

Guidance: RPL, articulation and credit transfer

This document is to be read in conjunction with the *Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards* (ASWEAS 2024), it is only a guide to assist.

The AASW supports the articulation of welfare, human services, social and behavioural science, and community work programs of different levels with social work degree programs, including credit transfer, in accordance with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and the TEQSA Higher Education Standards.

Relevant 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.

Relevant Standard 4: (Practice education 4.8 Work experience as RPL for placements)

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

1. Intent of Standards

Standard 7

This standard ensures that students entering the program have the necessary capability and suitability to successfully engage with and achieve the academic and practical learning outcomes of social work education. Admission processes should evaluate the academic preparation and English language proficiency of the prospective student to participate in their intended study. The Provider should apply any admissions or credit policy consistently and fairly and allow for diversity across the incoming cohort. By setting clear entry expectations, this standard upholds the integrity of social work education and supports students in their progression toward becoming skilled, ethical, and competent entry level practitioners.

Standard 4.8

The intent of the standard is to ensure that Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for social work placements maintains the integrity and learning outcomes of the program while acknowledging relevant professional experience. RPL is limited to the first placement only (or part thereof) and is only granted to applicants with substantial, recent experience in social work-aligned settings, ensuring they have developed the foundational skills and competencies expected at conclusion of that stage in their learning. This approach ensures that students awarded RPL can still engage meaningfully with the program's academic and practice learning requirements. The Academic Lead has the responsibility to ensure rigorous assessment of RPL to safeguard the quality and consistency of learning, ensuring graduates are well-prepared for professional practice.

2. AASW will seek evidence of

The Provider developing articulation arrangements that will identify, negotiate and document effective articulation arrangements between AQF qualifications. (*AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy section 2.2*) Any articulation arrangements must ensure that the AQF Qualification Type Specifications for each qualification type in the arrangement are met.

The Provider has policies in place which are fair and equitable and govern the way in which academic credit, credit transfer and RPL is processed and that is accessible for all prospective and continuing students to view and to reflect on how the students can apply and will be notified throughout the process.

The Provider granting credit which is subject to Provider requirements for admission and to rules concerning the minimum amount of study required before a qualification from that Provider can be awarded. These requirements may vary for candidates admitted through special entry schemes. The Academic Organisational Unit must ensure that students are not granted credit beyond the parameters set through the requirements of the ASWEAS.

The Social Work Academic Organisational Units ensuring that students undertake all relevant social work subjects and are not exempted from core social work subjects/units based on the qualification that led to their initial acceptance into the degree; In other words, subjects/units must not be double counted.

3. Definitions used in consideration of credit transfer

For the purposes of this document, the AASW will use the following definitions when referring to credit transfer:

1. A diploma means a diploma program accredited by [Community Work Australia \(CWA\)](#) or recognised by the Provider granting the credit.
2. A reference to a three-year social welfare degree means a degree program accredited by [Community Work Australia \(CWA\)](#).
3. A reference to a four-year social work degree means a degree program approved by the [Australian Association of Social Workers](#) (AASW). Four-year programs may include an embedded honours program in fitting with AQF level (8) but only if social work learning outcomes are not compromised.

Individual Providers may accept, for the purposes of granting credit, diploma, associate degree, and degree programs in addition to those referred to in the above definitions.

4. Conditions set by Universities Australia

Universities Australia has set the following conditions:

1. The granting of credit will be subject to Provider requirements for admission, and to individual Provider rules concerning the minimum amount of study required before a qualification at that Provider can be awarded.
2. For any credit, RPL or credit transfer awarded the Provider should ensure it aligns with the *TEQSA Higher Education Standards Framework* and *Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)*.
3. There may be variations for candidates admitted through special entry categories.

4. Program prerequisites and the requirements of professional bodies will also be unaffected.

5. Credit for completed diploma and advanced diploma study

For graduates of TEQSA recognised Higher Education Providers the AQF recommendations for credit for graduates with diplomas are the accepted guides:

- 37.5% credit for an Advanced Diploma or Associate Degree linked to a 4 year Bachelor Degree
- 25% credit for a Diploma linked to a 4-year Bachelor Degree.

6. Transfers from a welfare, human services, social and behavioural science, community work program, bridging programs or other social work programs to a social work degree program

Universities Australia has decided the participating universities will grant:

- To candidates having completed two years of a three-year social welfare program, or holding a completed three-year social welfare degree, and admitted to a four-year social work degree program, a minimum of 25% credit, and normally in the range of 25%-50%, of the social work degree program.
- To candidates who have completed one year of a three-year social welfare degree program and admitted to a four-year social work degree program, minimum credit of 25% of that social work degree program.
- The AQF identifies that prior studies in the same discipline at a three-year bachelor level (AQF 7) allow a master's qualification to be achieved in 1.5-2 years and if the three-year bachelor's qualification was in a different discipline, two years of master's coursework is typical.

Candidates entering a qualifying Master of Social Work program who have completed a three-year social welfare program may therefore be granted a maximum of 25% or one semester of four if the AOU can ensure that graduates meet all required learning outcomes for Australian social work graduates as defined in the ASWEAS.

- Credit is not normally accepted for certificate courses in welfare.
- Students admitted from bridging programs cannot be given credit for any subjects in that program.
- 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.

7. Recognition of prior learning in practice education

The AASW supports the recognition of prior learning (RPL) only as a basis for application for credit in one (the first) practice education subject/unit in a social work program. If a school, department, or unit elects to utilise RPL, it must clearly articulate the following:

1. a transparent process
2. the rationale for how RPL is to be used
3. the criteria used to assess RPL
4. the weighting which the academic unit intends to use
5. the mechanism for appeal by the student.

The AASW acknowledges that life experience informs the student's participation in a social work course but does not replace the required course content. Only formal work experiences, tasks, and duties which align with social work roles, tasks, and functions should be considered when granting RPL, not life experience.

8. Decision-making principles

1. Credit for the first practice placement or part thereof, may be possible based on recognition of prior experience or the successful completion of practice placements completed prior to entry into the social work program.
2. Recognition of prior learning for practice placements must be thoroughly assessed.
3. Performance outcomes for first placement based on the AASW Practice Standards and Code of Ethics should be used to assess students for RPL.
4. In order to be granted RPL for practice placements the student must provide evidence that they have met the standards and can demonstrate a level of knowledge, competencies and skills consistent with those expected of a social work student at the end of first placement.
5. Granting of RPL for a complete practice placement subject/unit should be considered very carefully and granted only, when the SWAOU is certain the person will meet all learning outcomes of the program by the time they complete the program.
6. Only formal work experience, tasks, and duties which align with social work roles, tasks, and functions must be considered when granting RPL for practice placement credit. Providers should ensure that 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.

9. Assessment conditions for granting credit

Assessment conditions for granting credit will include:

1. Currency of the work experience, with a minimum of three full-time equivalent years' practice in a relevant context, with at least the final year of the work experience for which RPL is claimed is within five years of applying for RPL.
2. Minimum three full-time equivalent years' practice in a relevant context, using social work practice skills such as assessment and counselling and methods such as case work or community work. The minimum expectation for a 'relevant context' is that it includes an organisational context and similar kinds of professional work experience that correspond to what would be expected of a first placement student.
3. Assessment of a portfolio developed by the student demonstrating how he/she meets the practice standards and demonstrates the integration of theory and practice, social work ethics and values.

4. External, independent verification/reference as to accuracy of student's claims.

10. Assessment process for granting credit

1. Students will provide a portfolio (which should include, for example, job descriptions, accompanied by referee reports; skills assessment and critical reflection on placement or work experience) to be assessed which demonstrates:
 - a. How their work experience meets the relevant AASW Practice Standards to the level required by completion of the first practice placement subject/unit
 - b. The integration of theory and practice, social work ethics and values
 - c. How they met the specific learning outcomes for the first practice placement subject/unit.
2. Assessment of the application is the responsibility of the social work Lead Academic of the Organisational Unit.
3. It is recommended that a qualified social worker who can attest to its accuracy will provide external, independent verification/reference as to the accuracy of student's claims. The student may have their application assessed by a panel made up of the Placement Coordinator and at least one other member (a social work practitioner and/or a social work program staff member with an expertise in RPL).

The granting of credit must be considered with respect to the implications for second placement subjects/units.

11. Policy regarding subsequent placements

If partial or full RPL is granted, the following conditions apply for the second practice placement. The meeting of these conditions must be considered prior to the granting of RPL for first practice placement.

1. The second practice placement must be undertaken in an Australian setting where the student can gain extensive experience with human services agency clients and practice case work, group work or community practice skills. The prime focus of the placement cannot be policy or research.
2. All students approved for RPL must undertake a final placement with direct supervision by a qualified social worker. There may be a need to adjust this requirement in a remote setting where no other placement is available and high-quality external supervision is provided, however all opportunities for direct supervision should be explored first.
3. The placement setting must be different from the setting in the student's work history and any experience on which the RPL application was based.

4. Non-Compliance Risk

If the Provider was to not meet the Standards, it may result in a conditional accreditation finding placed on the social work program by Council. It may additionally affect the students by:

- **Compromised Program Integrity and Accreditation Risk** – failure to ensure students complete core elements could lead to gaps in essential competencies, undermining the program's alignment with ASWEA Standards.

- **Deficiencies in Graduate Competence** – Allowing exemptions from core units/subjects or excessive credit transfers may result in graduates lacking critical social work knowledge and skills. RPL practices that do not adequately assess the relevance and currency of work experience could produce graduates who do not meet professional standards.
- **Risk to Public Safety** – Graduates who have not met core competencies could pose risks to clients and communities due to inadequate knowledge of ethical, theoretical and practical frameworks.
- **Inconsistencies and Inequities in Student Outcomes** – granting credit from bridging programs or excessive RPL without rigorous assessment could create inequities, where some students gain qualifications without comparable academic or practical experience.