



AASW
Australian Association
of Social Workers

Australian Association of Social Workers

Accreditation Framework 2024

(AASW Framework for the Accreditation of Social
Work education programs delivered by Higher Education
Providers)

This AASW Accreditation Framework is informed by professional competencies as outlined in the AASW Practice Standards, and AASW Code of Ethics.

The AASW Accreditation Framework was presented and approved at the Australian Association of Social Workers' Board Meeting on 6 July 2023.

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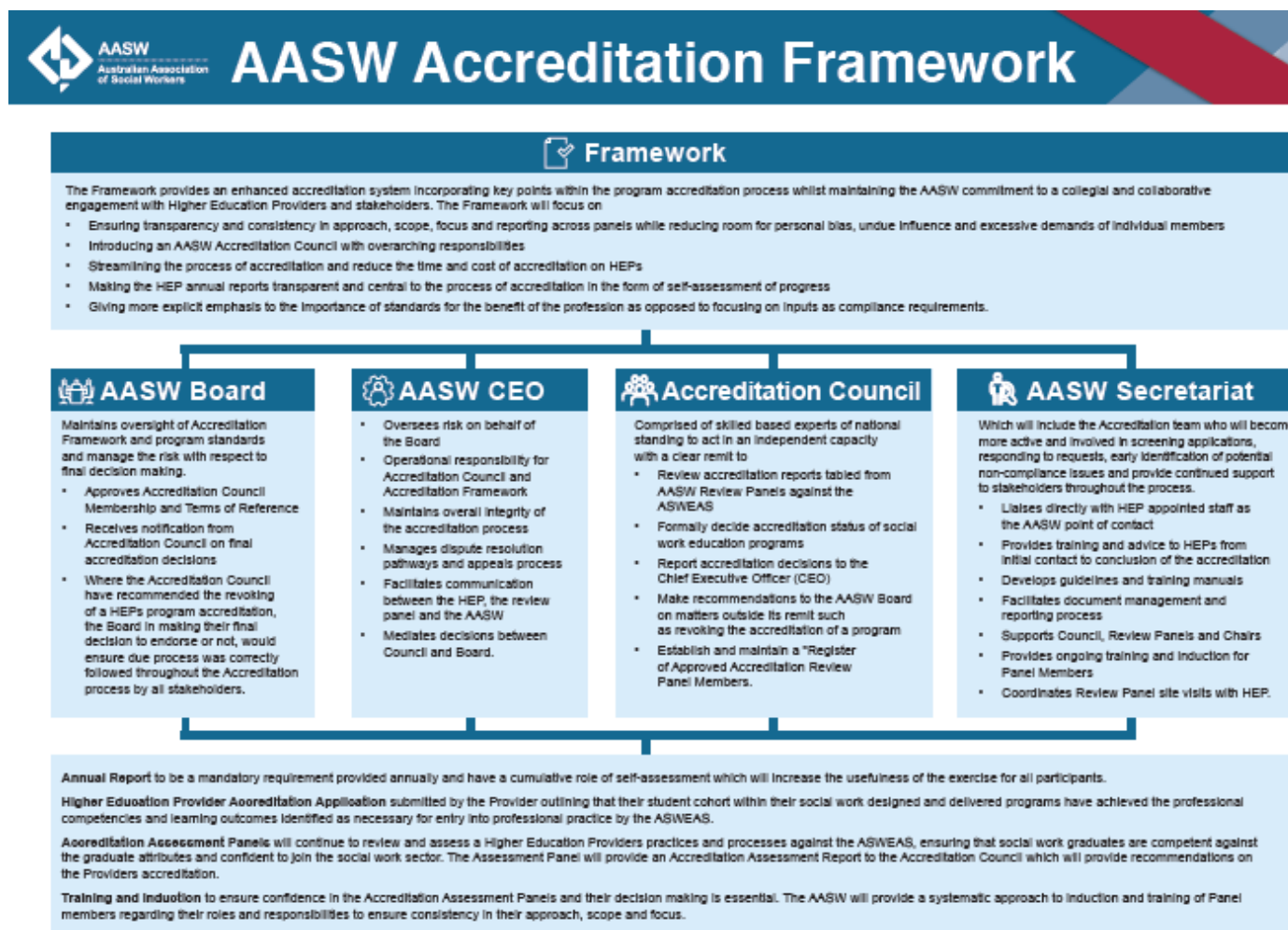
Declaration

AASW acknowledge the 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 society which represents all of us.

To achieve this vision, the AASW's 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.

Figure 1: Framework Overview



1. Foreword

The social work profession in Australia adheres to the definition of social work jointly agreed to by the International Federation of Social Workers and International Association of Schools of Social Work in 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 knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.¹

The profession subscribes to the principles and aspirations of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights², other international conventions derived from that Declaration, as well as treaties to which Australia is a signatory³ and other human rights documents.⁴

The AASW Accreditation Framework applies to the professional accreditation of programs which confirms for the community and social work employers that the graduates have completed an accredited program and that practitioners are competent. The role of AASW Accreditation is to ensure that programs have met a set of professional standards which in conjunction with the AASW Practice Standards inform the graduate attributes required by Providers to meet and comply with to achieve high standards of excellence within their processes and practices.

This document will

- Introduce you to the key elements of the Accreditation Framework 2024.
- Explain how the Framework was developed.
- Provide an overview of how the Accreditation Framework will work.
- Roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders within the Accreditation Framework

¹<http://ifsw.org/get-involved/global-definition-of-social-work/>

² <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights>

³ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/treaties/australian-treaties-database>

⁴ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/themes/human-rights/Pages/human-rights>

2. Introduction & Purpose

2.1 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.

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.

2.2 Purpose of the accreditation process

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.

2.3 Graduate Outcomes

The focus of course accreditation is to provide assurance that every graduate has successfully achieved professional approved standards. Graduates should be able to adeptly address diverse societal issues, advocating for marginalised communities, and affecting positive change. A core guiding principle is that the public, particularly vulnerable people, are protected and have confidence in the safety of services provided by social work graduates. The graduates equipped with ethical grounding can collaborate with individuals and systems, promoting wellbeing and social justice through empathetic intervention and systemic reforms. Ensuring achievement of professional approved standards involves rigorous curriculum, supervised practical experience, and continuous assessment. Evaluation includes skill demonstration, case-studies, ethical decision-making, fostering competent, compassionate, and accountable practitioners. As part of the accreditation process, it is imperative that the curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning methodology, context and resources are assessed by AASW, to demonstrate the compliance of the Higher Education Provider against the Standards.

The accreditation process aims to determine, with reasonable confidence, the extent to which:

- 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.

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

2.4 Continuous Improvement

The objective of the Accreditation process is to facilitate continuous improvement in the quality of social work education. The Provider is primarily responsible for maintaining continuous improvement within their delivered programs and this activity should include benchmarking the program across other Higher Education Providers social work programs. (*TEQSA HESF 5.3 Monitoring, Review and Improvement*)

Through the process of program accreditation, the AASW can confirm that Higher Education Providers are responding to the needs of the profession within the social work sector, as well as assure ourselves, that new Providers to the delivery of courses are not only aligned with the Standards, but additionally undertaking a cycle of continuous improvement.

2.5 Framework Consistency

Implementing a Framework for course accreditation assists with overall consistency and transparency which has a number of benefits:

- building an understanding and better communication between stakeholders, including other government organisations.
- Consistency, rigour and transparency with minimum standards for accredited courses and process
- mutual recognition of graduates' completion of accredited programs based on consistent understanding and application of the Standards and requirements.
- Consistency of approach to accreditation submissions and assessment of Higher Education Provider practices and processes.

3. Framework Principles

The guiding principles of the AASW Accreditation Framework are:

Transparency & Accountability

The Accreditation process will ensure clarity and rigour through consistent language, terminology and documentation.

The Accreditation process actively promotes high standards of integrity and ethics of stakeholders at all levels.

The Accreditation process fosters a culture of compliance through ongoing accountability and responsibility of all stakeholders.

Collaboration

The Accreditation process fosters a commitment to continue working together in a spirit of collaboration and partnership with stakeholders.

The Accreditation process through collaboration with industry will increase employer's trust in the competence of graduates.

Continuous Improvement

The Accreditation process reflects a commitment that future reviews of the ASWEAS will be based on the review of the Practice Standards and developments in the design and delivery of social work programs, alongside engagement with a range of stakeholders.

The Accreditation practices are reviewed to assist the ongoing growth of programs, through understanding and implementation of clear and effective accreditation Standards and processes especially for new Higher Education Providers and existing Providers.

The Accreditation process reflects an understanding and monitoring of changes occurring within the social work environment and the effectiveness of the processes for identifying and managing emerging risks.

Procedural Fairness

The Accreditation process is completed by all parties involved having the willingness for fair, honest and open communication, whilst reflecting at all time respect and professionalism. The Accreditation process will occur with a reasonable opportunity, for all parties to present their case without bias from any party and a fair and proper practice utilised when decision-making.

Outcome focused

The Accreditation process will provide an overview of Higher Education Providers governance, practice skills, students and curriculum.

The evaluation of alignment with the Standards through the Accreditation process ensures that the Higher Education Provider graduates are ready to enter the profession by the conclusion of the program.

4. Accreditation Framework and Standards

Accreditation refers to the process for assessing the quality and practices of an educational provider or program by an external accrediting body. It involves a thorough assessment of various aspects, such as curriculum, skills, qualifications, facilities, resources, and overall educational outcomes.

In education programs, accreditation is of principal importance for several reasons.

1. **Quality Assurance:** Accreditation ensures that a Provider's program meets certain minimum standards of quality. It provides official determination that the Provider's program delivers education which meets recognised benchmarks.
2. **Student Confidence:** Accredited programs provide students with the assurance that they are receiving an education which is valuable, suitable, current and credible.
3. **Transferability of Credits:** For students who may be seeking to transfer between Providers to pursue further education, accredited programs are more likely to have their credits recognised and accepted by the other accredited Provider.
4. **Job Market Recognition:** Accredited programs carry more weight in the job market. Employers often prefer candidates with a qualification from accredited programs, as it demonstrates that the candidate has successfully completed a quality recognised program.
5. **Continuous Improvement:** The accreditation process encourages Providers to engage in continuous self-assessment and improvement. It cultivates a culture of accountability and excellence in education.

Overall accreditation is a vital aspect of education that ensures quality standards are maintained, enhances credibility, and helps students make informed choices about their educational pursuits. It additionally promotes ongoing improvement in educational practices, which is of benefit to both students and Providers alike.

In the development of the AASW's Accreditation Framework, the association has maintained its commitment to a collegial and collaborative engagement with individual Providers and other stakeholders. The Accreditation Framework is to provide a robust, efficient, and effective accreditation process to ensure graduates have achieved the professional competencies and learning outcomes required for entry into professional practice.

Framework Review

At least once every five years the individual components of the AASW Accreditation process should be reviewed. The assessment will evaluate the substance of the framework to determine if it is still fit-for-purpose and aligns with the existing accreditation process or needs to be updated for the relevance and burdensomeness of requirements and any issues that should be reflected from the social work sector. This review will be considered and completed with consultation of various stakeholders.

AASW Standards

In addition to the points mentioned prior, it is crucial that stakeholders have a comprehensive understanding of the Standards governing the accreditation process. Familiarity with the *AASW Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS)* and the *AASW Practice Standards* is essential for several reasons:

1. **Ensuring consistency:** The Standards act as a foundation for the accreditation process, providing a common framework for evaluation. By understanding the Standards, Providers, Accreditation Assessment Panel members and the AASW can ensure that reports tabled, and assessments completed are aligned with the predefined criteria, promoting consistency in decision-making.
2. **Quality Assurance:** The Standards serve as a benchmark for assessing the quality and effectiveness of the Provider seeking accreditation. The AASW, through the role of the Accreditation Council, are then able to identify that the Accreditation Assessment Panel has thoroughly evaluated the Provider's compliance with the Standards.
3. **Informed Decision-Making:** An in-depth knowledge of the Standards enables the AASW Accreditation Council to make well-informed and fair judgments about the accreditation status of a Provider. They can identify areas of strength and weakness accurately, leading to more effective decision-making.
4. **Effective Feedback and Support:** With a clear understanding of the Standards, the AASW through the Accreditation Assessment Panel, Accreditation Council or Accreditation team can provide valuable feedback to stakeholders. The AASW can offer constructive guidance on accreditation areas, therefore facilitating the continuous enhancement of educational quality.
5. **Confidence in the Process:** A comprehensive understanding of the Standards reflects the credibility of the AASW Accreditation Council and the accreditation process. Stakeholders, including Providers, students and the public, will have more confidence in the outcomes determined if they know the assessment is based on well-defined criteria.

In summary, knowing and understanding the Standards is essential for Higher Education Providers, AASW Accreditation Council members, Accreditation Assessment Panel members and the AASW Accreditation team to fulfill their role effectively, maintain consistency, and make informed decisions that contribute to the overall improvement of education quality and accountability in the accredited Providers and social work programs.

5. Governance & Administration Roles

5.1 AASW Board

The AASW Board maintains a role in the oversight of the Accreditation Framework and approval rights of the Standards. The Board will monitor and manage risk with respect to final decision-making processes. The Board will approve the Accreditation Council membership and the Terms of Reference.

The final decisions determined by the Accreditation Council of Higher Education Providers accreditation reports will be noted with the Board and in the case of the Council recommending the accreditation of a Provider be revoked, the Board will ensure that due process was followed throughout the Accreditation process by all stakeholders before endorsing the decision or not.

5.2 AASW Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Maintaining the overall integrity of the accreditation process is a cornerstone of the CEO's role. By providing oversight of the operational process, the CEO ensures that the Association adheres to the highest standards of transparency, fairness, and ethical conduct.

Operational excellence is a hallmark of effective educational management. In the accreditation landscape, the CEO has the operational responsibility for the Accreditation Council and the Accreditation Framework. It is the role of the CEO to ensure the AASW commitment to quality is reflected in every facet of the accreditation journey.

The CEO role in terms of the Accreditation Framework is: -

- Oversight of risk on behalf of the Board
- Operational responsibility for Accreditation Council and Accreditation Framework
- Maintain overall integrity of the accreditation process
- Implementation of the ASWEAS
- Manages dispute resolution pathways and manage appeals process
- Facilitates communication between the Provider, the Accreditation Assessment panel and the AASW
- Mediates decisions between Accreditation Council and AASW Board.

5.3 AASW Accreditation Council

The primary responsibility of the Accreditation Council is to ensure that graduates from social work programs have achieved the professional competencies and learning outcomes identified as necessary for entry into professional practice by the Australian Social Work Education Accreditation Scheme (ASWEAS).

When reviewing assessment panel reports, the focus should be on the content of the report tabled. It is not the role of the Council to reevaluate the entire submission but to ensure that the Accreditation Assessment Panel has followed the prescribed guidelines and criteria. The goal is to maintain consistency and fairness in the accreditation process without interfering with the Panel's autonomy. By maintaining this approach, the Council will contribute to the credibility and integrity of the accreditation framework whilst respecting the expertise of the Assessment Panel members in carrying out their responsibilities.

In aligning with the ASWEAS, the Council ensures the Higher Education Providers (HEPs) design and deliver social work programs that equip entry-level social workers to practice safely and effectively, thus making them eligible for membership of the AASW.

The Standards and accreditation process overseen by the Accreditation Council aims to ensure:

- 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 Higher Education Provider
- The program will continue to produce the graduate attributes expected throughout the accreditation period.

5.4 AASW Accreditation Team

The Accreditation Council will work very closely with the AASW Accreditation team who have day to day responsibility for the accreditation process activities and management of the AASW Accreditation Assessment Panels.

The Accreditation team acts as the conduit between the Higher Education Provider and the Association, providing advice and support and completes a desktop review in conjunction with the Accreditation Assessment Panel of each submission from the Provider.

The Accreditation team in their role develops templates, guidelines, and training manuals, whilst conducting induction and training of the Accreditation Assessment Panel Members and Council. The team facilitates document management and the accreditation reporting process whilst offering support to the Accreditation Assessment Panel Members and Chairs.

The Accreditation team or CEO office will provide secretariat support to the Accreditation Council.

6. Accreditation Process

6.1 Initial Program Accreditation, Reaccreditation and Program Variation Approvals

In the AASW role as the accrediting body of a Provider's social work programs the Accreditation Assessment Panel will be asked to assess submissions regarding the following scenarios.

Initial Program Accreditation: The evaluation requested for a new educational program offered either for the first time by a Provider or in conjunction with another accredited social work program.

Reaccreditation: The evaluation requested for a renewing or extension of the accreditation status of a social work program delivered by the Provider after a specific period.

Program Variation: The request for an evaluation to occur to assess a proposed change or significant modification to an existing social work program offered by the Provider, including addition of new location.

6.2 Chair and Assessment Panel Training

The efficacy of the Accreditation Assessment Panels and their decision-making stands as a cornerstone of the accreditation process. Vital to this effectiveness is an unwavering commitment to integrity and a process that remains replicable and consistent, leading to comparable outcomes regardless of the specific Accreditation Assessment Panel involved.

In pursuit of bolstering the capability of Accreditation Assessment Panel members, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) conducts ongoing information sessions and training. This strategy encompasses the development of a designed induction guide and training program. As part of this endeavour, the Accreditation Assessment Panel Member Handbook pertaining to the roles and responsibilities of its members has been developed to serve as the foundational framework for the induction of new participants.

In alignment with the revamped approach to accreditation, the program will be tailored to achieve the following objectives:

- Maintain a consistent approach, ensuring uniformity in method, scope, and focal points across all AASW Assessment Panels.
- Prioritise an emphasis on key aspects of the ASWEAS to ensure the accreditation process is fair and equitable for all stakeholders.
- Enable a comprehensive understanding of the essence and utilisation of evidence within the decision-making process.

This induction program has been developed to reflect the advice of seasoned Accreditation Assessment Panel members and align with the revised accreditation approach. Specific emphasis will be placed on cultivating proficiencies in critical areas, including:

- Essential leadership principles, nurturing the ability to guide and inspire the Accreditation Assessment Panel effectively

- Strategies for proficient group management, ensuring optimal collaboration and information exchange
- Setting precise goals, thereby channeling efforts toward targeted outcomes
- Analysis techniques and adept utilisation of evidence to inform decisions
- Effective negotiation strategies to navigate differing perspectives and reach consensus.

Accreditation Assessment Panels will be equipped with a standardised and well-informed approach which will ensure that decisions are not only consistent but also entrenched in a deep understanding of learning outcomes and supported by a judicious use of evidence. Ultimately, this initiative contributes to upholding the integrity of the process, bolstering confidence in Accreditation Assessment Panel decisions, and advancing the quality of accredited programs in alignment with the evolving educational landscape.

6.3 Accreditation Application Materials

The AASW Accreditation team has developed an AASW Application and Evidence Guide and Accreditation Guidelines to support both Higher Education Providers and Accreditation Assessment Panels with the outlining of material and supporting evidence sought through the accreditation submission process. This guide will outline the essential and suggested forms of evidence crucial in an application, encompassing core curriculum mapping and the demonstration of graduate attributes and learning outcomes.

The introduction of a new suite of appendix templates for completion with the accreditation application document reflects a more consistent approach to the overall process. The Accreditation Assessment Panels are empowered to request additional evidence or supplementary documents solely when necessary.

By adopting these enhancements, the accreditation process will be more reflective of a streamlined, efficient, and focused, enhancing the value of the endeavour for all stakeholders involved.

6.4 Accreditation Ready to Proceed Check

The initial phase of accreditation concentrates on streamlining the process to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness. The objective is to diminish the likelihood of encountering compliance concerns at a later stage of the assessment.

This initial assessment will see the Accreditation team seek the completion by the Higher Education Provider of an Intent to Submit to provide the AASW with all initial information regarding the program seeking accreditation. Once this is complete further communication will take place with the Provider to ensure that all elements of the accreditation process, including evidence requirements can be covered and that the Provider has the ability to meet the process timeframe and schedule.

The Accreditation team will gather Annual Reports completed throughout the accreditation cycle (if an existing provider) to provide to the Accreditation Assessment Panel and provide additional crucial data, previous accreditation cycle reports (if relevant) and information to assist with the assessment process. The Accreditation Panel in discussion with the Accreditation team have the potential of placing the application on hold and not proceeding currently. A further discussion would then take place with the Provider.

6.5 Independent Experts

In the pursuit of fortifying the accreditation process, the integration of independent experts emerges as a potential strategy, poised to elevate the quality and rigour of professional education programs. The landscape of accreditation is evolving, and with it, the judicious utilisation of external expertise offers a dynamic avenue for enhancing practices and outcomes. The independent experts, for example, may be engaged to review a particular accreditation only, assess the quality of evidence, program design and delivery, quality assurance, and program evaluation or engaged for an appeal process.

The spectrum of independent experts encompasses not only professionals from the field of social work but extends to non-social work domains as well. These experts bring their profound expertise to bear on evaluating critical facets such as evidence quality, program design, delivery mechanisms, quality assurance frameworks, and program evaluation methodologies. By tapping into this reservoir of external proficiency, the AASW augments its ability to comprehensively assess education programs.

6.6 Desktop Assessment

The desktop assessment conducted by the Accreditation Assessment Panel is designed to cultivate a robust and rigorous evaluation process, instilling a heightened level of scrutiny and depth that ultimately fortifies the entire accreditation process.

An imperative focus of this step is to avert premature site visits, ensuring that on-site assessments occur with utmost readiness. By proactively identifying potential areas of non-compliance, this proactive approach mitigates the emergence of discrepancies and uncertainties between Assessment Panels and Higher Education Providers during the final stages of reporting and decision-making. This foundational groundwork serves to pave the way for a more constructive and productive site visit experience.

Furthermore, the desktop review serves as a conduit for streamlining the supporting documentation provided by Providers. An imperative goal is the selective extraction of information that directly informs assessment determinations. This discerning approach ensures that only material pertinent to evaluation decisions is considered, enhancing the precision and clarity of the entire process.

Critical to the desktop review is a detailed analysis of the mandated curriculum before any on-site engagement. This phase entails a comprehensive evaluation of curriculum outcomes, with an explicit focus on program coherence, alignment with practical applicability, and the extent to which assessments are intrinsically linked to measurable student learning outcomes.

6.7 Site visit

The site visit phase is a pivotal juncture within the accreditation process, providing a convergence of perspectives and insights to cultivate a thorough and rigorous evaluation. The distinct components of this phase harmonise to add an unparalleled level of depth and precision to the assessment, reinforcing the overall strength of the process.

To optimize the site visit as an integral part of the accreditation assessment the Accreditation Assessment Panel should actively engage with essential decision-makers and leaders and curriculum team who have oversight of program operations and content. The visit should include consultations with a representative cross-section of external stakeholders, encompassing employers, agencies, and service users, to enrich the perspective and facilitating a platform for Providers to address substantial challenges in direct response to Accreditation Assessment Panel concerns.

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) takes a proactive role in developing mechanisms that empower Accreditation Assessment Panel Chairs and members to articulate concerns, fostering open communication and problem-solving. The site visit agenda undergoes refinement to include an explicit delineation of attendees for each session, alongside their respective roles, transparency and effective engagement. The Accreditation Assessment Panel should provide an engaged approach during the site visit, enacting thorough and scrutiny, thereby ensuring the process is comprehensive, informed, and strong. The site visit may potentially, at the discretion of the Chair, provide an opportunity for the panel to note their initial findings and outline any recommendations including conditions.

By integrating stakeholder perspectives, expert consultations, and a proactive problem-solving ethos, this not only safeguards the integrity of the accreditation process but also paves the way for continuous enhancement within the ever-evolving landscape of social work education.

6.8 Accreditation Reporting

Following the site visit the Accreditation Assessment Panel led by the Chair will draft the final report on the program and their findings from the visit and submission. The report will make clear the proposed decision making regarding the accreditation and their rationale for that decision. Additionally, the report will note recommendations, including any conditions and provide an opportunity for constructive commentary on aspects of the proposed program in relation to alignment with the ASWEAS, with a view to quality improvement and commendations being affirmations of positive features.

After the final draft report is completed, the Chair will disseminate the draft report to the Provider, who will have a ten-day opportunity to respond to the report, in particular to correct any factual errors or clarifications.

Once the Provider has returned the draft final report to the AASW Accreditation team, the Chair will make any final adjustments based on the response from the Provider and that report will then be provided to the CEO for tabling at the next available Accreditation Council meeting for final decision-making approval. The Accreditation team will then advise the Provider of the official outcome.

6.9 Accreditation decisions

Full accreditation

Approval would be sought as a recommendation of the Accreditation Assessment Panel for a period of five years, following the latest assessment of the Provider submission, site visit and annual reports received over the assessment period. The Accreditation Council would need to be satisfied that the program meets the ASWEAS, and that the first or continuing cohort of students have achieved the entry level standard (for accreditation of new or changed programs).

Conditional accreditation

Approval would be sought as a recommendation of the Accreditation Assessment Panel when a program substantially meets the requirements for accreditation, however the Panel and AASW have identified areas of deficit or weakness which can be addressed within a specified limited time. In these instances, providers will be required to resubmit against specific conditions by the conditional expiry date and the Accreditation Assessment Panel would revisit and assess the responses provided for operational compliance with the identified areas of deficit or weakness. In most cases, this would be a desktop assessment not a process including a site visit, as that would have already occurred.

Provisional accreditation

Approval would be sought as a recommendation of the Accreditation Assessment Panel for a new Provider offering a program for the first time, or an existing Provider adding a new social work course that has not yet delivered its first graduates. It may be applied in cases where a Provider has significantly changed an existing accredited social work program and the AASW would like to see a cohort of students graduate from the changed program. The Provisional status applies for the duration of the first cohort, before a sample of graduates has emerged. Full accreditation would be sought upon the next full Provider submission with the Accreditation Assessment Panel assessing the submission, annual reports, and evidence that the first cohort of students have achieved entry level standard.

Provisional accreditation – Conditions apply

This would follow the same process as Provisional accreditation, however the outcome from the Accreditation Assessment Panel may recommend a shorter specified accreditation period, so as the Provider can address where the accredited program may not meet one or more of the standards specified in the ASWEAS or identified areas of deficit or weakness.

Accredited teach out program

A term used to describe the timeframe after a Provider has made the decision to no longer offer a social work program and may transfer students into another similar program to complete their studies or allow students to complete the course with no further intakes to be permitted. The Accreditation Council would note this circumstance, and AASW records would reflect the 'teach-out' status noting the final completion date. No further accreditation cycle process for the program would be required for ongoing accreditation purposes, however the teach out would be tracked via the annual report process.

Approve / Not Approve

The Accreditation Assessment Panel would recommend to the Accreditation Council that approval be given or not for Provider's request to approve a variation to an existing social work accredited program. This is normally for an existing program which would be already accredited, and the Provider wishes to add a location or change of minor components of the program.

Accreditation revoked

The accreditation of any social work program may be revoked by the AASW after serious consideration. This would mean that the social work program is no longer considered accredited, and students would need to be advised of this decision and all marketing materials reflect this decision. The program once revoked does not revert to a prior level of accreditation. If the Provider was to seek accreditation once again after a period, the process would commence again, and Provisional Accreditation status would be recommended. The Accreditation Council upon advice and recommendation from the Accreditation Assessment Panel would recommend to the AASW Board the revoking of the accreditation of a social work program and the Board would need to ensure that the Accreditation Council has followed all necessary process steps in reaching their recommendation.

Accreditation refused

The AASW has determined that a new program or a program undergoing reaccreditation or expansion has a serious deficiency or weakness in one or more ASWEAS areas that cannot be corrected within a reasonable timeframe.

In all the above noted accreditation decisions, the AASW requires that all Higher Education Providers publications and marketing materials correctly and prominently display the following acknowledgement of accreditation for each accredited program.

6.10 Accreditation Annual Report

The Annual Report is a mandatory document within the Accreditation Framework and is focused on gathering information to help the AASW determine the ongoing accreditation of a social work program. The Social Work Academic Organisation Units (SWAOU) are requested to nominate any changes or developments which have occurred over the previous twelve months. The template allows for the completion of a programs metric set of data.

The Annual report within the Accreditation Framework, provides a timely and cumulative role of annual self-assessment which will increase the usefulness of the exercise for all participants. It will reduce the sense of some Providers that the accreditation application starts from scratch, including a reconstruction of developments in the accreditation period. Contemporaneous reports should, in principle, produce more accurate accounts of direction and performance to inform the accreditors.

The AASW will provide a reporting template for this purpose, which must be used by all Providers and will be required each December. The AASW Accreditation Officer will review and track the provision of the Annual report and will identify any risks or concerns at an early stage for addressing within the accreditation cycle. The regular collection of this data and information will assist the AASW to identify how a program is measured against the Standards and how overall the social work programs are distributed across the educational sector. The AASW Accreditation team will be looking at providing reports over time back to the Providers on the state of education programs accredited by AASW.

The Annual Report will: -

- Assume a central role in a more efficient and effective process of accreditation.
- Note major changes to be proposed in a format to reflect a self-assessment approach.
- Allow major changes to be proposed in response of the AASW Accreditation team to the completed annual reports.
- Enable Higher Education Providers to map progress and program changes.
- Provide cumulative output which will form the basis of accreditation applications.

7. Glossary

AASW <i>Australian Association of Social Workers</i>	The professional 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
AASW ASWEAS or Standards <i>Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards</i>	The Standards ensures HEPs design and deliver social work programs that clearly equip entry-level social workers to practise safely and effectively, thus making them eligible for membership of the AASW.
AASW Practice Standards 2023	These Standards outline how social workers demonstrate their professional identity through their practice and ensure trust and confidence in the profession for the public and service users. They provide a reference point for assuring the quality of practice and make social workers accountable to the people they serve.
AASW Code of Ethics 2020	The Code expresses the principles and responsibilities that are integral to, and characterise, the social work profession and to act in ethically accountable ways in the pursuit of the profession's aims.
Accreditation Assessment Panel	AASW contracted individual who as panel members on behalf of the AASW assess Providers submission for accreditation, reaccreditation or change to their social work programs.
Accreditation Council	Appointed members who collectively provide oversight of the accreditation process of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW)
Accreditation Expiry Date	The date the program ceases to be accredited for the purpose of enrolling new students. Accreditation expiry dates are stipulated by AASW upon accreditation approval.
Accreditation Secretariat	AASW department that provides administrative support and has oversight of the accreditation process. The Secretariat includes the roles of the Senior Accreditation Officer and Accreditation Officer.
Accreditation team	AASW employees who work within the Accreditation Secretariat and liaise with Providers, students, Assessment Panel Members, and have oversight and coordinate the accreditation process.
Assessment mapping	Mapping across all units/subjects showing how each units/subject's assessments are used to evaluate the subject's learning outcomes and maps to the relevant AASW graduate attributes.
Assessment tasks	Written papers, oral presentations or demonstrations of competence in social work practice.
Assessment type	Formative assessment (intended to provide feedback for future learning, development and improvement) and summative assessment (that indicates whether certain criteria have been met or certain outcomes have been achieved).
AQF <i>Australian Qualifications Framework</i>	The national policy for regulated qualifications in Australian education and training. It incorporates the qualifications from each education and training sector into a single comprehensive national qualifications framework.
ACHSWE <i>Australian Council of Heads of Social Work Education</i>	A collective body with representatives from Providers of social work education dedicated to achieving excellence and innovation in social work pedagogy and promoting leading edge social work research.

Bachelor of Social Work	An entry level qualification to the social work profession take at an undergraduate level.
Credit	Value assigned for the recognition of equivalence in content and learning outcomes between different types of learning and/or qualifications. Credit reduces the amount of learning required to achieve a qualification and may be through credit transfer, articulation, recognition of prior learning or advanced standing.
Curriculum	Incorporates the social work program's total planned learning experience, including teaching and learning strategies, unit/subject outlines, educational and professional philosophies, program structure and delivery mode, practice experience and links between their assessment and the standards.
Delivery mode	Means by which programs are made available to students: on-campus or in blended mode, by distance or by e-learning methods.
Field Education	Often referred to as 'student placement' 'work-based placement' or 'work integrated learning' a critical component of the social work education program which provide students with the opportunity to apply the theory and skills they learned while studying in a professional workplace.
Governance	Framework, systems and processes supporting and guiding an organisation towards achieving its goals and the mechanisms by which it, and its people, are held to account. Ethics, risk management, compliance and administration are all elements.
Graduate	Those who, having successfully undertaken a program of study that enables them to apply for membership with the AASW.
Graduate Attributes	The high-level qualities, skills and understandings that a student should gain as a result of the learning and experiences they engage with, while at their Higher Education Provider.
Head of School/Discipline Lead	Lead academic responsible for the design and delivery of the program on behalf of the education provider.
Higher Education Provider (HEP) or known as Provider	A higher education institution, or a recognised training organisation, accredited by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) responsible for a <i>program</i> at AQF Level 7, 8 and 9 and who meets the standards and the requirements set out in the ASWEAS.
Learning Outcomes	Skills, knowledge and attitudes identified as the requirements for satisfactory program completion including, but not limited to, the relevant AASW standards for practice.
Master of Social Work	An entry level qualification to the social work profession taken at the post graduate level.
Program or Course or Degree	The full program of study and experiences that are required to be undertaken before a qualification recognised under the Australian Qualifications Framework, such as a Bachelor of Social Work, can be taken out.
QILT Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching	A suite of government endorsed surveys for higher education, across the student life cycle from commencement to employment.
SWAOU	Social Work Academic Organisation Unit
TEQSA Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency	The Agency responsible for regulating and assuring the quality of all providers of higher education in Australia.

8. Acknowledgements

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The consultation period saw written feedback provided from the following stakeholders:

- Australian Council of Heads of Social Work Education (Combined of various Providers)
- Charles Sturt University
- Edith Cowan University
- Federation University
- Institute of Health Management
- Southern Cross University
- University of Melbourne
- University of New England
- University of Newcastle
- University of South Australia
- University of Wollongong
- Western Sydney University

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