

# ASWEAS GUIDELINE:

Guidance on RPL, Articulation  
& Credit transfer



**AASW**

Australian Association  
of Social Workers

# Guideline: Guidance on RPL, Articulation and credit transfer.

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 recognised prior learning (RPL), articulation and credit transfer program requirements, (ASWEAS 4.7, 5.3, & 5.6) for programs seeking accreditation by AASW under the following headings:

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# 1. Articulation of programs and credit transfer

## 1.1 Principles of articulation and credit transfer

It is the responsibility of the organisations developing qualifications to develop articulation arrangements for qualifications when developing qualifications for accreditation (*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 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. Since 1998, higher education providers have extended credit arrangements, which may vary from provider to provider.

The granting of credit will be subjected 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.

Social work academic organisational units (SWAOUs) must ensure that students undertake all relevant social work subjects and are not exempted from social work subjects based on the qualification that led to their initial acceptance into the degree; In other words, subjects/units must not be double counted.

## 1.2 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 the [Australian Community Workers Association \(ACWA\)](#) or recognised by the Provider granting the credit.
2. A reference to a three-year social welfare degree means a degree program accredited by the [Australian Community Workers Association \(ACWA\)](#).
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 higher education 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.

## 1.3 Conditions for consideration in granting

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.

## 1.4 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 when linked to a four-year bachelor degree
- 25% credit for a diploma when linked to a four-year bachelor degree.

## 1.5 Transfers from a welfare, human services, social and behavioural science and community work program to a social work degree program

- 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 having 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.

## 1.6 Credit for certificate courses in welfare

Credit is not normally accepted for certificate courses in welfare.

## 1.7 Transfers from a welfare, human services, social and behavioural science, and community work program to a Master of Social Work (Qualifying) 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 as long as the AOU can ensure that graduates meet all required learning outcomes for Australian social work graduates as defined in the ASWEAS.

## 2. Recognition of prior learning in field education

The AASW supports the recognition of prior learning (RPL) only as a basis for application for credit in one (the first) field education subject 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.

### 2.1 Decision-making principles

1. Credit for the first field education placement or part thereof, may be possible based on recognition of prior experience or the successful completion of field education placements completed prior to entry into the social work program.
2. Recognition of prior learning for field education must be thoroughly assessed.
3. Performance outcomes for first placement based on the AASW Practice Standards and Code of Ethics must be used to assess students for RPL. AASW Guidance on Field Education may be referred to with respect to assessment in field education.
4. In order to be granted RPL for field education the student must provide evidence that they have met the standards and performance outcomes for the first placement.
5. Granting of RPL for a complete field education 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 field education credit.

### 2.2 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 in the previous seven years of which at least one year of fulltime equivalent has been in the last three years.)
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.

## 2.3 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 field education 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 field education subject/unit.
2. A qualified social worker who can attest to its accuracy will provide external, independent verification/reference as to the accuracy of student's claims.
3. The student will have their application assessed by a panel made up of the field education 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.

## 2.4 Policy regarding subsequent placements

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

1. The second 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. Strong preference is for on-site supervision unless in a remote setting where no other placement is available and high-quality external supervision is provided.
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.