Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS)

ASWEAS 2012
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Acknowledgements
**Preamble**

‘Social workers acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the First Australians, whose lands, winds and waters we all now share, and pay respect to their unique values, and their continuing and enduring cultures which deepen and enrich the life of our nation and communities.

‘Social workers commit to acknowledge and understand the historical and contemporary disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the implication of this for social work practice.

‘Social workers are responsible for ensuring that their practice is culturally competent, safe and sensitive.’ (AASW Code of Ethics, 2010: Preamble)

The education of social workers must demonstrate commitment to these principles.
1. **Introduction**

1.1. **About this document**

The Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS) sets out the principles, standards and graduate attributes for social work education in Australia. Specifically it sets out the criteria for the accreditation of a professional social work program with the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). The AASW has, by mutual agreement, set the standards for social work education and practice nationally since the 1960s.

This document is to be read in conjunction with:

- ASWEAS Guidelines for programs and accreditation panels (listed on page 24)
  - Guidelines for program delivery (Ref sections 3.3, 3.4, 4.4, 5.1)
  - Guidelines for program reaccreditation reviews (Ref Section 6.1)
  - Guidelines for new social work programs (Ref Section 6.2)
- *Practice Standards for Social Workers: Achieving Outcomes (AASW 2003)* (and pending *Practice Standards 2013*)
- *Code of Ethics (AASW 2010)*.

A glossary of terms used in both the standards and the guidelines is provided as a separate document.

If a social work program meets the standards encapsulated in this document, and follows the relevant guidelines, it will be accredited by the AASW subject to formal approval and ongoing monitoring and review. Graduates of AASW-accredited social work programs will be eligible for membership of the AASW. There is no legal registration for social workers in any state of Australia. However, as the AASW is the standard-setting body for social work, many jobs require eligibility for membership of the AASW.

The Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards reflect the *minimum* requirements for social work education. Individual social work programs are encouraged to achieve higher standards of excellence by which to assess students.

1.2. **Guiding principles**

In approving, reviewing and monitoring programs for the purpose of determining eligibility for membership of AASW, the AASW is guided by the following principles:

- The AASW encourages high standards of professional education, training and competence in the social work profession for the purpose of providing safe and quality service to the community and its members.
Higher education providers (HEPs) have the primary responsibility for the quality of their courses.

AASW processes for appointing review panel members are transparent and collaborative.

The AASW has efficient organisational structures and processes for approving, reviewing and monitoring programs.

The AASW develops the ASWEAS in consultation with higher education providers and other stakeholders such as students, employers, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Council and consumers of social work services.

The fundamental process of review is critical reflection and self-evaluation by higher education providers.

AASW approval, review and monitoring processes should not stifle diversity and innovation (adapted from the Social Work Registration Board of Ireland standards document 2011).

1.3. Qualifications for AASW membership

The AASW accredits courses developed by higher education providers who are accredited by TEQSA to provide qualifications at AQF levels 7, 8 and 9 and who meet the standards and requirements in this document and the attached guidelines.

The AASW has determined that the academic qualifications that applicants will be required to hold on completion of an AASW-accredited course in order to gain entry to the profession will be the following:

- social work bachelor’s degree (AQF Level 7)
- social work bachelor’s degree with honours (AQF Level 8)
- social work master’s degree (AQF Level 9)

Entry to, content and demonstrated outcomes of these qualifications are explicated in sections 3 and 4 of these standards.
1.4. Definition of social work

The social work profession in Australia adheres to the definition of social work jointly agreed to by the International Federation of Social Workers and the International Association of Schools of Social Work in 2001:

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance wellbeing. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. (AASW 2010)

Social workers pursue these goals by working to address the barriers, inequities and injustices that exist in society and by active involvement in situations of personal distress and crisis. This is achieved by working with individuals towards the realisation of their intellectual, physical and emotional potential, and by working with individuals, groups and communities in the pursuit and achievement of equitable access to social, economic and political resources. Social workers with regulatory functions achieve these goals through a restorative practice focus. Social workers also pursue their goals through involvement in research, policy development and analysis, and consultancy. Social workers promote respect for traditions, cultures, ideologies, beliefs and religions among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and different ethnic groups and societies, insofar as they do not conflict with the fundamental human rights of people.

Social work programs must demonstrate how they assist students to develop a critical analysis, understanding of and commitment to this definition of social work.

Social workers:

- work with individuals, groups and communities to shape and change the conditions in which they live
- advocate for and with disadvantaged members of society
- work towards the elimination of social inequalities in society to facilitate a more equitable distribution of resources
- engage in research to build the social work knowledge base and understanding of society
- analyse, challenge and develop social policies.

Social work practice is informed by professional education based on an analysis and understanding of human behaviour and of complex social processes. It accepts a commitment to working within a stated value position and code of ethics.
2. **Principles for social work education**

Social work education prepares students for practice in the workplace in local, national and international contexts.

- Australian entry-level professional social work education is generalist. Generalist social work posits core and common knowledge, skills and values which can be applied across practice settings, fields of practice and methods of social work practice.

- Australian entry-level professional social work programs are educational programs. Education combines attributes of thinking, being and doing. It prepares graduates to be self-initiating, critically reflective, innovative and able to solve problems across a wide range of issues and situations, and in a diverse range of contexts. These attributes are informed by core values, including social justice, human rights, human dignity and equity—‘attributes of being’. In short, education enables ‘thinking in order to know what to do’ and ‘being, which drives why we do it’.

- Australian entry-level professional social work education acknowledges the complexity and the constantly changing context of social work practice. Therefore, it gives primacy to the development of reflective and reflexive practice, structural analysis, critical thinking, and ethical professional behaviour as the core attributes to equip a social work practitioner to enter practice across the range of social work settings, fields of practice and methods.

- Use of contemporary pedagogical knowledge and the associated processes of learning are requirements for developing core attributes and for building students’ commitment to, and an identity with, professional social work. It is recognised that tensions exist between learning processes and requirements for content, and that there is a point at which the amount of content will compromise the processes of learning and the development of social work graduates as critically reflective professional practitioners. These standards strive for the appropriate balance.

- Content delivered in professional social work education is based on, encourages and supports students’ commitment to and demonstration of the values and ideals of the social work profession as embraced by the AASW and defined by its 2010 constitution ([AASW 2010b, p. 1](#)). These values and ideals derive from the profession’s commitment to the pursuit of social justice, the enhancement of the quality of life and to maximising the development of the potential of each individual, family, group and community in society.

- Both content and delivery in social work education will demonstrate the profession’s core values of respect for persons, social justice and professional integrity as defined in the [AASW Code of Ethics (2010a)](#).
Australian entry-level professional social work education recognises that social work operates at the interface between people and their social, cultural, spiritual and physical environments.

Field education is a core component of Australian entry-level professional social work education. It is a cooperative endeavour between the higher education provider, the student, agencies and field educators to assist the integration of theory and practice.
3. Standards for social work education: content and learning outcomes

The goal of social work education is to provide a rigorous program which results in graduates who are competent, effective, skilled, knowledgeable, ethical and confident practitioners.

The education of social workers must demonstrate commitment to the principles enshrined in the preamble and introduction to this document. They shape the ways in which the three core values of professional social work practice—respect, social justice and professional integrity—must be practised in social work education.

Higher education providers must show that graduating students have demonstrated that they can integrate the social work values, knowledge and skills set out in Table 1 (see Section 3.1), that they have covered the broad content areas and core curriculum articulated in Section 3.3 and that they are therefore able to meet and maintain the profession’s standards as set out in the AASW Practice Standards 2003 (and pending Practice Standards 2013).

3.1. Attributes of Australian social work graduates

The Attributes of Australian social work graduates set out in Table 1 are based on the AASW Practice Standards (2003) and are statements of expected outcomes of AASW-accredited social work programs as embodied in its graduates. The AASW recommends that higher education providers (HEPs) provide assessment frameworks to show how they assess these learning outcomes.

These nine social work attributes, underpinned by values, knowledge and skills need to be developed by students during their social work degree. It is expected that at the point of graduation from a social work entry-level qualifying program, all social work graduates will have acquired these attributes and demonstrated the associated learning outcomes. The attributes are not mutually exclusive. There will be overlap and integration of the graduate attributes, particularly as they are experienced by students. Higher education providers running honours and qualifying masters programs will need to demonstrate to TEQSA how they meet the level 8 and Level 9 standards respectively.
### Table 1: Attributes of Australian social work graduates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduate attribute</th>
<th>Learning outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Demonstrated sense of identity as a professional social worker</td>
<td>▪ Demonstrated understanding of the role and value of social work in the community&lt;br&gt;▪ The ability to act in accordance with social work knowledge, values and ethics within a human rights framework&lt;br&gt;▪ The ability to apply and transfer knowledge across different fields of social work practice&lt;br&gt;▪ The ability to work for change to address inequalities at all levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sound understanding of and commitment to social work values and ethics to guide professional practice</td>
<td>▪ Good knowledge of professional values and ethics&lt;br&gt;▪ The ability to think through, recognise and explain ethical issues, and act ethically&lt;br&gt;▪ The ability to think critically within a framework of commitment to ethical practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ability to apply social work knowledge and interventions to respond effectively in meeting the needs of individuals, groups and communities in diverse settings, client groups and geographic locations</td>
<td>▪ A coherent and sound knowledge of the underlying theories, principles, concepts and practice in social work&lt;br&gt;▪ Knowledge of empowering and non-oppressive practice that is cognisant of the institutional context in which practice occurs&lt;br&gt;▪ Knowledge of recent developments in social work&lt;br&gt;▪ Understanding of frameworks and the purpose of professional supervision&lt;br&gt;▪ Knowledge of all core curriculum subjects&lt;br&gt;▪ Knowledge about social policy development, implementation and evaluation of social policy including policy theoretical frameworks&lt;br&gt;▪ Knowledge of and commitment to AASW Practice Standards&lt;br&gt;▪ Demonstrated ability to apply this knowledge in practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Graduate attribute

<table>
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<tr>
<th>4.</th>
<th>Ability to apply knowledge of human behaviour and society, as well as the social, cultural, political, legal, economic and global contexts of practice to respond effectively within a human rights and social justice framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Learning outcomes** | ▪ Knowledge of related disciplines including recent developments  
▪ Demonstrated ability to apply this knowledge to practice  
▪ Knowledge of and ability to critically analyse social, political, economic, historical, cultural and ecological systems as important considerations of governance  
▪ The ability to apply knowledge of organisations, systems and processes and societal systems to identify and explain inequalities and to act to reduce social barriers, inequality and injustice  
▪ The ability to utilise knowledge from a range of sources to inform practice  
▪ Knowledge of disability, vulnerability and resilience and their social construction and the ability to analyse these factors to inform practice  
▪ Knowledge of theories of trauma and its impact on functioning and an ability to utilise this knowledge in practice at the individual, family and community level |

<table>
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<tr>
<th>5.</th>
<th>Ability to review, critically analyse and synthesise knowledge and values and apply reflective thinking skills to inform professional judgement and practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Learning outcomes** | ▪ Knowledge of frameworks of critical analysis and reflective practice  
▪ The ability to critically analyse the structure of society with particular attention to dimensions of power and disadvantage and the influence of class, gender, age, intellectual and physical ability, sexuality, race and ethnicity |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6.</th>
<th>Ability to apply research knowledge and skills to understand, evaluate and use research to inform practice and to develop, execute and disseminate research informed by practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Learning outcomes** | ▪ The ability to undertake research to further inform and influence organisational goals and social policy  
▪ The ability to undertake evidence informed practice in all interventions  
▪ The ability to plan and execute project work and/or a piece of research and scholarship with some independence  
▪ The ability to apply research knowledge and skills to undertake research congruent with social work values and ethics  
▪ The ability to utilise research in practice to address the needs and aspirations of individuals, groups and communities in society in particular vulnerable populations  
▪ The ability to explore complex and sensitive social issues and problems to achieve socially just outcomes |
### Graduate attribute

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Learning outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td><strong>Demonstration of effective communication and interpersonal skills</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Demonstrated practice skills in all methods of social work intervention and understanding of the theories/evidence on which they are based</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Demonstrated oral communication skills for all intervention methods and demonstrated written communication skills for case noting, report writing, research and policy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Skills of advocacy, negotiation and mediation at micro and macro levels of practice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ The ability to present a clear and coherent exposition of knowledge and ideas to a variety of audiences in both oral and written form</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td><strong>Ability to work with diversity and demonstrate respect for cultural difference</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and ways of knowing and be able to apply these to practice</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ An appreciation of the historical and contemporary interface between non-Indigenous and Indigenous cultures in Australia and the ability to apply that to practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Knowledge of the cultural context of practice and the ability to apply that to practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td><strong>Understanding of the importance of and commitment to ongoing professional development</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Understanding of the value and use of supervision to achieve highly skilled professional practice, accountability and further learning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ The ability to articulate how to integrate knowledge and practice to enable contribution to further knowledge development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Demonstrated commitment to lifelong learning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Ongoing engagement as an active participant in learning to advance knowledge of social work practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### 3.2. AASW Practice Standards

The AASW Practice Standards (2003)\(^1\) (and pending Practice Standards 2013) establish benchmarks that graduates are required to demonstrate upon entry to professional practice and to maintain throughout their professional careers. The standards provide a framework for high-quality and accountable social work practice and outline what clients, employers, other professionals and the public can expect of social workers. Higher education providers must ensure that graduating students meet the practice standards.

### 3.3. Content of social work programs

While the focus of the ASWEAS is on outcomes and graduate attributes, the AASW requires that the following specific curriculum content be included in all social work programs:

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\(^1\) The 2003 AASW Practice Standards are currently under review. An extensive consultation process will follow the review of the ASWEAS, and the ASWEAS will be updated as necessary following the Practice Standards review, which is due to be completed by June 2013.
Standards for social work education: content and learning outcomes

- mental health
- child wellbeing and protection
- cross-cultural practice
- practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

Detailed statements of curriculum content covering these areas are provided in Guideline 1.1: Guidance on essential core curriculum content.

Besides this specific content, social work programs must include the elements outlined in sections 3.3.1 to 3.3.8.

Additionally, all social work program content should be taught in ways which provide students with tools to be social workers within the definition provided in the introduction to these standards.

3.3.1. Knowledge, skills and values for social work practice

Social workers recognise that social problems experienced by individuals, families, groups, and communities are multi-causal, and require knowledge of human behaviour, and socioeconomic, political, legal and cultural analysis to be able to offer appropriate help to alleviate and prevent problems. This interactive dual focus of analysis (individual and systemic, private pain and public issues) distinguishes the theory and practice of social work from other helping professions and shapes the forms of intervention offered. The acquisition of social work practice knowledge and skills will take place over at least two years of the educational program.

3.3.2. Knowledge of social work ethics

This is a core component of social work practice that relies on the ability to think critically within a framework of commitment to ethical practice, and needs to be developed throughout the social work program with reference to the AASW Code of Ethics (2010a). Graduates will be able to recognise the ethical issues that emerge in particular situations in practice and to demonstrate the ability to negotiate ethical outcomes informed by the AASW Code of Ethics.

3.3.3. Methods of social work practice

All methods of social work intervention are required learning, including community work, counselling, group work, social planning and social action, research, social policy analysis and development, and management.

3.3.4. Skills for social work practice

Practice skills include interpersonal skills; communication skills—both oral for counselling and for working in and with groups and teams, and written for case noting and report writing; skills of reflective and critical thinking and analysis; data collection and management.
skills; advocacy skills; skills for working with involuntary clients; conflict resolution skills; skills for working in organisations; and skills in negotiation and mediation.

Skills of making assessments and deciding on the most appropriate intervention, along with skills required in the process of making judgements and recommendations, need to be developed throughout the social work program.

### 3.3.5. Understanding the context of social work practice

Social workers need to be able to critically analyse the structure of society, with particular attention being paid to dimensions of power and disadvantage and the influence of class, gender, age, intellectual and physical ability, sexuality, race and ethnicity. The ability to understand the context of social work practice at local, national and international levels, and the institutional/organisational context of social work practice, is required. This understanding requires knowledge of and the ability to critically analyse social, political, economic, historical, cultural, legal and ecological systems as well as the important considerations of governance with respect to these.

The evolution of systems and the processes that facilitate and constrain change need to be understood. There must be a focus on empowering and non-oppressive practice that is cognisant of the institutional context in which practice occurs including considerations of worker and client safety.

### 3.3.6. Fields of practice

Students should have the opportunity to gain an understanding and appreciation of the experience of individuals, groups and communities within a range of different fields of practice, settings, client groups and geographical locations. It is expected the following areas will be addressed: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures; mental health; child wellbeing and child safety; ageing; income security; health; disability; cultural and linguistic diversity; rural and remote locations; correctional services and justice; housing and homelessness; international practice and education.

### 3.3.7. Knowledge from other disciplines

Knowledge from other disciplines is an integral component of social work education. This material has traditionally been covered in subjects variously named sociology, anthropology, politics, economics, history, social theory, psychology, and human development and behaviour.

In a two-year program, this essential knowledge should be acquired through HEP study undertaken prior to the final two years of social work study. In a four-year program, it will usually be completed in the first two years of the social work degree.
Each HEP will exercise its discretion in the organisation and presentation of material related to the following content areas, but all graduates must have demonstrated an understanding of society and knowledge of the individual:

- **Understanding of society.** An understanding of society and how it has developed and is organised is fundamental to social work. This includes an understanding of the major insights provided by sociology, anthropology, social theory, history, economics and political science, and an awareness of how these contribute to the understanding of the politico economic distribution of resources. In addition, students should be encouraged to think about the implications and effects of the globalisation of society.

- **Knowledge of the individual.** Understanding the individual requires students to learn a framework which situates the person in the environment. Specific knowledge development is required around:
  - human behaviour and development
  - personality development
  - life-cycle stages
  - family and social networks
  - physical health and ill-health, mental health problems and mental disorder
  - ability/disability, vulnerability and resilience.

Social work students are expected to also develop an understanding of the social construction of these concepts and develop the tools to use this knowledge to act in line with the definition of social work.

**3.3.8. Interprofessional practice**

Social work practice has long been grounded in working with other professionals to deliver high-quality services. Accredited programs need to ensure that students are familiar with the importance and fundamentals of collaborative care and can operate effectively in interdisciplinary teams.

**3.4. Learning for practice in field education**

Field education is a core component of social work education and the following principles must be incorporated in field education programs:

- Programs must be consistent with the general principles identified for social work education.
- Programs must have the status of a full academic subject.
- Field education is to be a cooperative endeavour between the higher education provider, the student, the field educator (practitioners supervising students in agencies) and the agency.
Programs must employ strategies to ensure that students integrate social work knowledge, skills and values.

In order to successfully complete the final field education subject in the field education program, students must meet the learning outcomes articulated as Australian social work graduate attributes (see Table 1).

Guideline 1.2: Guidelines on field education programs explicates the requirements for field education in social work programs. It must be read in conjunction with these standards as the guidelines form part of the requirements for programs to be accredited with the AASW.

The guidelines include expectations regarding:

- requirements of a program for learning in field education
- roles and responsibilities for the student, the agency-based field educator, the Social work academic organisational unit (SWAOU) based field education coordinator, the SWAOU field liaison staff and where required the professional external field educator
- location of placements including minimum requirements, placements in the student’s place of work and placements taken overseas
- assessment in field education including principles, strategies and criteria.
4. Standards for social work education: structure, delivery and process

4.1. Structure of programs of social work education

The AASW accredits entry-level social work programs taught at bachelor and master level. Bachelor degree programs combine an academic social science program (studies of society and studies of the individual) with social work education. They are full-time courses of four years’ duration. Qualifying master degrees are courses normally of two years’ duration. To ensure comparability, eligibility criteria for entry to qualifying master degrees will be completion of a relevant three-year degree which includes the equivalent of at least one year of full-time studies in social sciences. Under special circumstances, applicants may enter a program without the previous studies, but in this arrangement must be provided with an equivalent and appropriate bridging course. Entry qualifications and any bridging arrangements must be reported on in the annual accreditation report. The program structures outlined in paragraphs 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 are accredited by the AASW as qualifying graduates for entry to the profession of social work.

4.1.1. Bachelor of social work degree

To be eligible for membership of the AASW with a bachelor of social work degree, graduates in an accredited social work degree program must have completed one of the following:

- four years of full-time bachelor degree level study (at AQF 7 or 8) or its part-time equivalent, which leads to the award of a distinct qualification in social work. To be considered AQF 8 the AQF Council secretariat advises that the four years must include embedded honours
- two years of a full-time bachelor degree level study or its part-time equivalent, which leads to the award of a distinct qualification in social work, after the completion of two or three years of an undergraduate degree that contained at least one year of full-time studies in social sciences (studies of the individual and society).

All references to AASW-accredited social work qualifications in HEP publications and marketing material must state clearly that they are entry-level programs. They should be accompanied by the following statement, which must be in bold type:

This is an AASW-accredited qualification. It is an entry qualification into the social work profession and has been determined to meet the Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS).
It is preferred that all references to AASW-accredited social work qualifications in HEP publications also be accompanied by the AASW-accredited course logo.

4.1.2. Master of social work degree

To be eligible for membership of the AASW with a qualifying master of social work degree, graduates in an accredited social work degree program must have completed two years of a full-time master degree level study (AQF 9) or its part-time equivalent, which leads to the award of a distinct qualification in social work, after the prior completion of a relevant three-year degree which includes at least one year of full-time studies in social sciences (studies of the individual and society) or equivalent.

Entry requirements for admission to the qualifying master’s degree in social work must be consistent with the HEP’s entry requirements for other AQF level 9 degrees.

The qualifying master’s degree program must be clearly distinguished from advanced social work degrees.

All references to AASW-accredited social work qualifications in HEP publications and marketing material must state clearly that they are entry-level programs.

They should be accompanied by the following statement, which must be in bold type:

This is an AASW-accredited qualification. It is an entry qualification into the social work profession and has been determined to meet the Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS).

It is preferred that all references to AASW-accredited social work qualifications in HEP publications also be accompanied by the AASW-accredited course logo.
4. Standards for social work education: structure, delivery and process

Unless enrolling to meet recency of practice requirements\(^2\), graduates who are already eligible for AASW membership must not be given entry to a qualifying master degree. They should normally be offered an advanced postgraduate option.

4.2. Modes of delivery of social work programs

Social work programs may be taught in on-campus, distance, extension, offshore or other flexible modes of delivery (including on campus with e-learning offerings in some units). Regardless of the mode of delivery, the program must:

- articulate an explicit curriculum that leads to the achievement of specified outcomes
- provide evidence of regular assessment of program outcomes.

Some higher education providers offer more than one social work program in different modes of delivery: for example, four-year bachelor of social work dual-degree programs, a two-year postgraduate bachelor or master program, or an on-campus four-year program and an off-campus program. Each program will be assessed separately to determine accreditation of the program and eligibility of graduates for membership of the AASW.

4.2.1. Flexible delivery, distance and off-campus programs

Where a social work program is offered via flexible delivery and/or off-campus modes, students will be given a range of opportunities to engage in interaction with their peers and with experienced practitioners so that they can develop the appropriate knowledge, skills and practice standards for professional practice. These opportunities could include face-to-face interactions, use of online technologies, and other innovative strategies that replicate as closely as possible the range of practice contexts in contemporary society.

A minimum for twenty days of face-to-face delivery for campus and/or flexible delivery programs in the social work program is required, and at least one of these blocks of face-to-face study must be completed prior to the first placement. This requirement is recommended for areas where social work direct practice must be learnt and demonstrated, such as interpersonal and communication skills, conflict resolution, and capacity to work with individuals, groups and within the community. The 20 days excludes field education requirements. This applies to students who are enrolled and studying while living overseas as well as to those who live in Australia.

\(^2\) Under the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency guidelines for registered professions, recency of practice is defined to mean that a practitioner has maintained an adequate connection with, and recent practice in, the profession since qualifying or obtaining registration. Most registration boards recognise recency as within the past five years. If social work becomes registered, the standard is likely to be ‘within the past five years’. Less practice than this does not mean practitioners must do a new course; however, they are usually required to complete additional continuing professional development. The AASW therefore determines that it is only under circumstances where a social worker who already has eligibility requests such a program for recency of practice reasons, as defined here they may be enrolled in a qualifying masters. When in doubt, this should be discussed with the AASW.
4.2.2. **Offshore programs**

Because social work is a profession in which context is very important, there needs to be special consideration of the content of social work programs taught overseas. The social work program must be relevant to the context in which it is provided and, as an Australian accredited program, it must include in the curriculum knowledge of the Australian social work context.

4.2.3. **Simulated learning environments**

The AASW supports the development and use of simulated learning environments (SLEs) and encourages higher education providers to utilise SLEs to enhance teaching and learning. The development of technology-based SLEs may lead to significant advancement in social work education for internal and external students and for field education placements, potentially resulting in better prepared and trained social workers, and improved practice standards. However, technology-based SLEs are not to be a replacement for off-campus and/or distance education face-to-face requirements and may not be used as a replacement for field placement hours.

4.3. **Philosophy of social work education**

The academic unit that offers the social work program will have a clearly articulated educational philosophy.

- Adult learning principles enabling students to be self-directed and goal-oriented will be visibly demonstrated in all social work education.
- Social work education fosters a commitment to lifelong learning and continuing professional education.
- Social work education aims to maximise opportunities for mutual learning by both student and educator.
- Social work education requires the integration of theory and practice.

The teaching and assessment of a social work program must integrate and balance knowledge and skills as learning outcomes, preparing a student for practice by including skills-based teaching, practice teaching, and small group teaching.

4.4. **Articulation of programs and credit transfer**

The AASW supports articulation of welfare, social and behavioural science and community work programs with social work degree programs. Articulation arrangements between programs of different levels must be in accordance with the stated principles of Universities Australia and the AQF. Since 1998, higher education providers have extended credit arrangements, which may vary from provider to provider. Detailed guidelines on articulation and credit transfers for accredited professional social work programs are provided in [Guideline 1.3: Guidance on RPL, articulation and credit transfer](#).
Social work academic organisational units (SWAOUs) must ensure that students undertake all relevant social work subjects and are not exempted from social work subjects on the basis of the qualification that led to their initial acceptance into the degree. In other words, subjects must not be double-counted.

4.5. Recognition of prior learning in field education

The AASW recognises that students may enter their social work degree study program with a breadth of prior learning and experience in the human services sector. Recognition of prior learning (RPL) may therefore be considered with respect to field education.

If a social work academic organisational unit (SWAOU) elects to use RPL, however, it must follow the guidelines which complement this document. Granting of RPL for a complete field education subject should be considered very carefully and granted only if the SWAOU is certain the person will meet all learning outcomes.

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 experience, tasks, and duties in line with social work roles, tasks and functions should be considered when granting RPL. SWAOUs must ensure that students are not granted credit beyond those allowed and articulated in Guideline 1.3.
5. **Standards for organisational arrangements and governance of social work programs**

To be accredited by the AASW, the qualifying bachelor of social work and master of social work degrees must be offered by a higher education provider accredited by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency to provide qualifications at AQF levels 7, 8 and 9 and who meet these standards and the requirements specified in **Guideline 1.4: Guidance on organisational arrangements and governance of social work programs**.

5.1. **Planning and delivery of social work programs**

Social work education must be provided in a manner that acknowledges the partnership between higher education providers and human service providers, with evidence of scholarship informing policy and practice.

Wherever possible, there should be involvement of clients, service users and communities in the planning and delivery of social work education programs.

Social workers engaged in the planning and delivery of education and supervision undertake ethical responsibilities as outlined in the **AASW Code of Ethics (2010)**.

5.2. **Program structure**

The social work program must be the responsibility of a recognisable academic unit within the HEP. Where the unit is not a separate academic unit, the onus is on the HEP to demonstrate that the organisational structure is appropriate to ensure the achievement of the minimum social work education standards required.

The AASW recognises that some small or regional higher education providers (HEPs) may not be able to provide a social work program in their own right and may seek to do so in partnership with another program. In such situations the AASW will require information on legal arrangements between the two programs, terms of the agreement of the partnership, roles and responsibilities, governance and academic leadership arrangements and educational costs and benefits for students.

5.3. **Resources and staffing**

An academic unit offering a program of professional social work education must be adequately resourced if the required educational outcomes are to be achieved.

- It is expected that to develop an effective program of active research and run one accredited social work program, a minimum of five or more full-time equivalent social work staff will be required.
- All teachers of core social work theory and practice, including field coordinators, must have social work qualifications.
5. Standards for organisational arrangements and governance of social work programs

- At least 50% of the staff members teaching in the social work program must have social work qualifications.
- It is particularly important that adequate resources be available for the provision of a quality field education program. Members of staff responsible for field education manage a core component of the academic program.
- The head of the academic unit who is responsible for the discipline, leadership and management of the social work program must be either a professor or an associate professor who is eligible for AASW membership.

Guideline 1.4 must be consulted to meet the requirements of these broad statements.

5.4. Consultative arrangements

The HEP must have consultative networks that provide an opportunity for feedback from the field, and to bring current trends and issues from the field into the SWAOU. Formal consultative structures must be developed to enable teaching staff, field educators, human service providers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, service users, employers, graduates, AASW representatives and students to participate in decision making related to the social work program.
6. Procedures for program accreditation

Procedures for the review of social work programs offered by higher education providers are detailed in **Guideline 1.5: Guidance on reaccreditation reviews**, which also provides a template for review reports. Social work programs undergoing review will be approved on the basis of meeting these standards as articulated in **Guideline 1.5**.

6.1. Review of social work programs

The AASW reviews social work programs every five years to ensure that they are of a suitably high standard, reflect contemporary issues and scholarship and produce graduates who are able to demonstrate the minimum standards for social work education.

6.2. Consultation for new programs

The AASW also offers consultation to higher education providers which are planning new programs of social work education. Procedures for applying to have a course approved by the AASW are detailed in **Guideline 1.6: Guidance on new programs**. A consultant will be appointed to work with the higher education provider (HEP) seeking to run a program. The consultant, supported by and with the advice of consultancy advisors, will make a recommendation to the AASW Board of Directors regarding provisional accreditation of the new program.

6.3. Appointment of accreditation panel members

The AASW appoints members to the accreditation panel. Review teams are appointed from the accreditation panel as needed.

6.4. Review costs

The costs associated with the review of social work programs will be met by the higher education provider under review or requesting provisional accreditation for a new program.

6.5. Annual reporting

Programs will be required to report annually between reviews. A template for that report is available in **Guideline 1.5: Guidance on reaccreditation reviews** and in **Guideline 1.6: Guidance on new programs**.

6.6. Unmet requirement

If a social work program is unable from time to time to meet a particular requirement in the manner specified, the onus will be on the social work program to seek immediate consultation with the AASW. As part of this consultation the social work program may suggest an alternative method by which the AASW requirement could be met. Programs that subsequently do not meet these minimum requirements will have their AASW accreditation withdrawn.
6.7. Third party feedback

The AASW accepts feedback from third parties, including students, and will contact the relevant social work academic organisational unit if a complaint is received about the social work program or the unit which raises concerns about ongoing accreditation.
7. Policy implementation and review

This policy will be implemented from January 2013. Social work programs approved under the previous policy (ASWEAS 2008, updated 2009, 2010) will have until the date of their next review to meet the requirements of this policy if their next review is due after January 2014. A social work program that has a review in 2013 may choose to use the newly adopted policy or the previous policy.

Multiple contextual factors shaped the development of the ASWEAS 2012 document. In accordance with AASW policy, the principles, standards and policies presented in this document will next be reviewed in five years; that is, in 2017–18, or earlier, if contextual factors necessitate.
8. Guidelines

The guidelines and templates for programs and accreditation panels, in conjunction with this document, form the basis for program accreditation with the AASW.

The following guidelines are currently available on the AASW website:

- Guideline 1.1: Guidance on essential core curriculum content (Ref ASWEAS 3.3)
- Guideline 1.2: Guidance on field education programs (Ref ASWEAS 3.4)
- Guideline 1.3: Guidance on RPL, articulation and credit transfer (Ref ASWEAS 4.4)
- Guideline 1.4: Guidance on organisational arrangements and governance of social work programs (Ref ASWEAS 5.1)
- Guideline 1.5: Guidance on reaccreditation reviews (Ref ASWEAS 6.1) with annual report template
- Guideline 1.6: Guidance on new programs (Ref ASWEAS 6.2) with report templates.
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