

Responses to Key Attributes

Director candidate: Dr Fotina Hardy

Key Attribute	Response
1. Professional integrity: Committed to the professional standards and ethics of the profession. Committed, organised, promotes accountability and able to place the needs of the broader organisation/profession over personal values or interests. Shows courage and independence.	<p>Professional integrity is critical to my practice, something I do not compromise, which I have demonstrated during my time on the Board and in my work and life. As a Board Director and member of two human services Management Committees I take my fiduciary and legal obligations to the organisation seriously. This has guided my practice as it is imperative all Directors adhere to the Best Interest Rule under the Corporations Act. This means considering the needs of the Association as a whole. In doing so I have always focused on ensuring decisions are informed by a robust decision-making framework focused on achieving the agreed strategic plan and seeking all information possible to enable an informed decision. I was part of a team that researched and recommended a decision-making framework for the board to facilitate accountability, consistency, transparency and integrity. I am open to other perspectives, am critically reflective of my own biases or assumptions, and humble enough to accept other points of view, or recognise when mine may not be aligned with the strategic intent and fiduciary requirements.</p> <p>I have ensured I have upskilled myself in terms of the role of a company director and Management Committee member and requirements of a not for profit, under the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission guidelines and through consistent and regular professional development through the AICD. This includes seeking external supervision and mentoring and my ongoing personal research.</p> <p>As a Director, I recognise that not all decisions we have made have been popular, which has resulted in criticism and unfortunately, at times with misinformation. Yet the role of the Director is to consider the best interests of the organisation as a whole, recognising we have competing stakeholders, our members but also in terms of our role as a self-regulating authority, credentialing and skills assessment. As a Director I have had the courage to stand firm with decisions which have always been made to achieve the highest standards, quality and services for our members and the people we ultimately serve.</p>

<p>2. Cultural awareness and humility: Values diversity, aware of the importance of creating culturally safe relationships and communicating appropriately and inclusively.</p>	<p>I am a first-generation Australian born woman from Greek heritage. My parents came to Australia for a better life and their parents were refugees following the end of the Ottoman Empire. I grew up within the context of significant discrimination and racism, disadvantage and oppression. When I first studied social work, there were very few people with a complicated Greek name like mine (Panagiotidis) which I changed at the time because no one could pronounce it, as did my father. This lived experience has been critical in my valuing of diversity and always striving to be as culturally safe and inclusive as possible.</p> <p>However, I am also incredibly privileged as I grew up in a country where I had more rights than the traditional custodians of this land. I have worked hard to develop my cultural knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, working alongside Cultural Consultants, visiting regional and remote communities, undertaking training that has challenged and nourished me, and remaining curious and committed. This is what I have also tried to impart on the students I have taught and supervised over many years, drawing on the work of our amazing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars. No one, and certainly, I, will ever be culturally competent, but I aspire to be an ally, which means never assuming I know and taking responsibility for my own learning, engaging in whatever training and reading I can. I'm also incredibly aware of not putting the cultural load on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it is my responsibility to ask, learn and grow. I have been so fortunate to have had the privilege of working alongside some incredibly strong, smart and generous Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Board Directors and other colleagues. I am committed to the importance of decolonisation and challenging oppressive colonial structures and practices, both within social work and in our society.</p> <p>I have been volunteering with people seeking asylum and refuge for many years now, families who fled to Australia for reasons of safety and the future of their children. Many of these individuals still have no rights in Australia and have to rely on charity to live. This has provided me with yet another level of understanding of the challenges and the multiple intersecting oppressions. The experiences of these courageous people and those supporters I work alongside drive me to continue to advocate for adherence with our human rights obligations.</p> <p>I was lucky to be a student on placement during the Disability Rights movement, my commitment to 'nothing about us without us' was instilled from my two social work supervisors during university who both lived with a disability. I have continued to engage in research and advocacy and was privileged to be involved in research that was co-designed and a subsequent published text regarding young people with cognitive disability, their transition to adulthood and stories of</p>
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	<p>survival and aspiration in the face of adversity. As a Management Committee member of a mental health not for profit, we work alongside our members at every step, living the value of 'nothing about us without us'. I recognise the importance of inclusive communication that is not just geared to neurotypical people, both in my private life and professional life. As a lecturer I was always mindful of supporting all students through accessible lecture material and lectures. I personally dislike the use of jargon and terminology that requires a dictionary to understand it, this guides how I engage in the incredibly important teaching relationship. In my current role in aged care, I recognise the importance of targeting communication to be inclusive and accessible as I work with individuals with diverse communication, language and cognitive abilities. Recognising my own privilege and positionality is vital for me to be a true ally, and to live into my values, something I don't take for granted. It also means that if I'm called out for not being culturally aware of inclusive, I embrace the feedback no matter how confronting or challenging it may be and deeply reflect from a position of humility.</p>
<p>3. Critical thinking: Demonstrates critically reflective skills and the ability to analyse complex issues, weighing up options as part of a robust analytical decision-making process.</p>	<p>I have strong critical thinking and reflective skills. I was lucky enough to study at the first 4-year social work degree in Melbourne at the then Phillip Institute. It was known as the 'radical school of social work', where I was challenged to deconstruct my assumptions and beliefs, especially coming from a very patriarchal family and culture. This set the foundation for my emancipatory and values-based framework. I recognise the impact of intersecting levels of oppression and believe it is the responsibility of every social worker to advocate against injustice and the denial of rights. I am continually dealing with complexity in my practice both as a direct practice social worker, supervisor, educator, researcher, volunteer and Director. I believe that I am deeply reflective and able to systematically and critically review the information before me. As a researcher I have demonstrated my critical analysis skills to distil key themes, issues, and have contributed to peer reviewed publications and evaluation reports.</p> <p>In terms of my experience as a Board Director and previous AASW Branch member and President, and Management Committee member, I have developed and demonstrated my ability to analyse complex information, weighing up the options, seeking additional information, engaging in robust debate, critically analysing and the pros and cons and my own motivations and any biases, all part of my decision-making framework. At the end of the day, I need to be able to justify my decisions and ensure that they are in the best interests of the person I am working with, and in the case of a Board or Management Committee, in the best interests of the organisation. I worked with a fellow Director to introduce a robust decision-making framework for the board to provide rigour and transparency.</p>

	<p>As a Director, there is no room for ego, which means being open to other perspectives and not seeing myself as having to be 'right' or the 'expert'. What I do love about being on a board and committee is the robust discussion and being challenged and stretched and doing the same with others so that we can achieve the best outcomes.</p>
<p>4. Communicates constructively: Is articulate, persuasive, diplomatic, self-aware and reflects on personal impact and effectiveness. Listens and responds constructively to contributions from others.</p>	<p>I am a listener and focus on deep listening so that I understand what is happening. A strength of mine is being self-aware and very reflective of my own biases, experiences and perspectives as well as reflective of how I impact others. I have worked very hard on developing my emotional intelligence and skills in this area, both with courses, supervision, mentoring and reflection. I am my own best critic. I believe in taking a considered approach in my interactions with others and believe in the importance of ensuring people feel heard. I actively work on ensuring all voices in the room are heard. I value that personally, and this drives me to strive to ensure I practice that with others. I don't see myself as an expert, but someone who is constantly learning and developing and one way of doing that is to ask for and listen to the perspectives of others.</p> <p>As an Educator teaching social work students for over 12 years, feedback has consistently been that I can engage with students effectively, genuinely and meaningfully. I actively sought to ensure communication with students is accessible and engaging. I have developed precious long-term relationships with past students who are now my colleagues.</p> <p>I am able to articulate clearly and persuasively, which was evident when I presented AASW submissions to a number of Queensland Parliamentary inquiries with very positive feedback. I have published in peer reviewed journals and presented at conferences.</p> <p>In my experience on management committees and the Board, I believe I have brought a balanced, considered and always striving for a respectful approach. My values of respect and integrity also means that I will respectfully challenge injustice, disrespect and oppressive practices in whichever setting I am situated. I value kindness and believe that it takes very little effort to engage with respect and kindness. I strive to walk the talk and always have. I also recognise the importance of multiple perspectives and that when we harness this through constructive engagement and communication we can achieve so much.</p>
<p>5. Focuses strategically: Takes a broad perspective, can see the big strategic picture, and considers long-term impacts.</p>	<p>One of the first things I did when I was lucky enough to be voted onto the AASW Board in 2019 was to undertake AICD governance training. I joined the AICD and have completed the Company Director course, along with multiple other webinars and training. In 2024 I also did a three-day refresher of the Company Director Course. I take my responsibility seriously which is why I have</p>

<p>Demonstrates relevant governance and /or leadership experience.</p>	<p>invested heavily in my ongoing learning and development. When I see a gap in my knowledge I research and do further training, recognising this is not only my personal responsibility but also my duty. As a Director I learnt in the first year on the board the importance of a strategic focus on the big picture. Directors are not responsible for operational matters; our role is to steer the ship by setting the course and ensuring that our CEO and staff have the resources and support to make that happen. Similarly, as a Director we have ultimate responsibility and so ensuring good governance is key. This is not always easy, or popular, however it is what I signed up for. As a board Director of the AASW I have worked hard to strengthen governance procedures and policies, I initially recommended the development of a People and Culture Sub Committee after I joined the Board and this committee has been instrumental in improving the effectiveness of our board and our governance processes. I have chaired the Finance and Audit Committee and currently chair the Professional Regulation Committee. Ensuring robust fiscal management and governance processes that meet regulatory and statutory obligations is vital. As a self-regulating profession, we are accountable to numerous stakeholders including the government, thus, identifying conflicts of interest and gaps in the rigour of our processes is the role of the Board. I have actively participated in strategic planning for the AASW, and my other committee roles, which is a rigorous and detailed process, ensuring that we seek the views of all key stakeholders, reviewing the current and future challenges and innovations that will affect us as a profession and society. I never underestimate the privilege of being involved in such a key and vital responsibility as a Board Director or Management Committee member. I have actively sought to support the effectiveness of my governance knowledge and skills, including training, supervision and mentoring. I believe that I have demonstrated my leadership skills through my different roles as AASW Board Director for two terms; current Vice President of a not for profit mental health service; Treasurer of a not for profit peak body; Chair of a Professional Standards Committee; past Branch President and VP of the Queensland Branch and Convenor or two branch practice groups; member of ANZSWWER; as Coordinator of field education at a Qld university; and previous high level management roles.</p>
<p>6. Collaborates in the best interests of the AASW: Is a team player, flexible, cooperative and creates partnerships.</p>	<p>I believe collaboration is at the heart of effective governance and leadership. As a Director, I recognise that no one person has all the answers, and the strength of our Board lies in its collective wisdom. I have always sought to work constructively and cooperatively with my fellow Directors, the CEO, and Board Committees, ensuring that the focus remains on the best interests of the AASW/organisation as a whole. This means engaging in respectful dialogue, being open to different perspectives, and seeking consensus where possible, while also recognising when</p>

	<p>decisions must be made in a timely and decisive manner. I believe I hold a high degree of emotional intelligence, am self-aware and always critically reflecting on my own positionality, my assumptions and my privilege. I recognise the importance of always being professional in my role, recognising that robust discussions are needed and are not, or should not be personal. This is key to professionally working effectively with others.</p> <p>In my time on the AASW Board and other committees, I have demonstrated flexibility in adapting to change, particularly during times of organisational challenge. I have worked to foster partnerships internally and externally, recognising that the AASW's strength lies in collaboration with members, allied organisations, and community stakeholders. Through my committee leadership roles, I have actively encouraged participation, ensured all voices are heard, and promoted a culture of cooperation and inclusivity. I have engaged in stakeholder consultations about key policy areas ensuring the voice of social work is front and centre.</p> <p>In my previous role as member and President on the Queensland Branch Management Committee I actively sought to ensure social work was represented in government policy making, where we built a reputation for providing thoughtful, evidence-based submissions and were actively asked to present to Parliamentary inquiries. Our submissions made a difference with recommendations being recognised in legislation. This was possible through my collaboration and inclusion with our members and stakeholders.</p> <p>I believe in building trusted relationships, which are essential for effective teamwork and partnerships. I approach collaboration with humility, listening carefully to others and acknowledging the expertise they bring. At the same time, I am willing to share my own skills and knowledge to support shared goals. I have actively reached out to new Board members to provide support, recognising that the first year is a steep learning curve. My focus is always on achieving the best outcomes for AASW and the profession, even if that means setting aside personal preferences for the greater good.</p>
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