

ASWEAS GUIDELINE:

Guidance on
Governance &
Staffing
arrangements
of social work
programs



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Australian Association
of Social Workers

Guideline: Guidance on Governance and staffing arrangements of social work programs.

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 Providers on governance and staffing arrangements of social work programs, (ASWEAS Section 6) program requirements for programs seeking accreditation by AASW under the following headings:

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1. Staffing and resources
2. Commitment of social work schools to the professional body.

1. Staffing and resources

A social work academic organisational unit (SWAOU) offering a program of professional social work education must be resourced by appropriately qualified staff if the required educational outcomes are to be achieved. The purpose of the staffing standards is to ensure that student learning outcomes are achieved through working with academic staff who can model the behaviour expected of professional social workers in their teaching, research, scholarship and service.

This section provides information about academic staffing requirements in an SWAOU. These standards on academic staffing have been developed to ensure that education in social work is offered at a standard that merits accreditation.

- 1) The SWAOU must include a staffing profile that comprises a minimum number of social work qualified staff. All teachers of required social work theory and practice curriculum content should be eligible for membership of the AASW. This profile must be taken into consideration in the planning phase of the development of the social work program and must be borne in mind when making a submission for accreditation of a new program.
- 2) Minimum social work qualified staffing requirements are essential to the SWAOU's capacity to foster and develop the professional social work identity of students, for teaching specific social work components of the program for ongoing professional development, research and course development and so that the SWAOU can contribute to the development of social work knowledge. Student to staff ratios generally should not exceed 22:1. Where social work practice skills are being taught, the student to staff ratio will not exceed 16:1.
- 3) A SWAOU offering one program of social work (e.g. a Bachelor of Social Work or a Master of Social Work (Qualifying)) will meet accreditation compliance, if there are at a minimum five or more full-time equivalent (FTE) academic staff members at a Level B or above who have primary responsibility for teaching the social work program and research. The FTE academics should be eligible for AASW Membership. The staffing profile must be documented in the accreditation application with the expectation being with new programs, that staff increases commensurate with growth of the student cohort such that at least the five FTE Level B staff have been appointed by the time the first cohort reaches their final year of study.
- 4) A SWAOU offering program(s) on more than one campus will only be considered for accreditation if there are eight or more full-time equivalent (FTE) social work academic staff members in that SWAOU. This level of staffing must be maintained throughout the life of the program. The staffing profile must be documented in the accreditation application with the expectation being with new programs, that staff increases commensurate with growth of the student cohort such that at least the five FTE Level B staff have been appointed by the time the first cohort reaches their final year of study. At least five of the staff must hold full-time appointments and be based full time on the campus at which the head and the administration of the SWAOU resides. The FTE academics should be eligible for AASW Membership.

Where social work academic teaching staff numbers exceed the minimum five (5 FTE), at least 50% of additional staff members should be eligible for AASW membership.

- 5) The SWAOU will generally have more qualified social work staff dependent on the level of student numbers as to maintain ratios more academic staff would be required, along with any other social work programs the unit may deliver, for example, postgraduate certificates, diplomas, advanced masters, professional and research doctorates which would all require greater support of student learning needs.

- 6) The head of the SWAOU, responsible for social work program management and leadership, must be a senior academic appointment preferably at professorial Level E and eligible for membership of the AASW. At a minimum the head may be of associate professorial level (Level D) under exceptional circumstances and be eligible for membership of the AASW.

Any Level E appointment is expected to be an eminent authority in social work and to have achieved distinction at national and international level through the making of original, innovative and distinguished contributions to scholarship, research and teaching in social work as well as commensurate contributions to the work of the academic institution.

- 7) During the establishment phase of the social work program, the development of the program could be led by an academic appointed at Level C. However, a senior academic Level D appointee must be in place at the time of approval of provisional accreditation by the AASW.
- 8) Collaboration between SWAOUs is valued and encouraged. For example, the following type of collaboration arrangements may be considered:
 - a) Programs sharing curriculum content and other materials with each other
 - b) Partnership arrangements regarding the sharing of senior social work academic staff across programs.

The AASW is committed to supporting the development of regional social work programs. Where SWAOUs experience continued difficulties in recruiting a senior social work academic at level D or E in regional universities, partnership arrangements can be put in place. The partnership arrangement should be reviewed at the end of 12 months and if necessary, can be renegotiated for a further period.

Where SWAOUs collaborate with other programs, they should ensure that any such collaboration does not affect the ongoing viability of their own programs.

- 9) Social work programs should be embedded within a vibrant research culture and should be taught by staff who are engaged in research activities. At least 60% of the social work qualified staff should have research doctorates, professional doctorates or research masters and either established or promising research records. This requirement is essential to fostering a research culture in the discipline of social work and facilitating the development of higher-level professional capability in various areas of social work practice.
- 10) The SWAOU must be able to demonstrate that it is research active. This will normally be demonstrated by meeting at least one of the following criteria:
 - a) More than 50% of the social work qualified staff must be appointed on teaching and research appointments, with at least 30% of their time allocated to research activities
 - b) More than 50% of the social work teaching staff must have published three peer-reviewed journal articles in the preceding three years.
- 11) The SWAOU must include social work qualified staff with contemporary and relevant knowledge and practice experience to teach in areas relevant to their field(s) of practice. Social work qualified staff should hold qualifications equal to or higher than social work programs in which they are teaching. This principle does not exclude skilled or experienced practitioners teaching in the programs who do not hold a degree equivalent to or higher than the program in which they are teaching.

- 12) The SWAOU must include social work qualified staff with contemporary and relevant knowledge and practice experience to teach in areas relevant to their field(s) of practice. The staff should meet the *TEQSA Higher Education Standards 3.2 Staffing*, which outlines the qualifications the staff should hold, being equal to or higher than social work programs in which they teach. This principle does not exclude skilled or experienced practitioners teaching in the programs who do not hold a degree equivalent to or higher than the program in which they are teaching.

The social work qualified staff of the SWAOU must have the expertise to cover the core social work knowledge and skills as specified in the ASWEAS and must deliver these areas of the curriculum, recognising that the SWAOU may also employ on a part-time or casual basis individuals with particular contemporary expertise to teach in some specialist areas.

- 13) The SWAOU social work qualified staff must have demonstrated ability in teaching and supervising social work research, policy and direct social work practice and in teaching at either undergraduate or postgraduate level.
- 14) The SWAOU must be able to demonstrate systematic monitoring of teaching quality such as participation in regular formal teaching/unit evaluation, staff performance management and professional development.
- 15) Social work programs through the whole curriculum must demonstrate integration of field education. All staff teaching in social work programs must demonstrate their contribution to the field education program.

2. Commitment of social work programs to the professional body.

Accredited social work programs will demonstrate active commitment to the profession of social work represented by the AASW and through the AASW linked to the International Federation of Social Workers and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW).

This could include:

- promoting the benefits of joining the AASW and encouraging participation in AASW activity on a national and state basis
- promoting a strong commitment to the profession of social work as a self-regulating profession and the role of AASW members in engaging in evolving professional issues in a self-regulating profession
- providing AASW access to students to promote the AASW in relation to benefits and responsibilities
- strongly encouraging social work educators to be role models in demonstrating a commitment to the professional association by being a member and participating in the work of the association at either branch or national level.

It is highly important that the accredited programs demonstrate their commitment to the profession of social work to support the development and quality of service for social work in Australia, noting that social work is a self-regulating profession, and social workers have a responsibility to engage in key professional issues to ensure the ongoing development a strong effective profession.

This commitment should be demonstrated through adherence to the AASW Code of Ethics and through continuing adherence to practice standards and learnings in the education program to ensure that all graduates understand the development of social work knowledge and practice skills and receive high-quality education.

The AASW and accredited social work programs have a range of mutual priorities in ensuring the continuing development of the social work profession for students and qualified professionals. It is important that the AASW and educators continue to provide ongoing consideration to these common goals and consider strategies to support the development of mutual interests, the identification and development of joint projects and activities, and practice partnerships, for the ultimate benefit of social work client groups. Although it is highly recommended and expected that social work educators who teach in accredited programs be members of the AASW, it is not mandatory for all staff of accredited programs to be members.

Satisfying the commitment to the profession requirements of the ASWEAS may be demonstrated by:

- adherence to and maintenance of the AASW Code of Ethics by staff and students in all accredited programs and mandatory incorporation of this code into the program curriculum
- demonstrated engagement with the AASW to promote and advocate the development of contemporary practice in the field of social work and the support of AASW to incorporate into activities and development
- membership of the AASW and participation in state and/or national activities of the AASW and in continuing development of the professional association by staff of accredited programs.