

**AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS  
(AASW)**

**INTERNATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS COMMITTEE**

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROJECT

FINAL REPORT

by

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## ***Executive Summary***

This English Language Project has been undertaken as part of a larger review of policies and procedures for eligibility for membership to the AASW. It is the first stage of the review in relation to eligibility for membership of overseas qualified applicants. Input from previous Assessment Officers as well as feedback gained during the larger review indicated that English language skill levels of applicants for membership of AASW was an issue that needed to be addressed.

Consultation with both AASW members and other relevant bodies points to a consistent view toward establishing a position in relation to English language skill. This will help provide some consistency across the profession that currently does not exist. It also suggests that the AASW needs to choose a level of English language skill required for overseas social work applicants beyond what is required for general skilled migration and for general university entrance.

## ***Introduction***

In this introduction the AASW and its role in relation to self regulation for social work in Australia will be described, as well as an outline of the project and its intended outcomes.

The AASW is the professional body for social workers in Australia. It currently has a membership of approximately 6 000, represented by a number of branches around Australia.

The AASW has the responsibility for self regulation of social work education in Australia and currently eligibility for membership is based on graduation from a four year undergraduate degree or two years Masters qualifying degree the graduates from both being required to meet the AASW (2003) Practice Standards. Also AASW, under delegation from Australian Education International - National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (AEI-NOOSR) is the only assessing authority for the educational qualifications and work experience of overseas qualified social workers applying to migrate to Australia. For Migration Skills Assessment for period July-December 2007 the total number of applications was 117 and the number of applicants found eligible was 100. Meeting these assessment requirements also enables such overseas qualified social workers to practice within Australia as social workers eligible for membership of the AASW. Eligibility to AASW is recognised in the community services and health industry as the marker for being able to practice as a social worker in Australia.

The AASW Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (2008. p. 33) states the following:

“The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) has a commitment to the international social work community, and is a member of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). It values the contribution that social workers educated overseas can make to Australia's increasingly multi-cultural society, and recognises the importance of assessment of overseas qualifications so that eligible social workers may join the AASW and seek employment in Australia as social workers.”

The AASW carries out the practice of regularly reviewing its policies and procedures for eligibility every five years. The most recent review commenced in 2005. Review of Parts I and II of the then Policies and Procedures of Establishing Eligibility for Membership document was completed in late 2007. Parts II and IV which deal with policies and procedures for assessment of overseas qualified social workers is to be completed this year. This project constitutes the initial stage of this review.

The last review of the policies and procedures for eligibility for membership was undertaken in the year 2000. There have been considerable changes in the last 8 years with various sectors of the social work community indicating it was time for significant changes to the eligibility policies and procedures (Thomson & Martin 2006). These changes have included such things as globalisation which has impacted on our higher education system. One of the consequences for AASW has been a significant increase in the number of people seeking to be assessed for eligibility for membership to the AASW from other countries. AASW assessment statistics show a steady increase in the number of applications received since 2004, totalling just 164 in the year 2004 compared with 337 in 2007, showing more than a double increase. This tendency has continued in the year 2008. January and February 2008 combined, has been a period with the record number of application received, ever since AASW has kept records. This has inevitably resulted in an increased focus on the adequacy and quality of the standards used to assess these applicants. A new focus introduced into the Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (2008) already completed, is the inclusion of AASW Practice Standards (2003) as the necessary performance outcomes for social work students graduating from social work programs. Application of a focus on performance, with respect to eligibility, beyond qualification per se is a key issue, also current in the wider industry, that the review of overseas qualifications assessment will consider. In harmony with this focus, the International Qualifications Committee, in consultation with the AASW Board, decided that the review could give preliminary consideration to the issue of English language level as a specific performance issue that could lead into the review proper. Such a decision was also seen as being able to take advantage of PSDP funding available prior to June 30 2008 for such a task.

The English Language project is therefore a time limited investigation into the viability and benefit of setting up an English language skill level for social work within Australia such that recommendations in this area can be proposed to the AASW Board for consideration. A Project Manager and Project Consultant were appointed by the AASW to undertake this task.

With respect to outcomes, firstly, it is hoped that this research will provide the AASW Board with sufficient information in order to establish a policy with respect to the English language skill level required for social workers for whom English has not been their primary language, to adequately undertake the role of a social worker in Australia.

Such a policy would affect several categories of persons. They are:

- Overseas qualified social workers wanting to have their qualifications recognised in order to work in Australia,
- Overseas students wanting to study in Australia to gain an Australian social work degree.

Currently the AASW has no statement within its international qualification assessment policy on English language skill requirements to practice. The AASW accepts the various

English language skill levels set by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), the key one being IELTS level 6 set for general Skilled Migration (See Appendix Seven for IELTS band levels and their interpretation).

A second outcome hoped for is that the Project points out that any policy that the AASW develops applying to all social workers from the above categories, with respect to meeting the English language requirements. Currently, there is an unwritten assumption that all applicants to the AASW come via the international student or skilled migration route. However, there may be applicants who come via other pathways not requiring the English language skills of either of these two. An example of this is where a social worker comes to Australia as a secondary applicant on a skilled migration visa. In this instance the English language skills they require are described as 'functional' which translates to an IELTS score of 4.5.

### ***Project Team***

#### Project Manager

Nonie Hodgson, Convenor, AASW International Qualifications Committee (IQC); Accredited Member of AASW. The Project Manager has been employed on the project for 41 hours. Main tasks included:

- Contract and administrative matters
- Research on English language required for various university courses
- Journal search
- Meet with IELTS and write report of meeting
- Write up interim report for AASW Board
- Communicate with AASW Board via Board liaison member and write report of meeting
- Communicate with AASW President re meeting with Heads of Schools of Social Work and write report of meeting
- Co present to steering committee
- Co present to funding body
- Manage time frames for project
- Provide advisory role to Project Officer
- Co-write final report

#### Project Officer

Cate Burns, Member, AASW IQC; Accredited Member of AASW. The Project Officer has been employed on the project for 49 hours. Main tasks have been:

- Research on English language required by other professional bodies
- Review of media on the topic
- Internet search on the topic
- Coordinate and run focus group
- Develop questions for focus group
- Contact employers to discuss their experiences
- Write up final report
- Co present to steering committee
- Co present to funding body
- Present to AASW Board

## ***History to Project***

As indicated above, this project forms part of the broader review of eligibility. The first two parts of the four part review relate specifically to Australian social work education and accreditation standards. These will be fully implemented in January 2009.

The final two components of the eligibility document relate to international qualifications assessment policies and procedures. When these two parts are finalised, there may be some amendments made to the final document in order for all areas to be fully linked and congruent.

English language skill level has not previously been identified as requiring specific policies and procedures with the AASW content to accept the various levels set by DIAC. However, in recent years a number of issues have been identified that have highlighted the inadequacy of this approach. In November 2002 the then current International Assessment Officer raised concerns regarding the English language skills of some applicants with whom she had phone contact. The Assessment Officer also raised the issue that all immigrants to Australia were required to meet varying English language standards, depending upon the type of visa by which they entered the country. In response to this, the AASW Executive stated in their minutes

“The Executive acknowledged the importance of English language competency in the assessment process and are concerned that the issue be progressed by . . . IQC” (March 2003).

In July 2005 the IQC further considered the issue at its biennial face to face meeting, but was unable to advance the issue further without funding. In 2008, the IQC became aware of the Professional Services Development Program (PSDP) funding option and voted to pursue the issue, supported by the AASW Board to do so.

In 2007 an English Language Proficiency Report was produced as part of the Eligibility Review (Hodgson 2007). The information in the report came from 125 participants who either attended focus groups, or completed an online survey containing many questions related to the review. One hundred and five people responded to a question asking whether the AASW should require a particular level of English language skill for those who wish to practice social work in Australia. Ninety-six percent of respondents (101) supported an English language requirement, believing it was essential to practice in Australia.

For the purpose of the project, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) will be the test referred to as the primary measure of English language skill. The reference is based on DIAC’s use of IELTS as the preferred assessment tool for skilled migration. By default, it is therefore the system that is currently in use by the AASW. ‘IELTS measures ability to communicate in English across all four language skills – listening, reading, writing and speaking – for people who intend to study or work where English is the language of communication’ (IELTS, 2008).

## ***Outcomes***

A table summarising the outcomes is outlined below and then a more detailed outline of activities and outcomes follows.

<b>Specific Project Activities</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Were Outcomes Positive or Negative</b>	<b>Were Outcomes Expected or Not Anticipated.</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b>			
Research on the general university entrance requirements for English language for international students, also English language specific requirements for a variety of professional degrees as well as professional bodies levels.	Levels for Universities lower than levels for entrance to professional bodies and workplace. Social work programs across Australia currently accept applicants with general Uni entrance English language scores contrasting with other helping professions who require a higher level for entrance	Positive It was also positive to see that between the professional bodies that were considered there was consistency in English language skill level required.	These were expected The information gleaned from this part of the project also made the team aware of the differences between the various professional bodies and universities' related study programs.
Literature search	Studies on foreign nurses adjustment to new countries including the importance of language for personal and professional well being and successful employment. Study on setting an English language standard for nursing in USA Evaluation of spoken English proficiency of international medical graduates by standardized patients and testing validity reliability and fairness of the ratings which was high. Qual study of perceptions and experience of internat'l students through social and academic transitions. Eng lang support programs for international students	Positive	Provided some good information but was not as fruitful as expected. Fewer studies done in Australia
Media search	A report directed research to recent article by Birrell & Healy (2008)	Positive	Not expected
Internet search	This search included accessing information in relation to other professional bodies and their English language requirements outlined above, as well as government departments.	Positive	It was expected that more links to journals or academic information may have been found via this search. Very useful information in relation to DIAC language levels and associated points was found via this search.
<b>CONSULTATION WITH SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION</b>			

Focus Group Overseas Qualified Social Workers	Seven social workers interviewed. All supportive of English language test occurring. Some had not done English language test. 5 employed 2 unemployed	Positive in terms of views and individual interviews. Negative in terms of numbers	Not anticipated that participants would be so supportive of English language test Not expected in terms of low numbers
<b>CONSULTATION WITH SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION (Cont'd)</b>			
Focus Group Supervisors/employers of overseas qualified Social Workers	Three employers interviewed All supported an English language standard for social work, and were able to clearly articulate the issues and consequences they have as employers for there not being an accepted minimum English language standard explicitly stated.	Positive re quality of responses Negative in terms of numbers	Not expected re low numbers  Expected support for high level of English
AASW EL Steering Committee	Preliminary vote 6 to 1 for level 7 English language test being necessary	Positive	Expected
Past Assessment Officers	Estimation of 10-30% of overseas assessment enquiries were difficult to communicate with in term of English level Further group identified that would not have done English language test when apply for eligibility currently	Positive	Percentages expected Not expected that another group missing out on test has been identified.
Heads of Schools of SW	Leave to Unis setting and monitoring English level for international students	Negative in terms of no change of entry standard	Not anticipated
AASW Board (First meeting)	Varying opinion – request info on cost and numbers then further consideration	Positive and negative	Expected
AASW National Ethics Officer	No complaints re language skill since new national process set up in Feb 08. Earlier records not yet compiled from state by state based system.	Neutral	Not expected that national complaints data base had not been established prior to this current position.
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER BODIES</b>			
IELTS	Recommendation of level 7 Cost of test in Australia \$280, cost overseas can vary.	Positive Hearing and reading examples and their scores very enlightening	Clear recommendation not anticipated
AIWCW	AIWCW setting level 7	Positive	Not anticipated
Aust Nursing Midwifery Council	Instituting English language level entails little extra cost to the professional assessing	Positive	Expected

	body		
Translator and Interpreter Service	Level 7 English required for interpreters.	Positive	Expected
English language courses	Vary from \$400 to \$1800 to \$10,800 depending on amount of tuition needed. Financial assistance available	Positive compared with \$39,00-\$75,600 for uni full fee program and possibly no employment	Expected Financial assistance not anticipated
<b>DECISION MAKING PROCESS</b>			
Steering Committee	Two meetings – first one engaged and thoughtful with vote taken. Second provided qualitative comment	Positive	Expected
AASW Board	Two meetings – first one raised relevant issues for more info. At second meeting, vote taken.	Positive	Not expected to have extra face to face meeting to more fully consider this matter.

### ***Literature Review***

The journal search was conducted using Ovid Medline 1996 to Present. Within the time limits and given the very focussed nature of the research project, the results of the literature reviewed showed a limited number of articles available that were relevant.

An internet search was conducted using the Google Alerts system. A manual search of the internet was also conducted. In reviewing the DIAC website, further information came to light with respect to points for English language skill. If applicants exceed the General Skilled Migration English language skill level of IELTS 6, they are given an additional 10 points towards their Visa application. Applicants must meet a certain number of points to be eligible for a particular visa.

Local radio in Victoria had aired an item related to the project in the lead up to the commencement of the project. Further investigation of this led to accessing a research article by Birrell and Healy (2008). This research had just been published and had sparked the media interest in the topic. This also gave access to several feedback comments left on the web in response to the news articles on the research.

The information gleaned by this project activity though limited was of high quantity and this activity has been regarded as positive and very worthwhile to the project outcome. Professional bodies, worldwide, undertaking these kinds of projects and establishing similar guidelines, supported the need for establishing a suitable English language level.

### **Universities' Entrance Requirements**

As part of the research and review of current information, the project team looked at a selection of universities' English language requirements for overseas students wanting to study in disciplines that would lead to professional qualifications.

The universities chosen were:

Queensland: James Cook  
University of Queensland

New South Wales:	Western Sydney University of Sydney
Victoria:	Monash Melbourne
South Australia:	University of South Australia
Western Australia:	Edith Cowan
Northern Territory:	Charles Darwin
Tasmania:	University of Tasmania

One university had an indigenous alternative entry program. This includes a two-day Assessment Workshop. Applicants are asked to complete literacy and numeric assessment tasks and participate in an interview to discuss interest in the program of study chosen. This program allows demonstration of meeting the minimum and essential criteria required for the program of study selected.

The selected universities were chosen from those that provide social work study as an option. By choosing these the Project team was able to then compare and contrast the English language entrance requirements for social work and for other degrees leading to a professional qualification that requires registration or accreditation to practice.

The professional qualifications that were covered are:

- Law
- Medicine
- Nursing
- Occupational Therapy
- Pharmacy
- Physiotherapy
- Psychology
- Speech Pathology
- Teaching

Data was gathered on a number of other study programs but it was decided to select only those that could also be compared with social work both on university entrance and professional body requirements (See Appendix Two for a list of Universities and their levels).

This project activity was very worthwhile. It provided a good overview of how a cross section of universities in Australia manage English language level requirements. The information gleaned from this part of the project made the team aware of the English level differences between the various professional bodies and universities' related study programs (See Appendix Three for a table outlining these comparisons).

### Other Professional Bodies

The requirements of nine professional bodies were researched as part of this project. These professions were chosen as those that social workers are most likely to interact with professionally and within the workplace.

The professional bodies were:

- Dietetics - Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA)
- Medicine - Australian Medical Council (AMC)

Nursing – Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council (ANMC)  
 Occupational Therapy - Council of Occupational Therapists Registration Boards (Aust & NZ) (COTRB)  
 Pharmacy – Australian Pharmacy Council  
 Physiotherapy – Australian Physiotherapy Council  
 Psychology – Psychology Registration Board in each state and territory  
 Speech Pathology – Speech Pathology Australia  
 Teaching – Teaching Australia

Researching other professional bodies gave further evidence that having policies and procedures as part of the overseas assessment process was the norm for these associations. It was also positive to see that between the professional bodies that were considered there was consistency in the English language skill level that they required.

ANMC is currently involved in a project developing new standards of criteria for migration and registration using both ANMC and PSDP funding, due to be available in September 2008. These standards are requiring a 12 week national adaptation program to be completed by all entering nurses. The nursing English language skill level has been 6.5 for reading and listening and 7 for writing and speaking. The new English language level will be band 7 in all four modules. There was much consultation and an extended literature review from other countries to assist in determining this with state nursing registration bodies still needing to agree. These standards were being developed in preparation for the Howard national registration for professions that were due to be instituted in July 2008 but have now been postponed for two years till 2010 by the new government.

A Senior ANMC Assessment Officer offered comment that at the moment the level to study Nursing at University is lower than the ANMC level. She went on to say that currently the evidence is inconclusive that the level increases during the course of study. For many students' English does not improve. For some nursing students even some lectures are given in their original language. The ANMC Assessment Officer also provided information that the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) is currently undertaking a project which is looking at Good Practice with respect to English language proficiency at Universities (AUQA 2008, <http://www.auqa.edu.au/> accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2008).

### ***Consultation with Former Non English Speaking Background (NESB) Applicants***

An initial list of past international qualification assessment applicants was obtained from the AASW Membership services, with the assistance of the Acting International Qualifications Assessment Officer. The Assessment Officer provided names of previous applicants to the AASW Membership Officer, who then cross matched these names from the Victorian membership list to get current contact details. Victoria was chosen because of the location and availability of the Project Officer to facilitate a focus group. This list consisted of 15 names. The following is the outcome of the list:

- 1 – Phone no longer connected,
- 1 – No answer when they were rung at various times of the week, during both business and after hours,
- 4 – Did not respond to messages that were left for them on the telephone,
- 6 – English speaking social workers, who were born overseas,
- 3 – Participated in the project.

At this point the focus group plan was changed to individual telephone interviews as none of the 3 participants was able to attend a group meeting. (See Appendix Six for Participant Questions)

A second list of potential participants was provided by the International Qualifications Officer at the AASW. These were applicants who at the time of their application had provided some Australian contact details. This list contained 12 names. Due to time constraints, an introductory email was sent out to these people. They were asked to reply to the email if they were interested in participating either by phone interview or survey. There were no replies to this invitation. (For a copy of the email see Appendix Two)

The project was also marketed to the Horizon Career Service, a division of the AASW, and word of mouth via the Steering Committee and project team. Four participants eventuated from this effort.

Of the total of 7 participants in the project, their circumstances in relation to work were:

- 1 – Maternity leave from work
- 2 – Unemployed
- 4 – Employed and were able to provide employer details

The ethnic background of the participants was:

- Egyptian – 1
- German – 2
- Indian - 1
- Nepalese - 1
- Peruvian – 1
- South African – 1

Six of the participants were overseas qualified, one of whom was required to undertake some bridging studies. One participant gained their social work qualifications in Australia. The feedback from this 'user group' was in support of an English language standard for social work. (See Appendix Four for participant data)

### ***Consultation with Employers of NESB Applicants***

Three employers were contacted after their details were provided by 4 of the project participants. Two of these employers had experience, over their careers, with more than one worker from a non English speaking background.

This group also supported an English language standard for social work, and were able to clearly articulate the issues and consequences they have as employers for their not being an accepted minimum English language standard explicitly stated. (See Appendix Five for Employer Data, and Appendix Six for Employer Questions)

### ***Additional Consultation and Information***

The **AASW National Ethics Officer** was approached as part of this project. This activity was undertaken to ascertain whether there had been any complaints made that may have been related to language issues. The Ethics Officer position has only been in place since February 2008 and has not been able to collate information that was previously held on a state by state basis so could not contribute information to the project.

At the Interim Meeting with the **Project Steering Committee**, their views in relation to the issue were canvassed. Five members are from non English speaking countries (NESC) and 4 from English speaking countries (ESC). The outcome was that all were in favour of the AASW establishing a policy on English language skill level. In relation to a specific skill level, 6 voted for IELTS 7.0 (members are practitioners, consultants and managers) and one voted for IELTS level 6.0 (member is from academic background) . This vote included the 2 project team members as well as the 5 Steering Committee Members, with 2 members absent (one from NESC and one from ESC). (See Attachment One for this report)

**In consultation with IELTS**, the Project Manager was given opportunity to hear examples of various levels of IELTS and as a consequence was of the opinion that level 7 was necessary for adequate communication within the profession of social work. Principal IELTS Examiner and IELTS Examiner Trainer recommended an overall IELTS Band 7 for social work based on the language requirements for social workers outlined to him. As well on the four individual modules that make up the overall band, he recommended minimum 7.5 for Speaking, minimum 7.5 for Listening, minimum 7 for Writing and minimum 7 for Reading (See Attachment Two for this report).

**AASW Board** discussed for the first time at any length the issue of potential English language level for social work in Australia, based on report to the Board by the Project team via the IQC Steering Committee. Strong opposing opinions were present in relation to choosing a level such as 7 for social work. Some members advocated raising the level to Band 7 in order to provide better service to the client. Others were opposed to raise the level higher than it is (by default). Views to some extent depended on the background of the Board member – 50 % academics, 30 % management and 20 % practitioners. Views were shelved in favour of AASW Board asking for more information in the areas of cost to the AASW, and expressing concern regarding harming an important market; that is, whether setting a level would reduce the numbers of social workers entering Australia. The Board emphasised the need for evidence and also the issue of fairness to all applicants for eligibility.

The Board agreed to

1. Discuss the issue further at a face to face meeting soon to be held
2. Request more information in the meantime
3. Meet with Heads of Schools of Social Work (HOS) to gain relevant information and canvas HOS views. (See Attachment Three for this report).

At the **Heads of Schools of Social Work meeting** the AASW President raised the issue of adequacy of current situation with respect to management of English Language levels within social work in Australia. General view was that determination of such a level is the remit of the University social work program rather than the AASW. Universities set a level for general entrance, usually 6 or 6.5. Social Work programs are happy with this

general entrance level and expect that by the end of the program the student would have improved in their level of English. It was generally agreed however that social workers need good English skills to practice.

HOS meeting was concerned that AASW would be stipulating to the social work programs what level of English language skill they should require for the international student applicants to their programs. They were of the view that if there were difficulties with student English levels that the universities had resources to assist. Their aim was to ensure students were qualified and ready for practice by the end of the program.

More generally, HOS had no strong view as to whether AASW should require a level for overseas qualified social workers. However it was their opinion that levels of English of employed social workers should be left to the market place to determine. Their view was that if the social workers seeking employment could not speak well enough they would not gain employment. However their key area of interest during this discussion was English Language levels with respect to social work education. (See Attachment Four for this report).

**Australian Institute of Welfare and Community Workers (AIWCW) Assessment Officer**, on the guidance and advice of AEI after a recent audit visit is setting up an English language standard and is considering choosing level 7. The Assessment Officer had contacted Migration Agents and private training organisations in relation to AIWCW deciding on this level. Training organisations had set level 6.5 however the Assessment Officer stated level 7 seemed more desirable as AIWCW applicants had to be work ready not learning ready. The AIWCW Assessment Officer contacted the Project Manager at the suggestion of AEI to inquire about the level AASW had decided upon, particularly in relation to whether AASW was choosing the General of Academic test. He was making contact from the point of view of the desirability of AASW and AIWCW having similar levels. The Project Manager explained that AASW was in the process of deciding and that the Academic test seemed the most likely if AASW proceeded in this area. It was agreed that the Project Manager would advise AASW of AIWCW's current position so that AASW could consider the implications and the Project Manager would be in touch with AIWCW further. The Assessment Officer stated that AIWCW will be putting a level 7 in place regardless of the decision made by the AASW. The AIWCW Assessment Officer also stated that the number of applicants to AIWCW has increased this year from normally 80 to 90 per year to 190 so far this year. (See Attachment Five for this report).

The Project Team researched **potential costs to applicants and the AASW** as a result of issue raised by the AASW Board. There is virtually no extra cost to professional bodies to process English language testing results. Cost to applicant for IELTS test is \$280 if taken in Australia. Costs can vary depending on which country test and courses are being taken. Cost of English courses, if needed, varies from \$400 to \$ 1,800 to \$10,800. This large variation is based on how much tuition an individual needs. Financial assistance is available, if needed, to some in Australia wanting to apply for professional eligibility (see <http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/QualificationsRecognition/Information/Asdot.htm>). (See Attachment Six for this report).

**Past AASW professional social work assessment officers and the current manager of Horizon Career Centre, run by the AASW**, were asked for their estimation

of the percentage of phone conversations they had with applicants or potential applicants that were difficult to understand due to the English language skill level of the person to whom they were talking. Of the three past assessment officers, one was ambivalent about the necessity for a test and felt it was too long ago to remember the calls but added that much cultural sensitivity was needed in the position. The second was the first to raise the issue of a significant minority of concerning calls to bring the issue of English language proficiency to the attention of the then overseas assessment committee and the AASW, and work towards having it seriously addressed. She stated 10-20% of calls were of concern. The third and most recent officer said that 20-30% of calls were of concern with respect to their ability to communicate social work professional and formal process information and other required information. (See Attachment Seven for this report).

The current Manager of the Horizon Career Centre was not able to respond to the question in the time available. However she did offer, earlier in the Project, that a reason for the increase in overseas qualified applicants this year could be due to the work of the Career Centre recently setting up and building international links.

## ***Analysis***

### ***Literature Review***

A number of studies on foreign nurses adjustment to new countries, including the importance of language for personal and professional well being and successful employment, were noted (Magnusdottir 2005, Winkelmann-Gleed 2005, de Veer, den Ouden & Francke 2004, Yi and Jezewski 2000); however, full copies of these articles could not be accessed in the time available for this project. There are also articles on support programs for international nursing graduates (Julian, Keane and Davidson 1999, Abriam-Yago, Yoder & Kataoka-Yahiro 1999, Brown 1999, Malu & Figlear 1998) again full copies were not able to be accessed in the time available.

Evaluation of spoken English proficiency of international medical graduates by standardized patients, tested validity reliability and fairness of the ratings, which was high (Boulet, van Zanten, McKinley & Gary 2001, van Zanten, Boulet, McKinley & Whelan 2003, Rothman & Cusimano 2001). These studies would be very useful for doing further research beyond this project on a review of any level that might be set terms of the performance of overseas qualified social workers in the workplace.

The most relevant information is from Birrell and Healy (2008) who looked at employment outcomes for skilled migrants who arrived in Australia between 2001 and 2006. Birrell and Healy (2008) state that only a minority of those from non-English speaking countries (NESC) are successful in finding jobs consistent with their qualifications. Having an Australian education appears to be more of a disadvantage than an advantage. 'Former overseas students who have studied in Australia, are having the least success in finding professional employment.' (2008, p.1).

When looking at age groups, Birrell and Healy found that from the above population, 22 percent of NESC people aged 20-29 had found employment by census date 2006. For those aged 20-64 this increased to 36 percent. For migrants from mainly English speaking countries (MESCS) the results were 57 and 64 percent respectively. The

statistics by country of birth were similarly bleak for some individuals. Twenty two percent of skilled migrants born in India had found employment, while for those born in China only 16 percent had found professional positions by 2006. Social work specific data was not gathered in this research. In email correspondence with Dr Bob Birrell he noted the same findings as this project, that medicine, nursing and pharmacy all require higher IELTS scores for accreditation to practice than the university entrance for these study programs (22 May 2008).

The importance of linking AASW eligibility requirements to both overseas applicants and overseas students in Australian courses has been highlighted in recent media debate, sparked by the above research. Navitas is a publicly listed business which runs English language courses as part of pathway courses for higher education in Australia. Managing Director, Rod Jones estimates that up to 30 percent of his 16,000 English language students are on the permanent residency track (The Australian 2008). This supports the use of education as a pathway to residency in Australia, and that people are committed to ensuring they meet the English language requirements of their chosen pathway to immigration.

O'Neill, Marks and Wendt (2005) conducted research for the National Council of State Boards of Nursing in America. This research used an alternative sophisticated and very methodical approach to determining an English language level for a professional group. It used a standard setting panel the composition (number, representativeness and qualifications) of which were a crucial element. It provides an opportunity for comparison and evaluation of this project's process. O'Neill, Marks and Wendt's research used the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) test as the test of choice by which to determine the level for the standard. The panel had to calculate a suitable standard for the purposes of entry level nursing in the USA. The panel were given extensive orientation to the purpose of the score and asked to agree on the core tasks that entry level nurses needed to perform. The panel was then instructed to imagine a nurse candidate who was educated outside the United States and in a language other than English and then chose the TOEFL level that would be required, being given the opportunity for first and second round judgements. The Examination Committee then developed a recommended minimum passing score for the TOEFL by reviewing the panels' recommendations, existing US visa requirements, state licensing criteria and normative TOEFL performance data for other professional licensing bodies.

In contrast to the O'Neill, Marks and Wendt research, during the current project, consultees will be past applicants themselves and their employers, other social workers involved in international qualifications assessment many of whom are also overseas qualified, and finally the AASW Board which is representative of AASW branches in each state and across states around Australia. Further the IELTS test is being used rather than the TOEFL test as the test of choice.

Birrell and Healy (2008) point to the importance of incorporating into the higher education system any standards that are adopted by the AASW. As a professional body, the AASW can have some control over the requirements of international social work studies in Australian Universities. Any standards the AASW adopts should be applied in as consistent a manner as possible. This will ensure the client is provided with the best possible service – the client in this case being overseas residents who wish to pursue social work in Australia. It can be assumed that some international students would undertake their studies, believing that an Australian qualification would be an advantage

to them in their move to Australia. However, the research shows this is not the case. To be considered eligible and qualified but be unable to secure employment would be demoralising for an individual.

### Universities' Entrance Requirements

Each of the universities outlines their English language entrance requirements using the IELTS scoring system as well as equivalent scores for other English test alternatives. The requirements varied from 6.0 to 7.5, depending on the university and the field of study. The University of South Australia has increased its IELTS requirement for 2009 in at least 10 of its study programs, but has kept social work with an IELTS entry requirement of 6.0. (See Appendix One for table). It needs to be noted that the level required for entrance into university is being further reviewed by the Australian University Quality Agency. Further, groups that may not have already done English language test when they apply for AASW eligibility were identified. Consistent with the comments by Birrell and Healy (2008), the university entrance requirements were generally lower than those of the professional body associated with the study program.

An element that needs to be considered is the significant cost associated with being a full fee paying overseas student. International study program costs vary between universities, but are all within a similar range. Costs for international students are between \$17,000 and \$20,000 per academic year. Research by Birrell and Healy (2008) indicates that for some individuals their qualifications may then provide a pathway to permanency in Australia, but does not lead to a career in their chosen field, generally as a result of their English language skills. This is a significant financial burden to have incurred and to not reap the financial rewards associated with a professional qualification.

### Other Professional Bodies

With the exception of Speech Pathology, all the professions reviewed during the project have the same overall band score requirement on the IELTS system – 7.0. Speech Pathology accepts a different testing system, the Occupational English Test (OET). There are, however, some differences amongst the professions. These are:

- Medicine, Occupational Therapy, Psychology and Teaching also require a minimum score of 7.0 on all four components of the test.
- Nursing allows a minimum of 6.5 in the reading and listening components (but is currently reviewing their English language requirements)
- Pharmacy and Dietetics allows a minimum of 6.5 in any of the components
- Physiotherapy allows a minimum of 6.0 in any of the components.

Contact was made with Translator and Interpreter Service via the DIAC. They stated that all their interpreters are required to have an English language skill of IELTS 7.0.

There was also a level of consistency across the various professions when it came to the conditions and exemptions they applied. A summary of these are:

Conditions:

- IELTS test results must be current within the last 2 years (DIAC, Dietetics, Medicine, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy and Psychology). Note that Teaching does not accept tests older than 12 months.

- Results older than two years are accepted where there is evidence that since the last IELTS test the applicant has actively maintained employment or further study related to the profession in English in a country where English is an/the official language, (Medicine, Psychology, Teaching – 2 years full time employment)

Exemptions:

- All components of the applicants' academic qualification were completed in a country where English is an official language at a tertiary institution where programs and assessments are conducted in English and the applicant can provide evidence of completion of secondary education in English in a country where English is an official language. (Psychology) Note that Teaching requires that an applicant was **born** and completed their education in either Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom or the United States of America.
- The applicant completed their primary and secondary education in English in either Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Republic of Ireland, South Africa, United Kingdom, and United States of America (Physiotherapy)
- The applicant completed secondary education in a country where English is the native or first language (Medicine nominates specific countries to which this exemption applies).
- The applicant completed tertiary education in their field in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, New Zealand or Ireland, leading to registration/licensure in those countries (Occupational Therapy)
- The applicant can provide evidence (eg reference/s) of at least three years practice of the profession using English as the primary means of communication. This practice must be undertaken in a country where English is an official language (Psychology) Note that Physiotherapy requires an applicant to have worked 2 out of the last 2 years in either Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Republic of Ireland, South Africa, United Kingdom, and United States of America.

Please note, that where waivers or exemptions apply, applicants are always required to provide documentary evidence in support of this.

In addition, one other English language test was consistently accepted by the other professional bodies. This is the Occupational English Test. Research on the equivalency of this test to IELTS has been undertaken, but the results are not yet publicly available as it has been put forward for publication (OET). Further investigation into comparative tests to IELTS that AASW will also accept could be done by considering such current research.

### ***Consultation with Social Work Profession and Other Bodies***

#### IELTS

Project Manager listening to audio-visual examples of Speaking at IELTS Bands 6, 7 and 8 and viewing writing examples was of the following view.

Band 6 still has problems with pronunciation and fluency. It was agreed these would distract and make listening more difficult for a client who was being served by a social worker with skills at such a level. Band 7 showed greater flexibility to express oneself with minimal lexical and grammatical error. Pronunciation caused less strain. At Band 8, intonation and stress are used effectively to enhance and emphasise meaning. At this

level, candidates are able to develop topics coherently and use sophisticated lexis to convey precise meaning; grammatical errors are rare at Band 8.

It was agreed that an adequate level of English for social work is necessary as part of respect for the client. Language and communication are the key tools that social workers use for interaction between individuals, with individuals and social systems being the specific units of focus for social work.

#### Former NESB Applicants

The information gathered from the 7 participants was interesting in both its disparities in some areas and congruence in others. Information that participants provided was also interesting when their total situation was taken into account, and when information from their supervisor was then compared.

The most notable disparity was in relation to their English language skill level. Three of the 7 participants were not required to undertake a language skill test. This included the participant who was also required to undertake a bridging program. One of them did attend an interview with DIAC; but, was told there was no need to undertake any language tuition. One participant commented that prior to actually arriving in Australia the whole process had been a paperwork exercise and that she had not had to speak to anyone in Australia at all.

The 3 participants who did not undertake an English language skill test stated that a test and a standard should be required. One person stated that social workers should at least have the same level of English as medical staff in hospitals (a workplace with which they were familiar). At the same time this person expressed concerns that some doctors did not really have sufficient language skills and that this had resulted in patients and/or families asking for a change in doctor. It needs to be noted that doctors in Australia are required to have IELTS level 7.0 on all four test components. For this social worker speaking and listening were the skill areas that were considered the most significant for social work practice. They indicated that 90% of their work was probably verbal communication with either clients or other professionals. The other two also indicated a level of 7.0 as their recommendation.

For the 4 participants who had undertaken an English language test, for all of them this was an IELTS test. One participant did not know whether the test was an Academic or General test, but had scored 5.5. This person indicated that it took 1 year to gain employment as a social worker. They also stated that when they commenced work it was a 'shocking experience' due to the level and lack of language skills held. They were considering returning to their country of origin due to the language skills issue. This person recommended a minimum of either 6.5 or 7.0 as the standard that should be adopted.

The other 3 participants who undertook the IELTS scored General 7.0, Academic 7.5 and Academic 8.

One of these people initially indicated that the AASW should adopt the same language requirement as DIAC. In more discussion, this person stated that they believed the DIAC requirement was 7 (this person scored 8). They also suggested that writing might need a higher level of skill than other areas as social workers are often required to write formal

reports. This same individual showed considerable insight into the complexities of language. They had undertaken post graduate counselling studies since arriving in Australia but felt that their English language skill level wasn't sufficient to pursue work in this area.

Of the other two participants who completed an IELTS test, one believed a level should be set. The other suggested that the current system is good and then made a recommendation that the AASW could 'conduct some training programs to improve the competency of English speaking'. This person had their qualifications approved by the AASW in 2006, started seeking employment in March 2008 and is currently not employed. This person felt that their English language skill wasn't an issue, but that their overseas qualification may have had some bearing on their employment status. They had ten years experience as a social worker in their country of origin.

#### Employers of Former NESB Applicants

The three employers provided a consistent view on the issue of English language skill for social workers.

Only one of the employers had a social worker with an IELTS score known to the project but not known to the employer at the time. This employer was very happy with the English skill level of the social worker. She stated that the main benefit of the social workers English language skill was that she neither had to check any written correspondence from the social worker, nor employ someone else to undertake that. This employer felt that writing skills were particularly important in terms of not leaving an organisation open to legal action or other types of complaints. This reflected the views of the social worker she employed who had also mentioned writing skills as an important skill area. This employer said that she would employ a social worker from a non English speaking background again if their English language skills were equal to or marginally less than this worker. The employer clearly stated they would not consider employing a social worker with anything other than slightly less English language skill levels than this worker. The IELTS score of the this current social worker was in Academic Band 8.0.

The other two employers shared similar views; however, the social workers that they supervised did not have a scored English language skill level. Having spoken to other project participants, the project officer subjectively assessed each of these social workers as speaking at a level consistent with IELTS levels 8 and 9. (This is a subjective level of assessment, with no reference to any written information).

One employer provided some broader information, information in relation to social work, and personal experience. In relation to the broader information, this supervisor indicated that there had been complaints in relation to language skills of medical staff. The workplace had resolved this by a speech therapist facilitating some sessions with these staff in relation to the language skills. She was unaware that medical staff are required to have an IELTS score of 7. This supervisor was currently aware of several social workers from non English speaking backgrounds and had mixed views about whether they had the sufficient language skills to undertake the role for which they were employed. As a result of this, the supervisor was clear that the current standard needed raising.

In relation to her own personal experience, the supervisor had undertaken a post graduate degree at a university. She attended the university on a weekly basis, with the

aim of being to debate the issues that arose as part of the study. She indicated that she looked forward to engaging in some professional debate and being stimulated by the ideas of other professionals in the field. A large component of the course participants was made up of international students. This social worker felt that the language skill of many of these students meant that they could not engage in the professional discussion, and that her trip to the university was usually a wasted one. She states that she would not pursue further studies at this university as a result of her experience.

### ***Additional Consultation and Information***

In analysing the feedback from all the groups consulted in this Project, it becomes evident that those from an academic background tend to support a lower level of English for social work or letting the market decide. Practitioners, professional bodies and assessment officers (with one exception) tend to support a higher level of English and setting a standard for social work.

Current evidence supports the finding that English of some university students might not improve; however this research does not specifically include social work. The findings of the Australian Universities Quality Agency study will also be relevant to the further consideration of levels of English of graduates from university study in Australia. With respect to social work in particular, it would appear that there is no research available on the English language level of NESB social work students who graduate.

With respect to the AASW setting a standard, there is a clear indication from the consultations done during this Project that this would be a positive move forward. AIWCW is considering setting a level 7 English level standard. With AASW aligning with a higher academic level of qualification within the community services and health industry, AASW setting a level lower than this would also be conflicting.

The AASW Steering Committee suggested the possibility of a provisional level of membership within the AASW for those not meeting the required level. If this was the case there would be further cost to the applicant in having levels re-assessed to progress to a higher level. There would also be cost involved to the AASW in monitoring and reviewing a member's provisional status.

What follows on from this is the corresponding but different issue of the level of overseas qualified applicants' knowledge of the Australian social welfare system. Some mentoring and orientation to social work in Australia may be possible to institute. Research could be done into how other professional bodies eg NASW and BASW and Canada address this issue of the orientation of new social workers to practicing in the country. The Horizon Career Centre, managed by the AASW, could take on a role in such a process. It needs to be noted that the ANMC are recommending a 12 week national adaptation program in their new criteria for assessing skilled nursing migrants soon to be introduced.

Feedback from a previous Assessment Officer indicates that some past applicants had not undertaken an English language test. This was confirmed by the outcome of the individual interviews with previous applicants. This information can either be acted upon and a level introduced by AASW or more research done. Although the Project tested a very small sample - 3 out of 7 - this represents 43% of the sample not taking an English language test prior to entry to Australia. It could be said that ultimately it is in the social

worker's interest to improve on English language skills whether tested or not in order to increase chances of employment. However how much do administrators and managers understand what social work has to offer, set up situations that use social work to its maximum capacity and seek social workers who can work to their maximum capacity? Should the AASW therefore leave applicants' employment prospects to market forces? These are the questions the AASW needs to ask.

### ***Impediments***

Several impediments were encountered during the project. These have been mentioned within the body of the report, in the relevant section. However, a summary of these now follows.

A number of issues affected the data base. The initial problem that arose was issues with the AASW membership database from which the list of potential focus group participants was to be gained. Prior to the commencement of the project initial enquiries had been made with the AASW in order to ascertain the projects ability to gain this information. The data base problems were not foreseen.

In addition to this the data base has no facility to identify AASW members by the country in which they gained their qualifications. This provided some difficulties and limitations on the project that were also not foreseen. In order to compensate for this issue, the IQC data base was accessed for previous applicants who had provided Australian contact details, although there was no way to know whether these details were still current. The result was the number of overseas born social workers was smaller than expected. Positive and important information was still gleaned from this group.

The time frames of the project also impacted on the focus group. This was seen as a potential issue prior to the commencement of the project and so a number of alternatives had been developed. It was thought that a group process would have been conducive to greater discussion and information than individual interviews. However, having completed interviews, it became evident that the topic can be an emotive and challenging one, and individual interviews was probably a better process. Responding within individual interviews, participants were able to discuss their difficulties and vulnerabilities in relation to their language skills that they may not have felt comfortable doing within a group setting. However, more time would have allowed for more individual interviews.

Other issues identified in the risk management process prior to the commencement of the project were not encountered.

### ***Finances***

See Attachment Eight and Attachment Eight (a) for travel receipts

## **Conclusion**

Social Work in Australia currently is experiencing strong pressure to meet demand and foster the attractiveness of social work to both international students coming to Australia to study and also to overseas qualified applicants. With respect to setting English language requirements, this burden exists in tension with the first obligation of the profession which is to clients. As such, the Association needs to ensure that clients are not disadvantaged by workers inability to communicate effectively in English. It would appear then that the Association should therefore have an English language proficiency level that non English speaking applicants for work or migration must meet at the same time as, in harmony with the values of the social justice, making every effort to provide support to such applicants.

Failure to meet this obligation to set an English language standard may leave the Association open to legal or political challenge by clients or client advocates in instances where clients have been disadvantaged by non-proficient practitioners.

This first obligation takes precedence over the equity issues of the Association disadvantaging overseas social workers by requiring English language proficiency. The Association has accepted the need to rigorously ensure professional proficiency in the past by requiring substantial supplementary education programs also at a significant cost to the applicant. It is the same obligation that now drives the need for English language proficiency. However having accepted this requirement, it is then the obligation of the Association to ensure that overseas applicants are not unnecessarily disadvantaged in fulfilling this requirement. This can be achieved by ensuring that language acquisition processes, assessments and orientation and mentoring are as accessible as possible.

### **Recommendation 1**

That AASW agree to adopt a level of English language skill for overseas qualified social workers.

Accepted at Board meeting 28<sup>th</sup> June 2008  
(See Attachment Nine for Report)

### **Recommendation 2**

That the level of English language skill required for social work in Australia is IELRS Band 7 (or its equivalent) with 7.5 for speaking and listening and 7 to reading and writing.

Accepted at Board meeting 28<sup>th</sup> June 2008

### **Recommendation 3**

Further investigation in relation to comparative tests to IELTS that AASW will also accept.

Accepted at Board meeting 28<sup>th</sup> June 2008

### **Recommendation 4**

That Schools of Social Work at this stage choose the levels for entrance to social work programs within their own universities.

Not addressed at Board meeting 28<sup>th</sup> June 2008

The above recommendations are based on the following findings of the Project.

1. NESB social workers who have been through the assessment process recommend a level of English for social work
2. Already there is evidence of social workers coming into Australia from NESB, being accepted as eligible for AASW membership, yet undergoing no English test at all.
3. The most principal IELTS examiner across Australia recommends level 7
4. Knowledge of the associated skill with each IELTS level encourages that level 7 is necessary,
5. 96% of social workers responding to a questionnaire during the AASW Eligibility Review stated that they are of the opinion that an English language standard is necessary for social work in Australia.
6. Most recent past assessment officers report difficulty in understanding and speaking with 10 - 30% of inquirers/applicants.
7. Virtually no extra cost would be incurred to AASW to institute this level within its IQ assessment standards.
8. The cost to the applicant may be in having to take an English language course in order to meet standard. Financial assistance may be available in some instances. This however would be of less cost than paying to enter Australia and then not obtaining work due to inadequate English level.
9. If AASW wants high standards for the client and maximum number of social workers in employment it needs to require a high level of English. The risk of social workers coming to Australia and not being able to gain employment due to compromised English language skills is higher than the risk of reduced numbers entering Australia because competent English standard required.
10. The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) is currently undertaking a project which is looking at Good Practice with respect to English language proficiency at Universities (AUQA 2008, <http://www.auqa.edu.au/> accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2008.)

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## Appendices

### Appendix One- English Language Levels for Universities with Social Work Programs

This table only considers English language level for undergraduate programs not post graduate coursework or research programs and only according to the IELTS test. Equivalency for other tests can be factored in once AASW decides on the level of IELTS. (All universities require test scores to be valid for two years, from the date of the test to the date of commencement at the Uni)

SW Program	Overall English language standard for University (including Social Work)	English Language standard for Exceptions within the University
<b>QLD</b>		
James Cook <a href="http://www.jcu.edu.au/sass/swcw/">http://www.jcu.edu.au/sass/swcw/</a>	<b>Band 1</b> <b>6.0 (no component lower than 5.5)</b>	<b>Band 2</b> <b>6.5 (no component lower than 6.0)</b> Bachelor of Law, Bachelor of Nursing, Bachelor of Occupational Therapy, Bachelor of Pharmacy and Bachelor of Physiotherapy.  <b>Band 3</b> <b>7.0 (no component lower than 7.0)</b> Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Medicine/Bachelor of Surgery and Bachelor of Speech Pathology.
University of Qld <a href="http://www.uq.edu.au/swahs/index.html?page=28376">http://www.uq.edu.au/swahs/index.html?page=28376</a>	<b>Overall score of 6.5 with a minimum score of 6 in writing,</b>  Note: valid for 2 years, from the date of the test to the date of commencement at UQ.	<b>Overall 7 with writing 6, speaking 7:.</b> All Dental Science, Medicine (MBBS), Midwifery, Oral Health, Occupational Therapy, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Nursing Veterinary Science programs  <b>Overall 7, writing 6, speaking 8.</b> Speech Pathology Note: Test scores are valid for two years from the date of the test to the date of commencement at the University of Queensland.

<b>SW Program</b>	<b>Overall English language standard for University (including Social Work)</b>	<b>English Language standard for Exceptions within the University</b>
<b>NSW</b>		
Western Sydney <a href="http://www.uws.edu.au/#">http://www.uws.edu.au/#</a>	<b>6.5 overall score with a minimum 6.0 in each subtest</b>	<b>7.0 overall score with a minimum 6.5 in each subtest</b> B Medicine/B Surgery:  <b>Indigenous Students</b> The Badanami Alternative Entry Program includes a two-day Assessment Workshop. Applicants asked to complete literacy and numeracy assessment tasks and participate in an interview to discuss interest in the course chosen. This program allows demonstration of meeting the minimum and essential criteria required for the course selected.
Uni of Sydney <a href="http://www.usyd.edu.au/fstudent/international/undergraduate/apply/english.shtml">http://www.usyd.edu.au/fstudent/international/undergraduate/apply/english.shtml</a>	<b>Overall 6.5 Section Minimum 6.0</b>	7.5 No component lower than 7 Bachelor of Arts (Media and Communications) 7.5 No component lower than 7 Law (all programs) 7.5 No component lower than Bachelor of Education 7 No component lower than 7 Combined Health Sciences 7 No component lower than 7 Combined Nursing * 7 No component lower than 7 Veterinary Science 7 No component lower than 6 Architecture all programs)
<b>VIC</b>		
Monash  <a href="http://www.monash.edu/study/international/apply/entry-requirements-english.html">http://www.monash.edu/study/international/apply/entry-requirements-english.html</a>	<b>minimum test score of 6.5 overall</b>  at least 6.5 in Reading and Listening  at least 6.0 in Writing and Speaking	For Off Shore courses – Students must satisfy the minimum English language requirements of the university.
Melbourne <a href="http://futurestudent.s-test.acs.unimelb.edu.au/courses/englishreq.html">http://futurestudent.s-test.acs.unimelb.edu.au/courses/englishreq.html</a>	<b>2008 All faculties 6.5 (written 6)</b> <b>2009 All faculties 6.5 (with no band less than 6)</b>	

SW Program	Overall English language standard for University (including Social Work)	English Language standard for Exceptions within the University
<p><b>SA</b></p> <p>Uni of SA</p> <p><a href="http://www.unisa.edu.au/international/apply/english.asp">http://www.unisa.edu.au/international/apply/english.asp</a></p>	<p><b>2008 All Uni 6</b> Social Work 6 only exception BEd 6.5</p> <p><b>2009 Social Work 6</b> Psychology 6 Social Science 6 Soc Sc (Humans Services) 6</p>	<p><b>Increase for 2009</b> Science 6.5 Law 7 Health Science 6.5 Allied Science Human Movement 6.5 Physiotherapy 6.5 Pharmaceutical Science 6.5 Nursing 6.5 Nutrition 6.5 Food Science Podiatry Medical Radiation Science 6.5 Edn and Childhood Edn 6.5 Business 6.5</p>
<p><b>WA</b></p> <p>Edith Cowan</p> <p><a href="http://www.ecu.edu.au/international/admissions/applications/entryrequirements.html#english">http://www.ecu.edu.au/international/admissions/applications/entryrequirements.html#english</a></p>	<p><b>Overall band score of 6.0 (no individual band less than 6)</b></p>	<p><b>Overall 6.0 with no sub-band below 5.5;</b> (A 3-year trial has been approved for these scores for students entering courses within the Faculty of Business and Law</p> <p><b>7.0 (no individual band less than 6.5)</b> Education programs</p> <p><b>6.5 with no individual band less than 6.5</b> Bachelor of Science (Nursing)</p> <p><b>7.0 (minimum of 6.5 for Listening and Reading and 7.0 for Speaking and Writing).</b> Bachelor of Science (Nursing) -</p> <p><b>7.5 (no individual band less than 7.0)</b> Bachelor of Science (Occupational Therapy)</p>
<p><b>NT</b></p> <p>Charles Darwin</p> <p><a href="http://www.cdu.edu.au/international/prospective/entryrequirements.html#undergrad">http://www.cdu.edu.au/international/prospective/entryrequirements.html#undergrad</a></p>	<p><b>Overall 6 with no band less than 5.5</b> (Foundation and VET: 5.5 with no band less than 5)</p>	<p><b>Overall 6.5 with no band less than 6</b> B Nursing B Pharmacy</p>

SW Program	Overall English language standard for University (including Social Work)	English Language standard for Exceptions within the University
<b>Tasmania</b> University of Tasmania <a href="http://www.international.utas.edu.au/statistic/admissionRequirements.php">http://www.international.utas.edu.au/statistic/admissionRequirements.php</a>	<b>Overall 6.0 (no band less than 5.5)</b>	<b>7.0 (no band less than 7)</b> Medicine <b>6.0 (no band less than 5.5)</b> 1st Year Bachelor of Nursing (Alternatively students may partake in either the 10 week or 15 week DEAP (Direct Entry Academic Program) Program. Students who successfully complete this program are not required to sit an IELTS test.) <b>6.5 (no band less than 6.0)</b> 2nd and 3rd year Bachelor of Nursing or 2 Year Bachelor of Nursing Fast Track program <b>6.5 (no band less than 6.0)</b> , Pharmacy Evidence that a minimum of 2 years full-time study with English as the sole medium of instruction and examination have been completed within the last 24 months. Proposed increase. It is expected this will be approved by August 2008 and as such will be a formal entry requirement for the 2009 intake. <b>6.0 (no band less than 6.0)</b> , Pharmaceutical Science Evidence that a minimum of 2 years full-time study with English as the sole medium of instruction and examination have been completed within the last 24 months.

All unis have various other forms of demonstration of English language proficiency besides the IELTS test. For example, for University of Sydney, applicants must provide evidence of English language proficiency through one of the following methods:

- 'You have completed the International Baccalaureate provided you have met one of the following criteria:
  - Completion of two Languages A1 in English at Higher or Standard Level;
  - Completion of Language A2 English as a Group 2 subject at either Higher or Standard Level;
  - Completion of Language B English at Higher Level with Grade 4 or more; or completion of Language B English at Standard Level with a Grade 5 or more
- You have completed at least one year of full time university study in an English speaking country where the language of instruction (i.e. teaching, assessment and examination) was in English.
- You have achieved the required grades in "English for Academic Purposes" at the University's Centre for English Teaching. The course must have been completed no more than 2 years prior to the commencement of the course you are applying for.'

**Appendix Two-  
University and Profession English Language Level Requirements**

<b>Profession</b>	<b>Professional IELTS Requirement</b>	<b>Educational IELTS Requirement</b>
Dietetics	7.0 (min component 6.5)	6.5
Law		6.0 (component min 5.5) 6.5 6.5 (component min 6.0) 7.5 (component min 7)
Medicine	7.0 (all)	7.0 (All) (2) 7 (writing 6, speaking 7) 7 (component min 6.5)
Nursing	7.0 (min of 6.5 in reading and listening)	6.5 (2) 6.5 (component min 6.0) (3) 7 (writing 6, speaking 7) (2) 7.0 (All)
Occupational Therapy	7.0 (all)	6.5 (component min 6.0) 7 (writing 6, speaking 7) 7.5 (component min 7.0)
Pharmacy	7.0 (min component 6.5)	6.5 6.5 (component min 6.0) (3) 7 (writing 6, speaking 7)
Physiotherapy	7.0 (min component 6.0)	6.5 6.5 (component min 6.0) 7 (writing 6, speaking 7)
Psychology	7.0 (all)	6
Social Work		6.0 (2) 6.0 (component min 5.5) (3) 6.5 (minimum of 6 in writing) (3) 6.5 (minimum of 6 in writing and speaking) 6.5 (component min 6) 6.0
Speech Pathology	OET A x 3, B x 1.	7.0 (All) 7.0 (writing 6, speaking 8)
Teaching	7.0 (all)	6.5 7.0 (All) 7.0 (component min 6.5) 7.5 (All)

NB:

- one university had different English language requirements for Nursing as the course progressed. 1st year nursing required 6.0 with minimum component score of 5.5. Subsequent years required 6.5 with a minimum component score of 6.0.
- Where more than one university set these language skill standards the number of universities using that standard are indicated in italics i.e. (2)

For each of the professional bodies all test results were required to be current within the last 2 years. The test results had to be obtained in the one sitting. (ie the best test results from various sittings couldn't be chosen) .An exception to the two year rule was where a candidate could demonstrate they had actively maintained employment in their profession in a country where English is the native or first language since completion of their IELTS.

In relation to English language competency there are a number of other factors that some of these professions took into consideration.

Other factors which some of these professional associations took into consideration are:

- Occupational English Test (OET). This test is almost as widely accepted as the IELTS. Where overall scores of 7, with 6.5 as a component minimum was accepted, an OET of B or greater was also accepted. Within the OET scoring system, no professional association allowed lower scores for some components, even if this was the case for what they accepted with the IELTS
- English language tests other than IELTS and OET were also accepted by one or two professional bodies, but these were the only two being broadly accepted by professional bodies
- Test results had to be current in the previous 2 years
- Waivers were considered where a 4 year course of study was undertaken in an English speaking country
- Australian study in a related field was undertaken in the previous 2 years.

Exemptions:

- Evidence of secondary education in English in a country where English is the native or first Language. (Medicine and Psychology)
- Evidence of 3 years practice in the profession using English as the primary means of communication. This practice must be undertaken in a country where English is an official language.
- All components of the applicant's academic qualification for registration were completed in a country where English is an official language at a tertiary institution where programs and assessments are conducted in English and the applicant can provide evidence of completion of secondary education in English in a country where English is an official language.

**Appendix Three- Correspondence to Former NESB Applicants**

**From:** Cate Burns [cateburns@westnet.com.au]

**Sent:** Saturday, 7 June 2008 11:47 AM

**To:** 'cateburns@westnet.com.au'

**Subject:** AASW English Language Project

**Attachments:** Project Questions.doc

Previous International Qualifications Applicants (Social Work),

Hello Everyone,

I am a project worker with the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) doing research on the level of English language that people require in order to adequately undertake the role of Social Worker in Australia.

Currently the AASW has no specific policy on this, so relies on the levels set by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). As part of this process we are keen to speak with people who have been through this process. Where possible we want to know what level of language you have, whether it has been hard to find work, whether your previous Social Work experience has helped, and what you would recommend to the AASW in respect of English language skills. If at all possible, we also want to speak to employers to see what their experience has been employing people who have English as a second language.

I have attached an outline of the questions that I am asking. During conversation other questions often come up – especially when people have been overseas students first and then remained in Australia. If you are interested in this area and would like to help the AASW please let me know. I am also happy to receive these questions completed in writing – and I will follow up with email or phone calls if there are further questions that I have. My preference is to speak with people, but I am happy to receive you input in any way that is possible.

Should you be interested in speaking with me, I am happy to make a time that suits, either during work or after hours.

Regards,  
Cate

Cate Burns  
Independent Consultant and Counsellor  
Ph: 0405 381 611

 please consider the environment before printing this email.

**Appendix Four-Data from Former NESB Applicants**

No.	Country of Origin	IELTS Test Score	When Qualls Approved	How long did it take to find work?	Previous SW Exp	Recommendation to AASW	Addit Comments - participant	Addit Comments - Project Officer
1	Nepal	Academic - 7.5	Sep-07	<b>Not employed</b>	4yrs	Need to set a level. (Not specific)	Currently doing a Masters in Public Health as International Student	Had expected to gain employment by now. Only want to work in Health in one geographical area of Melbourne
2	Peru	5.5	Jun-99	1 yr	N/A	6.5 or 7 in each module. All modules equally important	<b>My first 12 months in the work place was a 'shocking experience'. I was at the point of preparing to return home, a score of 5.5 was not enough.</b>	
3	India	General - 7	2006. Commenced searching March 2008	<b>Not employed</b>	10 yrs	Current System good	AASW should conduct training 'to improve competency of English speaking'	Difficult to communicate with verbally and in writing. Gave very brief answers and wasn't able to expand on them further.

No.	Country of Origin	IELTS Test Score	When Quals Approved	How long did it take to find work?	Previous SW Exp	Recommendation to AASW	Addit Comments - participant	Addit Comments - Project Officer
4	Germany	N/A	AASW rec bridging course. Commenced 1998	Immediately	Years	7		
5	Germany	Academic - 8	2006	Immediately	8 Years	7	Thought DIAC required 7.	
6	Egypt	N/A	2000	Immediately	N/A	7		
7	South Africa	N/A	1996	Immediately	5 Years	7		<b>Immigration was a paperwork exercise. Did not speak to an Australian until I arrived in the country.</b>

**Appendix Five – Data from Employers of Former NESB Applicants**

No.	Employee IELTS Test Score	Would you employ another worker with lower English Language Skills	Would you employ a worker with the same English language skills	Recommendation to AASW	Addit Comments - participant	Addit Comments - Project Officer
1	Academic - 8	Possibly marginally less, but if lower still would be a performance management issue	Yes		Don't need to check written work that goes out.	Employer hadn't realised the worker had higher than the required English language skill level
2a	N/A	No	Unsure	Definitely raise the language level required	We need to appreciate what people from NESB bring and take advantage of that. Also, I <b>attended a Masters Program that involved weekly discussion groups. There were a majority international students who weren't able to contribute to the discussion due to their lack of English language skills. I wouldn't go to that University again.</b>	
2b	N/A	No	Yes	As above	As above	
3	N/A	A little less	Yes	Need a level	There has sometimes been confusion with written English.	

## **Appendix Six – Questions put to Social Workers and Employers**

### English Language Project Questions – Social Workers

1. What is your nationality?
2. As part of the immigration process did you undertake an English language test?
  - a) If yes, do you remember which test it was?
  - b) If yes, do you remember what you scored on the test?
3. Did you undertake secondary school studies in English?
4. When were your Social Work qualifications approved?
5. When did you start seeking employment as a Social Worker?
6. How long did it take you to gain employment as a Social Worker?
7. Did you obtain work at the level that you wanted and expected?
8. Was your overseas Social Work experience recognised when you obtained your first employment as a SW in Australia?
9. How long have you been employed?
10. What type of social work do you do? i.e. child protection, hospital, disability etc.
11. Do you feel your English language skill level has been sufficient to do your job?
  - in relation to your work with clients?
  - In relation to dealing with work colleagues, or workers from other professions, such as doctors, nurses, lawyers etc?
12. Can you please say what impact your level of English language has had on
  - a) Gaining employment
  - b) Your opportunities within the workplace?
13. Do you know anyone who has employed or supervised a Social Worker from a non-English speaking background that we may be able to contact to ask their experience of this? (This could be your supervisor or someone who has employed or supervised you, or a colleague or friend who has been in this position).

14. Currently the AASW, itself, does not have an English language standard. It uses the Department of Immigration standard, according to the IELTS (the test they use which is internationally recognised). What is your view on this? Should the AASW have its own IELTS standard, and if so, what should that be?
15. Do you have any other information that is not covered, but that you think is important for the AASW to know when reviewing the level of English language skill that it requires social workers to have?

Thank you for your time.

#### English Language Project Questions – Employers

1. What has been your experience of employing/supervising a social worker from a NESB, in relation to their English language skills?
2. If you were to employ another worker from a NESB would you employ one with lower English language skills?
3. If you were to employ another worker from a NESB would you employ one with the same English language skills?
4. Currently the AASW, itself, does not have an English language standard. It uses the Department of Immigration standard, according to the IELTS (the test they use which is internationally recognised). What is your view on this? Should the AASW have its own IELTS standard, and if so, what should that be?
5. Do you have any other personal or professional experiences/information in relation to NESB social workers that might be useful to this project and the AASW?
6. Is there any other information that we haven't covered, but that you would like to make comment on?

### Appendix Seven- IELTS Band Scores

9	<b>Expert user</b>	Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.
8	<b>Very good user</b>	Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.
7	<b>Good user</b>	Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.
6	<b>Competent User</b>	Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.
5	<b>Modest User</b>	Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.
4	<b>Limited User</b>	Basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Has frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.
3	<b>Extremely limited user</b>	Conveys and understands only general meaning in very familiar situations. Frequent breakdowns in communication occur.
2	<b>Intermittent User</b>	No real communication is possible except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulae in familiar situations and to meet immediate needs. Has great difficulty understanding spoken and written English.
1	<b>Non user</b>	Essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.
0	<b>Did not attempt the test</b>	No assessable information provided. No assessable information provided.

### Interpretation of IELTS Results

Band	Linguistically demanding <b>academic</b> courses e.g. Medicine, Law, Linguistics, Journalism, Library Studies	Linguistically less demanding <b>academic</b> courses e.g. Agriculture, Pure Mathematics, Technology, Computer-based work, Telecommunications	Linguistically demanding <b>training courses</b> e.g. Air Traffic Control, Engineering, Pure Applied Sciences, Industrial Safety	Linguistically less demanding <b>training courses</b> e.g. Animal Husbandry, Catering, Fire Services
7.5 - 9.0	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
7.0	Probably Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
6.5	English study needed	Probably acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
6.0	English study needed	English study needed	Probably acceptable	Acceptable
5.5	English study needed	English study needed	English study needed	Probably acceptable