

Criteria for AASW Accredited Clinical Social Worker (ACSW)

Preamble

The document outlines the principles and policies behind the accreditation process and the procedures to become an AASW Accredited Clinical Social Worker (ACSW).

To apply for accreditation as an ACSW, you need to complete the relevant application form and to submit it to the AASW. It is strongly recommended that you read this document in full before beginning the application process.

Background

Contemporary clinical social work practice is grounded in the profession's long history of direct practice with individuals, couples, families and small groups. Work with individuals, couples and families was known as casework and is the oldest and most prevalent helping method in the profession. "The primary historical aim of casework intervention was to restore, enhance or maintain the socio-emotional functioning of individuals and families who were experiencing distress at an intrapersonal, interpersonal or environmental level (Gonzalez & Gelman 2015 p257). Casework was first conceptualised by Mary Richmond (1917) and outlined in her work *Social Diagnosis*. Richmond's seminal work conceptualised the necessity of both individual treatment and environmental manipulation to advance the wellbeing of vulnerable people. Core to social casework is the relationship between the social worker and client and the focus on enabling people to solve their own problems.

Clinical social work is a distinct area of practice differing from community work, advocacy, policy work, case management and service management. Central to clinical social work practice is a formal role in a counselling or therapeutic context which privileges working collaboratively on issues identified by the client or clients. Clinical social workers work on a broad base of knowledge and skills to address the needs of clients who are impacted by life challenges and changes. This practice is characterised by working with people's intimate experiences and their relationships within their social and physical environment. Clinical social work practice will pay particular attention to factors of social disadvantage, inequalities and human rights. Hence at times clinical social workers may engage in some other areas of practice, however it is not the prime focus of their service provision.

Clinical social workers develop their advanced practice skills and knowledge from the base of a qualifying social work degree. Ongoing supervised practice development will be grounded in competent ethical interpersonal skills and knowledge which recognises the client's role in all treatment plans and their right to competent service provision.

Gonzalez M.J. & Gelman C.R. (2015) Clinical social work practice in the twenty-first century: A Changing Landscape *Clinical Social Work Journal* 43: p257-262

Queensland Government (2010) *Social Work in Health Clinical Capability Framework*

Richmond M.E. (1917) *Social Diagnosis* New York: Russell Sage Foundation

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Definitions

AASW Accredited Clinical Social Worker (ACSW)

A clinical social worker draws on evidence-based theories and methods of prevention, assessment and treatment with a special focus on psychosocial and behavioural problems and disorders.

The practice of clinical social work is informed by the broader concepts intrinsic to social work practice such as enhancing the wellbeing of persons in their environment, inclusive of principles of social justice and human rights, person-centred and strengths focused interventions.

Further to this, clinical social work

- Requires complex decision making, systemic analysis and advanced critical thinking skills gained through supervised practice, continuous improvement and focused professional development (which may include postgraduate education)
- Engages directly with individuals, couples, families and groups focused on complex issues impacting on individual and family functioning and their relationships including, but not limited to, mental health, parenting, separation, adolescence, addiction, grief/loss and trauma.

The clinical social worker credential recognises advanced direct practice in a diverse and unique range of clinical practice settings and progressive body of clinical knowledge through the accreditation process.

Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW)

The Australian Association of Social Workers is the professional representative body of social workers in Australia, with more than 11,000 members. It was formed as a national association in 1946 and has since supported its members through the profession's developments and changes.

Clients

Clients are individuals, families and other kinship arrangements, groups, organisations and societies, especially those who are neglected, vulnerable, disadvantaged, alienated or have exceptional needs. (AASW Code of Ethics)

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

AASW members maintain, improve, broaden and develop their skills, knowledge and expertise through continuing professional development (CPD). CPD is an ongoing process throughout a social worker's career, informed by the changing practice environment, professional domains, new evidence and community need. Interested applicants for the ACSW must meet the [ACSW CPD goals](#). ACSWs must also maintain the CPD standards annually.

Expert Advisory Group

The National Clinical Social Work Expert Advisory Group was instrumental in designing the rigorous assessment and accreditation process for ACSWs. Members of the expert advisory group were experienced social workers engaged in clinical settings in public, government, non-government and academic capacities.

Clinical or demonstrably related field

The definition of the clinical field for the purposes of practice in social work is discussed below. Social workers are considered to have worked in the clinical field if they can demonstrate that they have covered the areas outlined in the [AASW Clinical Social Worker Capability Framework \(2019\)](#). Among other considerations, this would mean social workers need to show that they have specific knowledge about clinical practice. Where the applicant has worked in a field that they consider provides them with sufficient knowledge and skills, they will need to submit sufficient evidence to make a case to demonstrate the relevance.

Clinical social work practice settings

Specialised clinical social work practice is located in a broad range of practice settings as follows. Some of these are clinical settings however not all social work practice in clinical settings can be defined as clinical social work practice. The following list is not exhaustive:

- Mental health
- Sexual assault

- Trauma services
- Veteran services
- Grief and loss
- Family violence
- Child and family support work
- Hospitals
- Aged care
- Relationship counselling
- Private practice
- Child wellbeing
- Chronic illness
- Community health
- IVF clinics
- Cancer services
- Indigenous health
- Women's health
- Men's health
- Sexual health
- Schools
- Refugee and asylum seeker services
- Disability
- Forensic services

Clinical social work knowledge base

Clinical Social Workers demonstrate specialised knowledge and skills for effective clinical interventions with individuals, families, couples, and groups. Individual Clinical Social Workers will draw from a range of different intervention approaches, and may describe themselves as eclectic, however each should be able to articulate their particular practice framework. The ongoing identification and evolution of their practice framework will be a part of their supervision.

Clinical social workers will be familiar with social, psychological, cultural, sociopolitical, environmental and health factors that influence the mental, emotional, and behavioural wellbeing of their clients. Overall, clinical social workers would use systems theories and a person-in-environment orientation, while drawing on a range of other approaches to inform their understanding of clinical need and case formulation. These may include:

- Psychodynamic theory
- Family systems and family therapy
- Crisis intervention approaches
- Strengths-based approaches
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy
- Narrative therapy
- Ecological approaches
- Anti-oppressive practice
- Radical approaches
- Intersectionality
- Empowerment
- Feminist approaches
- Humanistic and existentialist practice
- Solutions-focused therapy
- Attachment / Family of Origin
- Relational social work
- Gestalt
- Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT)

The centrality of the client's relationship to their environment and its systems is often the primary distinction between a social work approach and that of other disciplines. Clinical social workers may also be involved in systemic advocacy, highlighting gaps in services, and reference social injustice. However, their primary work is usually with an individual client or clients.

When additional knowledge and skills are required to address clients' needs, the clinical social worker should seek appropriate training, supervision, or consultation, or refer the client to a professional with the appropriate expertise. They may engage with other health or welfare professionals in providing services so that clients and their families receive a holistic and coordinated response.

Fields of practice

Fields of practice are either areas of practice such as: mental health or rehabilitation or practice which focuses on a particular client group such as: at risk children; persons with a disability.

Full-time equivalent (FTE)

The AASW recognises that full-time employment equates to the minimum of 38 hours per week, for 48 weeks per year. The AASW requires applicants for the ACSW to have a minimum of five years full-time equivalent (post-qualifying) social work practice including a minimum of two years full-time equivalent social work practice experience in clinical social work within the past eight years.

The AASW is aware that many social workers are employed on a part-time basis, so in order for a social worker to meet the two-year full-time employment requirement they must demonstrate how they have met this requirement. For example, if a social worker were employed for 17.5 hours per week, the social worker would need to work for four years, at 17.5 hours per week, to meet the two-year full-time equivalent requirement.

When submitting your CV, please ensure that you include the FTE hours for each role. See the following table for further information:

FTE Value	1	0.9	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.1
Days per week	5.00	4.50	4.00	3.50	3.00	2.50	2.00	1.50	1.00	0.50
Hours per week	38	34	30	27	23	19	15	11	8	4

Knowledge for practice

This is commonly used to mean knowledge from all intellectual and professional disciplines that is regarded as an integral part of social work education.

Practice experience

Practice experience is used as a tool for assessing eligibility for the ACSW. Practice in this field must have occurred within the last eight years.

Practice framework

A practice framework is a cohesive and coherent set of practice principles, values, theories, interventions and concerns that inform the thinking and actions of each clinical social worker i.e. it informs how the clinical social workers use knowledge, apply theory and make decisions to bring about specific types of change. Each practitioner's framework provides a structure for analysing complex and emotional human problems and situations. It also helps to organise information, beliefs, and assumptions into a meaningful whole. The framework promotes a systematic, orderly, and predictable approach to work with people. While there will be common elements between clinical social work practice frameworks, each practitioner will develop a unique framework.

Qualifications to apply for recognition as an Accredited Clinical Social Worker

Applicants are required to meet the minimum requirements for eligibility of membership of the AASW. Please refer to the AASW website for information concerning AASW accredited courses.

Social worker

A social worker is a person who is eligible for membership of the AASW.

Supervised practice

The term supervised practice as used throughout this document is defined broadly. Supervised practice is clinical practice that has been subject to an identified form of professional appraisal. Supervised practice can include a range of activities undertaken to meet the professional development needs and accountability requirements outlined in the [AASW Practice Standards 2013](#) and [AASW Supervision Standards 2014](#).

Assessment Criteria

This section explains the assessment criteria for accreditation as an ACSW.

There are six criteria/components to the accreditation process:

- Current membership of the AASW
- Minimum of five years full-time equivalent (post-qualifying) social work practice including a minimum of two years full-time equivalent social work practice experience in clinical social work practice
- Minimum of two years' full-time equivalent post-qualifying supervision in clinical social work or evidently related field
- Ability to demonstrate how this experience meets the Accredited Clinical Social Worker Framework both through written submission and referee statement
- Successful completion of clinical case study assessment in an exam environment
- Meets the Clinical Social Worker Continuing Professional Development requirements for the membership year. This includes a total of 50 hours of Continuing Professional Development in AASW specified categories, of which 20 hours must be specific to clinical social work
- A curriculum vitae.

Criteria 1: Membership of the Australian Association of Social Workers

To apply for accreditation as a Clinical Social Worker, you must be a current member of the AASW.

If you are not a current member, [join today](#).

Criteria 2: Post qualifying clinical social work experience

Post-qualifying clinical social work experience

You are required to demonstrate that you have a minimum of five years' full-time equivalent (FTE) social work practice including a **minimum of two years' full-time equivalent (FTE) social work practice experience in clinical social work practice**. These roles must have occurred **after graduating from an AASW accredited social work course**. Where your social work practice experience has been gained over an extended period, you need to show that you have the equivalent of two years' full-time in clinical social work practice or demonstrably related role, **within the last five years**.

Capability Framework for Accredited Clinical Social Workers

You are required to explain the link between your practice experience and the [AASW Clinical Capability Framework \(2019\)](#). **Use examples from your practice to demonstrate that you have met the Framework capabilities. The roles you listed to evidence that you have these skills and capabilities. Your application must enable assessors to clearly understand how each capability influences your practice.** All knowledge and skill capabilities should be addressed in your application.

You will also be asked to articulate your personal Clinical Practice Framework. This should cover:

- The theoretical approaches you draw on
- Some of the tools and major processes you use in practice
- How these relate to the evidence base of your area of practice or practice setting
- The influence of your own orienting principles and practice experiences
- An example of the current dilemmas you are exploring in your framework through supervision and reflection.

For further information, we recommend you read:

Gibney, P. (2015) Developing and Articulating one's own practice framework, *Psychotherapy in Australia*, Vol 21(1) pp82-91.

Criteria 3: Supervision

You should be able to demonstrate that they have at least **two years' full-time equivalent (FTE)** supervised practice in clinical social work, or a evidently related field. This practice must occur **after graduating from your social work degree**. You should be able to show that you have been formally supervised, in line with the [AASW Supervision Standards 2014](#).

Supervisors must have a higher level of social work practice experience than the social workers they are supervising and should have training in supervision or have adequate experience as a supervisor. For the purposes of this assessment, the supervisor or employer does not necessarily need to have a social work background, but should have provided you with appraisal and assessment in relation to your clinical social work practice.

Criteria 4: Continuing professional development

You need to demonstrate that you meet [the ACSW CPD requirements](#), as outlined in the CPD policy. This means that an applicant must enter information regarding the professional development activities they have participated in within the current or previous CPD cycle. The CPD cycle runs from 1 July to 30 June each year.

The AASW recognises various activities as contributing to a social worker's ongoing professional development. Depending on the nature of the activity, the AASW has grouped these activities into three categories. You must demonstrate you have engaged in activities in each of the categories. Overall, you must demonstrate you have engaged in at least 50 hours' worth of CPD, 20 hours of which must be relevant to clinical social work.

To read more about the CPD requirements, which activities are considered as CPD and the breakdown of the categories, please refer to the [CPD section of the website](#) and the [CPD policy](#).

For further information on how and where to record your CPD, please refer to the [CPD Record User Guide](#).

Criteria 5: Demonstrated clinical social work advanced practice

We define an advanced clinical social worker as one which:

- carries considerable responsibility and is a primary deliverer of direct services to individuals, groups, their families and carers in a clinical social work practice setting
- identifies and can manage the most complex decision-making

- the delivery of clinical services is the majority of their role
- utilises a range of direct service modalities requiring a depth and breadth of knowledge and expertise which are informed by clinical need.

The AASW Clinical Social Work Capability Framework defines the skills and knowledge required to practice at this specialist level.

To meet this criterion, you will respond to a case study assessment. These can include case studies from the applicants' own practice or from the case studies provided.

Criteria 6: Referee statement

You are required to submit a [referee statement](#) from an employer or supervisor either past or present. It is necessary for the referee to confirm the claims made by the applicant. The primary purpose of the referee statement is to seek information about your skills and competencies in practice. The referee statement also needs to verify that you have had two years' full-time equivalent, post-qualifying, direct practice experience within the past five years in clinical social work. If one employer/supervisor is not able to verify two years' full-time equivalent experience, please arrange for an additional employer/supervisor to complete a referee statement document.

Please note that your employer/supervisor may be contacted directly by the Accreditation Officer if further clarification is required.

For the purposes of this assessment, the supervisor or employer **does not** have to have a social work background, but should have provided you with appraisal and assessment in relation to practice in a clinical setting.

Supporting documents

The following documents may be required as evidence for the information you have supplied. Please refer to the application form for your required supporting documents:

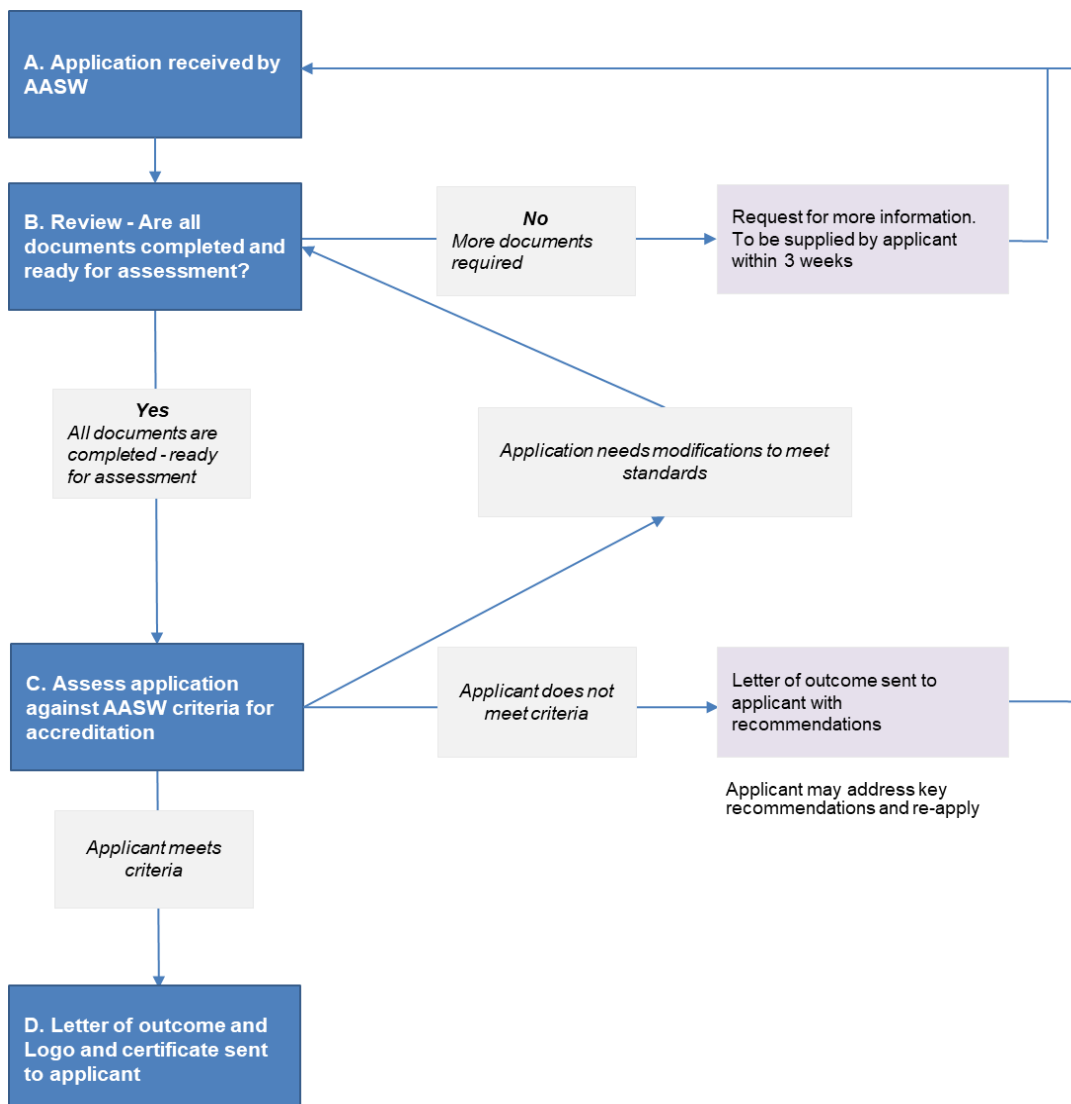
- **Certified copy of academic transcript.**
- **Curriculum vitae** – clearly stating part-time or full-time status and hours per week (refer to table on page 2 of the application form)

Do not supply any further documents. The AASW assessor will contact you if further information is required.

AASW Accredited Clinical Social Worker Capability Framework (2019) (mandatory for those applying)

Please refer to the **AASW Accredited Clinical Social Worker Capability Framework (2019)** throughout the application process.

Assessment process and continuing accreditation



The assessment

The assessment will be undertaken by an Accreditation Officer in the National Office of the AASW. The Accreditation Officer conducts a preliminary review of the submitted material and you will be contacted if further evidence is required. The Accreditation Officer reports to a Manager, Professional Standards. The Accreditation Officer may seek advice from the Manager or a Review Panel if required.

Assessment outcomes

Possible assessment outcomes:

- **Successful:** If you clearly meet all the assessment criteria, you will be notified by email and granted the status of AASW Accredited Clinical Social Worker
- **Further review:** If the Accreditation Officer determines that further information is required, you will be notified. In some instances, the application may be referred to an internal Review Panel
- **Does not meet the requirements:** If you are determined as not yet meeting the requirements, the Accreditation Officer will contact you and provide advice on the professional development or practice

experience that will facilitate the applicant obtaining accreditation in the future. The applicant will be refunded the annual accreditation fee.

Duration and maintenance of accreditation

Following a successful assessment outcome, you will receive a certificate and an accreditation logo from the AASW confirming accreditation as a Clinical Social Worker. Accreditation as a Clinical Social Worker will remain valid until the end of the current membership (financial) year. You will then need to renew your accreditation annually.

To maintain accreditation, you will need to maintain your status through completion of [CPD requirements](#). This involves completing at least 50 hours CPD per membership year, including accruing 20 CPD hours specific to clinical social work. You must retain supporting documentation for all CPD activities. As part of a quality assurance system, all credentials undergo auditing. Social workers who do not comply with the policy can expect to lose their accreditation.

Appeals process

Applicants may appeal to the Professional Standards and Assessments Manager against an assessment outcome. Appeals for reconsideration may be made on the following grounds:

- improper procedure OR
- new evidence.

An applicant must lodge an appeal within 30 days of the original notification of the assessment outcome decision. The appeal must be lodged in writing to the Professional Standards and Assessments Manager of the AASW.

Withdrawal of accreditation

If a member resigns from their AASW membership or membership is withdrawn for any reason, the member's accreditation to practice as an AASW Accredited Clinical Social Worker will also be withdrawn.

All members of the AASW, including ACSW members must comply with the AASW Code of Ethics. If the actions of an ACSW member compromise the expectations set out in the Code of Ethics, accreditation may be forfeited.

Fee structure

Please refer to the AASW website for details on [fee structure](#).

If you are an existing Accredited Mental Health Social Worker (AMHSW) or member of the Clinical Division of the Australian College of Social Workers, then a different fee structure applies. Please see the fee section of your application form.