are able to:

- a. actively participate in professional supervision to build and strengthen their practice (PS 8)
- b. undertake formal supervision, relevant to their area of practice, by an appropriately trained, senior social work qualified supervisor (PS 8.1)
- c. maintain a record of supervision for the duration of the supervisory relationship (PS 8.2)
- d. use supervision to examine and critically reflect upon their personal and professional values and the implications for practice (PS 8.5)
- e. use supervision to demonstrate integration of professional knowledge and theoretical approaches to practice. (PS 8.6).

### **Practice Standard 9: Professional growth**

Entry-level social workers should, at a minimum, demonstrate that they are able to:

- a. monitor, evaluate and review their skills, knowledge and expertise (PS 9)
- b. identify their current and future professional learning needs (PS 9.3)
- c. be active learners, open to new and emerging knowledge, research and evidence informing their practice (PS 9.5).

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