

# ASWEAS GUIDELINE:

## Guidance on Field Education



**AASW**

Australian Association  
of Social Workers

# Guideline: Guidance on Field Education within the social work program.

This document is to be read in conjunction with the *Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards* (ASWEAS March 2020 v2.2 updated August 2023).

The ASWEAS details the principles, standards and broad requirements for accreditation by the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) of professional social work education programs delivered by Higher Education Providers (HEPs) through the social work academic organisational units (SWAOUs).

This document provides guidance to educators on field education programs requirements, (ASWEAS Section 4) for programs seeking accreditation by AASW under the following headings:

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1.0	13 <sup>th</sup> September 2023	CEO	
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# 1. Requirements of a program for learning in field education

1. Field education subjects/units must demonstrate a developmental approach to learning that complies with the principles for social work education set out in ASWEAS March 2020 v2.2 updated August 2023 (Section 4).
2. Field education subjects/units must be taken over two years within the professional social work program of study.
3. Students must successfully complete a minimum of 1,000 hours of professional practice learning experience involving no more than three placements. These hours must be completed within the normal working hours / days of the organisation hosting the placement. No leave of any kind may be included in this requirement; that is, the full 1,000 hours must be completed.
4. Practice–theory integration seminars may be included within the required hours up to a maximum of 7 hours per 250 hours of placement, with a maximum of 28 hours across all field education placements.
5. No placement will be shorter than 250 hours.
6. No placement will be an observational placement. All placements will involve the active involvement of the student in social work roles.
7. Students will complete at least one placement in a professional practice setting with an onsite social work field educator.
8. Placements must be structured in a way that is educationally viable (so that educational goals can be achieved). Patterns of placement days may vary from five days per week, to a minimum of two days per week. Placements that are two days per week must include at least two full-time (five-day) block periods, unless the SWAOU determines that extenuating circumstances apply.

## Guidelines for considering extenuating circumstances

On occasions, a student may request flexibility regarding the requirement that placements that are two days per week must include at least two full time (5 day) block periods, on the grounds of extenuating circumstances.

Requests for flexibility regarding this requirement can only be considered for extenuating circumstances.

Extenuating circumstances should normally only pertain to those with a disability in which the five-day block is likely to lead to more impaired health or is simply untenable due to the nature of the disability.

The ASWEAS does not attempt to define extenuating circumstances absolutely. Any extenuating circumstances would be expected to have a substantial impact on the individual's ability to complete the tasks. This means that the circumstances must have a bigger impact than everyday things like a poor night's sleep, a minor illness (such as a cough or cold), a minor injury or if you are anxious about the placement.

The following is an example of circumstances which may be considered extenuating:

- Serious health issue, illness or disability which impacts on the student's capacity to attend placements for at least two full time (5 day) block periods. An appropriate

medical certificate or other assessments may be requested by the SWAOU in considering such requests.

The following are some examples of circumstances which would **NOT** be considered extenuating:

- Other work commitments
- Family commitments
- Holiday / Moving house
- Changing jobs
- Financial cost
- Transitory health matters

The above guidelines are not absolute nor are they exhaustive. It is recommended that each SWAOU considers all extenuating circumstances requests on a case-by-case basis.

The onus is on the student to demonstrate their extenuating circumstances and to provide appropriate evidence and/or supporting documentation upon request of the SWAOU.

SWAOUs are required to report on incidents where extenuating circumstances are granted as part of their annual reporting to the AASW.

9. All placements are carried out in a host organisation that provides appropriate social work tasks<sup>1</sup> and meets the educational requirements of the field education program.
10. Each student is allocated a field educator who is a suitably qualified and experienced practitioner meeting the requirements specified in this document. The field educator guides the student's learning during the placement.
11. Clear expectations for learning goals and performance outcomes, based on the AASW *Practice Standards for Social Workers* (2003) and the AASW *Code of Ethics* (2020) are established through a consultative process between the SWAOU, the field educator and the student, and are documented in a learning management plan.
12. 500 hours of placement time will be undertaken in a direct practice role involving the application of professional interpersonal skills.
13. Students in employment will not have a placement in their current work role or under their current supervisor.
14. In some community contexts cultural support should be provided in addition to the requirements for supervision specified in this document. Cultural support may be provided by a community member who is not a social worker.

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<sup>1</sup> Appropriate social work tasks are defined as tasks which enable students to develop practice and analytic skills in community work, casework, group work, social planning and social action, research, social policy analysis or social policy development.

## 2. Roles and responsibilities

Roles and responsibilities for the student, the agency, the agency-based field educator, the HEP-based SWAOU field education staff and, where required, the professional external field educator must be clearly outlined in the field education policies of the social work program.

### 2.1. Field educator responsibilities and qualifications

- 1) Field educators are qualified social workers (eligible for full membership of the AASW) with a minimum of two years' full-time post-qualifying practice experience, or its part-time equivalent, who demonstrate a commitment to continuing professional education and an interest in developing social work knowledge and skills.
- 2) In recognition of the difficulties for some regional HEPs, in exceptional circumstances relating to distance, a field educator with less experience may be allocated for one placement only. In this circumstance the field education coordinator must ensure that the field educator has additional support and mentoring.
- 3) Field educators must undertake training for the field education role before or during their first experience in the field educator role. Ongoing training and professional development of the field educators is highly recommended.
- 4) Social work field educators will provide a minimum of 1.5 hours formal, structured supervision per student for each 35 hours of placement. At a minimum, half of this supervision must be provided on a one-to-one basis.
- 5) The social work field educator will be able to observe the student's practice in placements where the focus is on direct practice. Ideally the field educator will also observe the student's engagement in team and interdisciplinary meetings.
- 6) The social work field educator will not be someone who has a current or prior close personal relationship with the student.

### 2.2. Social work program responsibilities

- 1) There must be a clearly identifiable field education unit including administrative support dedicated to the management of field education partnerships and the student experience.
- 2) The unit will appoint a Field Education Unit Academic Lead with responsibilities for leadership, research, and educational innovation in field education, the appointment must be appointed at Level B or above, a qualified social worker with at least five years post-qualifying experience and eligible for AASW membership.
- 3) Staffing of field education programs should reflect the SWAOU's commitment to the centrality of field education in the social work curriculum. For example, there may be clear connections between the academic and research interests of staff and the field education experiences offered by the academic unit.
- 4) All members of staff will actively contribute to the field education program. All academic staff will use opportunities to integrate learning from field education into other parts of the curriculum.
- 5) The social work program will assign one or more staff as designated field education coordinator to ensure placements meet ASWEAS requirements and field education liaison officer (FELO) to provide oversight and support for student and Field Educator, for each placement.

- 6) Field education coordinators will have a minimum of five years' post-qualifying practice experience and be eligible for AASW membership.
- 7) Responsibilities of field education coordinators will include:
  - a. developing placements and engaging field educators
  - b. contributing to field education integration workshops
  - c. contributing to workshops for field educators
  - d. performing a field education liaison role.
- 8) Field education liaison officer (FELO) will be on a permanent or contract appointment, with a minimum of five years' post-qualifying practice experience, and eligible for membership of the AASW.
- 9) The responsibilities of the field education liaison officer(s) will include:
  - a. involving the organisation, the field educator, and the student in a consultative process about the goals, learning processes, structure and assessment of the placement
  - b. maintaining regular contact with the student, with a minimum of two contacts, including at least one face-to-face visit, to clarify educational issues, monitor the progress of the placement, mediate any difficulties, and assess student progress. These may include group meetings and tutorials. In exceptional circumstances relating to distance, this may be waived (and videoconferencing or voice over internet protocol (e.g. Skype)) for one placement only. Telecommunications and video conferences may be used to supplement site visits but will not entirely replace them. Students and field educators should be provided with additional on-site visits from liaison staff if difficulties arise during the placement.
- 10) The SWAOU must ensure that policies and processes are in place to meet duty of care, risk management and occupational health and safety requirements for students undertaking field education. These include:
  - a. recommending a maximum number of hours of placement and travel to be undertaken in one day
  - b. recommending a maximum number of paid hours and placement hours to be undertaken in a week
  - c. notifying host organisations of occupational health and safety requirements, higher education provider insurance arrangements and the limits of that cover.
  - d. ensuring that host organisations have alerted students to policies regarding harassment, bullying and other obligations under relevant legislation
  - e. ensuring that host organisations understand that their legal obligation to provide a safe workplace with respect to freedom from bullying, harassment etc. extends to students in the workplace
- 11) SWAOUs must offer adequate support to field educators in recognition of their contribution to the social work education program. This support should include:
  - a. access to the higher education provider's resources such as the library
  - b. consultation with SWAOU staff as required

- c. training and support in student supervision
  - d. other professional development activities as appropriate
- 12) In situations where the host organisation has no suitable social work field educator, arrangements must be made to ensure that appropriate professional formation and supervision is provided by a qualified social work field educator.

The SWAOU will:

- a. negotiate with the host organisation to engage an external social worker to undertake the professional supervision requirements
  - b. negotiate with the agency for a suitably qualified co-field educator to be appointed to supervise the student's day-to-day learning in conjunction with the external social work field educator
- 13) Only one placement should have an external field educator, except in the exceptional circumstances (listed in the work-based placements clause) and they will meet the same requirements, have the same role responsibilities, level of oversight and support, as those employed in agency-based positions.
- 14) Where field educators undertake student supervision roles that are not included in their usual paid employment, where they are employed as external field educators to the host organisation, it is expected that SWAOUs will negotiate payment as part of their contractual agreement with the field educator.
- 15) SWAOUs will liaise with host organisations so that the student has access to appropriate learning opportunities and to an educational environment that enables a student to meet the requirements for social work education. This includes arrangements for:
- a. adequate space and resources for the student as required, including use of desks, office space, computers, telephones, and cars. If the resources that a student requires to meet their learning needs are not available, it is expected that alternative arrangements will be negotiated.
  - b. reasonable access to organisational records
  - c. accommodation of students' learning needs, including adequate time for supervision, completion of field education assessment requirements, reading and reflection
  - d. a physically and emotionally safe and secure work environment.

### 3. Location of placements

It is essential that students have the opportunity to participate in a broad range of learning experiences in field education. In particular, students must undertake field placements in at least two distinctly different fields of practice and organisations, with different client groups, using different methods of social work practice and with a different field educator for each placement.

#### 3.1. Placements in the student's place of employment

- 1) In order to provide a breadth of experience and to prevent conflicts of interest between employment and education roles, field education placements will be undertaken in a different context, organisation and field of practice to the student's place of employment.
- 2) This requirement may be waived for one placement only if the SWAOU is satisfied that all other principles and policies set out in this document can be met.
- 3) If a placement is undertaken in a student's place of work, a written agreement signed by the organisation, the SWAOU and the student will be completed. The role will be significantly differentiated from the student's substantive/current position to ensure sufficient opportunities for a breadth of learning and practice experiences, as required to meet the graduate learning outcomes.  
All parties will agree to:
  - a) agreement that the employee is in a student role while on placement and that the student is able to meet the educational requirements, principles and policies set out in this document
  - b) allocation of learning experiences not involving the student's routine work responsibilities, including details of the differentiation between learning goals and usual employment duties
  - c) protected time while on placement that is separate from the duties carried out at work and includes time to complete reading, reflective learning and assessment activities related to the placement
  - d) specification of how the criteria outlined in this document for field education are met
  - e) specification for how the placement will be monitored to ensure that the criteria will be met
  - f) that the supervisor is not the student's line manager or usual supervisor
- 4) In exceptional circumstances, a student may be granted two field placements in the student's place of employment. These exceptional circumstances could include:
  - a) Where students are living and/or working in remote areas and there is no suitable placement within a reasonable distance (> 90 kilometres travel)
  - b) Mobility, support, access and equipment requirements of students with a disability that would exclude other placement options

<sup>2</sup> Definition of rurality/remoteness: ARIA is an unambiguously geographical approach to defining remoteness. It is derived from measures of road distance between populated localities and service centres. These road distance measures are then used to generate a remoteness score for any location in Australia. Australian Standard Geographical Classification – Remoteness Areas (ASGC-RA)

RA1 – Major Cities of Australia Scores: 0 – 0.2

RA2 – Inner Regional Australia Scores: >0.2 – 2.4

RA3 – Outer Regional Australia Scores: >2.4 – 5.92

RA4 – Remote Australia Scores: >5.92 – 10.53

RA5 – Very Remote Australia Scores: >10.53

It is recommended that the definition of remoteness includes those areas which fall into the ARIA categories RA3–5 and RA2 where the distance to the major service centre is more than 90 kilometres.



- c) Extreme financial circumstances. This would involve a significant change to a student's living circumstances if they were required to undertake an unpaid placement and documentation must be provided to substantiate these claims
- 5) If the SWAOU approves two field placements in student's place of employment, it must guarantee that all of the principles and policies of this document are met. Grounds for exceptional circumstances must be documented in the social work field education manual.
- 6) In cases where exceptional circumstances apply, the second placement in a place of work must be in a completely different practice setting and field of practice and with a different field educator from the first placement.

### 3.2. Overseas placements

- 1) When a student is enrolled in a higher education institution based in Australia, 50% (500 hours) of the field education program must be undertaken in Australia. It is preferable that the student undertake their first placement in Australia.
- 2) When a student is enrolled in an accredited social work program in an Australian HEP offshore campus, students can do both placements overseas as long as the principles and policies of this document are met.
- 3) Direct responsibility for the placement and onsite supervision will be assigned to a qualified social worker and the program provider must appoint a staff member to directly liaise with their international counterpart.
- 4) Field educators must have at least two years' experience and be eligible for membership of either the AASW or the equivalent professional association within the host country.
- 5) Field education coordinators must be staff members of accredited social work educational programs in the country where the placement is undertaken, or members of accredited Australian social work programs.
- 6) Recognition of prior learning for field education does not invalidate the requirement for one placement in Australia.

## 4. Assessment in field education

The *AASW Practice Standards for Social Workers (2023)* must be utilised to inform the assessment of student field placements as they give detail to the graduate attributes.

- 1) Social work programs should map the practice standards specified in the AASW Practice Standards across the entire curriculum and show how field education is located within this.
- 2) Social work programs have a responsibility to assist organisations and field educators to map the AASW Practice Standards against the experiential learning opportunities offered to students during placements and to articulate how the students' field education experiences relate to the practice standards.
- 3) Performance outcomes based on the AASW Practice Standards and the AASW Code of Ethics will be used to assess students in each of their field placements. It is expected that different scaffolded performance outcomes will assess novice students (first placement students) and graduating students (final placement students).
- 4) The assessment activities will include direct observation of the student in academic and practice education settings.
- 5) Assessment strategies will require the student to demonstrate performance at the same standards of academic rigour as is expected in any academic subject.
- 6) The assessment asks will be designed and implemented using a range of agreed assessment strategies to assess the student's level of achievement and include contributions from all parties involved in the placement and carried out in an equitable and collaborative manner.
- 7) The final decision about whether the student has achieved the identified learning goals and performance outcomes and has passed the field education subject is made by the SWAOU after consideration of material submitted by all parties.
- 8) Field education curricula must incorporate a development component, such as a rating\* scale, so that student progress against the practice standards and/or levels of achievement can be assessed and recorded.

\*The following example of a rating system was developed by, and is used with permission of, the Victorian Combined Schools of Social Work (CSSW).

### Extract from the Victorian CSSW *Common Assessment Tool* (2012)

A **rating scale** that identifies level of achievement against the core learning areas assists students and field educators to assess the level of the student's performance. This scale is designed for the purpose of indicating minimum standards expected for field education placements. It is holistic in nature, providing a broad rating against each of the core learning areas. The scale is as follows:

Rating	Level	Description
Not capable	0	Performance not at basic level expected. Poor understanding of requirements. Practice unsafe or inappropriate. Knowledge or skills undeveloped. Little application to learning.
Some capability	1	Performance not yet capable. Some requirements understood. Further work needed to demonstrate beginning capability.
Beginning capability	2	Performance at beginning level expected. Requirements understood. Practice capable under close guidance and supervision. Limited adaptability.
Capable	3	Performance at level expected of newly qualifying practitioner. Requirements integrated into practice. Can perform independently. Demonstrates adaptability and critical appreciation of own/others' practice.
Highly capable	4	Performance beyond level expected of newly qualifying practitioner. High levels of independence. Engages strongly in critical reflexivity. Exhibits ethical fluency. Generates new understandings or practices.
Unable to be assessed	U/A	The work has either not been undertaken or the supervisor has not had an opportunity to assess capability in this area.

To pass the first placement, students must at least reach a level of 'beginning capability' (2) for all learning outcome areas appropriate to the setting by the end of the placement.

To pass the final field education placement, students must at least reach a level of 'capable' (3) across all learning outcome areas, relevant to placement setting, by the end of the placement.

## 5. References

Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) (2023). *Practice Standards for Social Workers: Achieving Outcomes*. Canberra: AASW.

—— (2020). *Code of Ethics*. Canberra: AASW.

Combined Schools of Social Work (Victoria) (2012). *CSSW Common Assessment Tool*.