

AASW **ASWEAS** Guidelines for accreditation reviews

V1.0 February 2021



AASW

.....
Australian Association
of Social Workers

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1 Purpose of guidelines

The purpose of the guidelines is to assist Accreditation Panels to interpret the AASW standards criteria set out in the ASWEAS, and to assess social work programs seeking accreditation against the criteria. The guidelines aim to clarify the intent of the standards, their use in determining the outcomes of reviews, and the roles and responsibilities of Review Panel members.

1.1 Objectives of accreditation reviews

Accreditation is intended to ensure that graduates from social work programs are equipped to achieve the professional competencies and learning outcomes necessary for entry into professional practice (ASWEAS 2020 p5).

The accreditation reviews aim to determine, with reasonable confidence, the extent to which:

- programs are capable of producing social work graduates with the skills and attributes identified by the ASWEAS
- graduates possess the capabilities specified by the provider
- programs will continue to produce the graduate capabilities throughout the accreditation period.

1.2 Categories of accreditation

One of the following categories of accreditation may be recommended to the AASW Board:

1. Full accreditation of a previously accredited program
2. Conditional accreditation of a previously accredited program
3. Provisional accreditation of an additional, extended or restructured program
4. Provisional accreditation of a program from a provider offering social work for the first time.

Full accreditation is normally granted for five years. That follows a review of the annual reports submitted over the accreditation period and evidence that first cohort students have achieved the entry level standard.

Conditional accreditation is normally granted where a previously accredited program has not met one or more of the Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards. This includes a program that substantially meets the requirements for accreditation which AASW determines has identified areas of deficit or weakness that can be addressed within a specified limited period of time. In these instances, providers will be required to undergo a further Panel review process to assess operational compliance with the identified areas of deficit or weakness.

Provisional accreditation is granted to a social work program that has not yet delivered its first graduates and applies for the duration of the first cohort, that is, prior to the first cohort

graduating. Full accreditation follows a review of the Annual Reports and evidence that first cohort students have achieved the entry level standard.

1.3 Approach to accreditation

Accreditation Panels should refer to the section in ASWEAS on the role of AASW as a professional accreditor (p4-6) noting in particular that:

1. AASW supports flexibility and responsiveness of social work programs to changes in the professional workplace
2. ASWEAS does not seek to duplicate the role of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) or the Higher Education Providers operating under the regulatory Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF)
3. AASW is committed to a collegial approach in working with HEPs with the aim of ensuring that graduate social workers are ready for professional practice
4. The approach of the review should seek a balance of summative and formative evaluation
5. The accreditation process is guided by the principles of transparency, fairness and collaborative engagement with HEPs and other stakeholders
6. The accreditation standards aim to accommodate a range of educational models and variations in curriculum design and teaching methods
7. Review recommendations must be based on clear evidence that the program is producing, or, in the case of new programs, is capable of producing, graduates with the knowledge and practice outcomes expected for entry level social work professionals.

2 Accreditation Panel

2.1 AASW Accreditation Panel

The AASW Accreditation Panel (the Panel) is the name given to AASW members appointed to act as accreditors of social work programs for the purpose of determining whether the programs demonstrate the required standards for social work education.

The following participants have direct responsibilities for the management of the accreditation process and outcomes:

- AASW CEO and Manager, Professional Standards & Assessments (AASW Executive)
- Chair of Accreditation Panel
- Members of Accreditation Panel
- Social Work Academic Organisational Unit (SWAOU)
- AASW staff.

2.2 Appointment of Accreditation Panel

Accreditation Panels are AASW members appointed to act as accreditors of social work programs for the purpose of determining whether the programs demonstrate the required standards for social work education. The number of Panel members may vary from two to five depending on the focus of the accreditation process and the provider location and context. Each Panel is chaired by an experienced member of AASW Accreditation Review Panels.

Previously accredited social work programs are reviewed by a Panel of three members from the Panel, one of whom will be a chairperson. The Chairperson and one other member will be appointed by the AASW. The names of two other available Panel members will be provided to the SWAOU so they may select the third member of the Panel. The member selected by the SWAOU is not a representative or advocate for the SWAOU.

When appointing members of a Panel, the following will be taken into account:

- compatibility of the proposed Panel with the SWAOU
- particular knowledge base relevant to any special needs of the school as identified by the HEP and AASW
- potential conflict of interest
- representation on the Panel of an academic/practitioner with experience as a field educator
- representation on the Panel of an academic currently involved in teaching in higher education.

2.3 Procedures for appointment

The following steps are required for the appointment of Panel members:

1. A call for applications from members will be published in the National e-Bulletin as required
2. AASW members can apply for appointment as a Panel member
3. Applications should be received in writing addressed to the Manager, Professional Standards & Assessments, and should be accompanied by the member's curriculum vitae and a statement addressing the selection criteria for appointment to the Panel
4. Applicants will be interviewed
5. Accreditation Panel members' names will be published on the members section of the AASW website
6. Successful applicants will be provided with training.

2.4 Term of appointment

Appointment to the Accreditation Panel is initially for a period of five years. Members of the Panel may re-apply to be re-appointed thereafter every five years with a limit of three terms. The application must include a current curriculum vitae.

2.5 Appointment of chairpersons of an Accreditation Panel

Members with at least three years' experience and three reviews on the Accreditation Panel will be invited to apply for the position of Chairperson for a three-year term initially with the option of continuing for three terms.

2.6 Selection criteria for appointment as chairperson

The criteria for selecting a Chair of an Accreditation Panel include but are not limited to the following:

- skills in chairing in a range of different contexts
- skills in negotiating with senior executive and management in higher education or similar organisations
- ability to analyse large quantities of data and to prioritise
- ability to lead and manage a newly formed team
- current knowledge of social work education in a higher education setting
- be a social worker
- have experience as a Panel member.

3 Roles and responsibilities of participants

3.1 AASW Executive

The AASW Executive responsibilities include:

- overall responsibility for accreditation review activities on behalf of the AASW Board
- briefing the AASW Board on the activities of the accreditation review
- presenting recommendations to the AASW Board
- ensure timely communication with Schools of Social Work due for accreditation.

3.2 Chair of Accreditation Panel

The Chairperson's responsibilities include:

- coordinating and concluding the arrangements for the review including site visits
- ensuring all timelines are met
- chairing the site visit meetings
- coordinating the work of the Panel
- regular briefing of the Panel on arrangements and developments
- recording and documentation of all discussions
- document version control
- leading the drafting of the initial and final reports
- preparing the accreditation report for submission to the AASW Executive.

3.3 Members of Accreditation Panel

The Panel members will:

- undertake a rigorous examination and assessment of the program against the requirements of ASWEAS 2020
- be available for and actively participate in all aspects of the review process
- read all documentation in advance of meetings and report writing
- declare any conflict of interest prior to and during the review
- ensure that they do not engage in activities that compromise their roles and responsibilities as reviewers
- take a balanced approach to their roles in the review process as assessors, facilitators and contributors to innovation and enhancement of good practice.

3.4 Academic organisational unit (SWAOU)

The SWAOU is the unit within a higher education provider (HEP) responsible for developing and delivering the social work program submitted for AASW accreditation. The SWAOU's responsibilities include:

- declaring any conflict of interest prior to and during the review
- organising arrangements for accreditation site visits and meetings
- providing all information and supporting materials in the agreed format
- meeting the costs associated with the review, including Panel travel, accommodation, meals and all reasonable costs associated with site visits.

Following its initial assessment, the Accreditation Panel may request further information to be provided prior to the site visit. The site visit may be postponed if the documentation is not made available in advance.

3.5 AASW Executive and staff

AASW Executive and staff are responsible for coordinating and managing accreditation reviews consistent with this document and ASWEAS 2020. Their responsibilities include:

- making overall arrangements for the review, including appointment of the Chair and Panel members, scheduling the review activities, and management of the reporting process and making arrangements in a timely manner
- concluding contract agreements with the SWAOU and the Panel members
- providing advice and support to the SWAOU and the Panel for the duration of the review
- managing delivery of the final accreditation report to the AASW executive.

1. Provider and program context, including:

- the quality of the program with respect to current HEP organisational arrangements, recent developments and strategic priorities
- the appropriateness of the organisational structure and location of the SWAOU with respect to current and planned social work programs offered
- whether the philosophy and approach of the SWAOU reflects the international definition of social work and AASW principles and values, identified in ASWEAS 2020.

2. Program structure and content, including:

- whether the Panel is confident that the design and main elements of the program will enable students to achieve the professional competencies and learning outcomes necessary for entry level practitioners

- the adequacy of the rationale for the program design, the logic for the sequence and content, and the extent to which the forms of assessment align with proposed student learning outcomes over the breadth of the program
- assessment of the potential of innovations to contribute to best known practice
- whether each of the five required areas of curriculum content clearly meet the criteria of explicit consideration of the immediate relevance to social work practice, and effective translation of knowledge and understanding into professional performance
- evidence that Field Education is fully integrated within the structure and delivery of the social work program, that students develop their professional identity, integrity and practice frameworks, and that they understand the complex, changing and ambiguous nature of practice
- evidence that students experience diverse and appropriate Field Education settings, and that the placements achieve the required learning outcomes
- RPL conditions are clearly articulated in the Field Education Manual, the assessment process is conducted in a fair and transparent manner, and the approach aligns with TEQSA and HEP requirements.

3. Degree requirements, admissions and learning outcomes, including:

- acknowledgment that social work students require a sufficient level of English to enable them to engage in field-based learning with vulnerable people
- evidence that student learning is assessed at a level of English appropriate to the social work context
- in relation to credit transfer, evidence of quality assurance processes to ensure integrity of program
- confidence that the program assesses student performance against the eight Domains of Practice (ASWEAS 2.2. and Appendix 1) and that students graduate with the profession-specific attributes needed to practice ethically and safely as beginner practitioners in a changing workplace and increasingly diverse social work contexts.

4. Governance, staffing and program delivery, including:

- evidence that the organisational arrangements are effective in maintaining the quality and integrity of the program over time, and that the SWAOU is appropriately recognised and supported by the HEP
- evidence that stakeholders have confidence in the governance of the program
- whether the Head of the SWAOU has a level of responsibility for the roles appropriate to the standing of the program as identified in ASWEAS 6.2.2
- whether student learning outcomes are achieved through regular contact with academic staff who, in their teaching, research, scholarship and service, are able to model the behaviour expected of professional social workers
- evidence that the qualifications and experience of staff is of a level that will maintain the quality of the program
- identification of any areas of potential risk to the program quality including limits in capacity and capability in specific areas
- any potential compliance issues against ASWEAS requirements including filling vacancies
- the relationship between SWAOU research and related activities, the curriculum and graduate attributes
- evidence of the appropriateness and effectiveness of modes of delivery
- evidence that students at all sites have a learning experience of equivalent quality
- any significant issues in resourcing available for the program quality.

5. Review of subjects/units offered, including:

- the contribution of subjects/units to the overall integrity and coherence of the course
- and the forms of assessment supporting student learning outcomes.

4 Accreditation review process

Overview of stages

The process for the review of AASW-accredited social work programs is divided into six stages. The stages and indicative timeframes for all three accreditation categories are as follows:

1. Planning	8 weeks
2. Initial review	8 Weeks
3. Site visit including preparation and response	4 weeks
4. Draft report and provider response	6 weeks
5. Ratification of final report	4 weeks
6. Appeal process	6 weeks
Total	36 weeks

4.1 Stage 1: Planning

4.1.1 Initiating the review

A review of a previously accredited program starts with:

- a written reminder from the AASW to the SWAOU at least 12 months prior to the expiry of the current accreditation period
- confirmation by the SWAOU that it seeks accreditation.

For HEPs seeking provisional accreditation of a program the review is initiated by an application to AASW at least 12 months before the program is to be offered by the SWAOU. Application forms are available from the AASW website.

4.1.2 Process management

The planning process involves the SWAOU and AASW staff until such time that an Accreditation Panel and Chair are appointed. At that point the details of the review are largely managed by the SWAOU and the Panel, consistent with this document, with AASW staff providing process and policy support and advice as needed.

At the conclusion of Stage 1, all parties will be contracted to the accreditation review, dates for the site visit will be agreed and the SWAOU and the review chairperson will work together to plan the remaining details of the review.

Stage 1 Planning (8 weeks)

Party responsible	Activity	Schedule
AASW staff	Previously accredited program: notify SWAOU of impending expiry of current accreditation and invite request for review, including any particular knowledge base relevant to the special needs of the program.	Twelve months prior to expiry of accreditation period
HEP/SWAOU	Written request to AASW for program re-accreditation or provisional accreditation, indicating any particular requirements as to the knowledge base of the Accreditation Panel.	Week 1
AASW staff	Written acceptance of request to HEP/SWAOU. Provides HEP/SWAOU with ASWEAS and application template.	Week 2
SWAOU	Commence preparation of application and provide suggested dates for site visit.	Week 3
AASW staff	Identify available reviewers and determine chairperson. Previously accredited program: AASW to suggest names for SWAOU to select an additional reviewer.	Week 4
SWAOU	Previously accredited program: select third review Panel member from nominated pool members.	Week 5
AASW staff	Confirm HEP/SWAOU of final Panel members and Chairperson, confirm site visit dates, and distribute contact details to HEP/SWAOU and review Chairperson.	Week 6
Chairperson	Finalise arrangements for site visits and advise Panel members, HEP/SWAOU and AASW.	Week 7
AASW staff	Distribute contracts/invoices to HEP/SWAOU and Review Panel.	Week 7
SWAOU	Submit accreditation documentation. Return completed contract/invoice.	Week 8
Panel members	Return completed contracts and confidentiality agreement to AASW.	Week 8

4.2 Stage 2: Initial review

The initial review enables the Panel to evaluate the program on the basis of the documentation submitted by the HEP/SWAOU. It also provides an opportunity for the Panel to seek clarification of details from the HEP/SWAOU and to then prepare an initial report including preliminary findings, comments and recommendations. On receipt of the preliminary report the HEP/SWAOU is then able to correct any errors or omissions of fact, and respond to any issues, requests or concerns raised by the Review Panel in advance of the site visit (Stage 3).

At least eight weeks before the scheduled site visit, the SWAOU will provide copies of its application to AASW for checking and distribution to review participants.

SWAOUs with existing social work programs should also provide:

- copies of Annual Reports for all social work programs currently offered
- summary of program feedback data (qualitative and quantitative) from surveys of graduates, employers and partner organisations
- compliance requirements/recommendations of the prior accreditation report, any conditions applied by the AASW Board, and the SWAOU response.

On request of the HEP/SWAOU additional advice and support regarding accreditation requirements will be provided by AASW.

Table 2: Stage 2 Initial review (8 weeks)

Party responsible	Activity	Schedule
SWAOU	Distribute application and supporting documents to Review Panel and AASW staff at least eight weeks prior to site visit.	Week 1
SWAOU, Chairperson	Finalise all administration, travel, accommodation etc. details for site visit. Agree schedule for site visit.	Week 2
Panel	Review the SWAOU application, prepare initial report comments, requests for further information and interim recommendations.	Weeks 3-5
Chairperson	Provide initial report to SWAOU.	Week 5
SWAOU	Consider initial review report, correct errors or omissions of fact. Respond to issues identified by the Panel or requests for further information.	Weeks 6-8
Chairperson	Advise SWAOU and AASW of acceptance of SWAOU response and readiness of all parties for site visit.	Week 8

4.3 Stage 3: Site visit

The site visit allows the Review Panel to meet key stakeholders within the HEP, SWAOU and others directly involved in the program including academic staff, students, graduates and advisory groups. The site visit enables the Panel to observe the learning environment, organisational arrangements and support services against the HEP/SWAOU application, and also to collect further information to inform their assessment.

Site visits are undertaken in a collegial atmosphere. Review Panel members are highly experienced academics and practitioners and offer an invaluable resource to the HEP/SWAOU, due to their experience in accreditation reviews and their knowledge of the content and delivery of social work education. All parties are encouraged to work productively to the benefit of the program and its students.

For programs offered across multiple sites it is essential that at least one member of the Panel visit each site. In some circumstances such as remote campuses, stakeholder meetings may be held via virtual meetings including viewing teaching facilities. Where elements of programs are offered on-line Panel members will be shown the relevant features of the online learning management system.

4.3.1 Site visit requirements

Site visits are undertaken in a collegial atmosphere. The HEP must liaise with the Review Panel in relation to

- office and meeting space arrangements for the Panel
- catering
- HEP liaison staff
- reimbursements of expenses
- car-parking, security arrangements

4.3.2 Site visit meeting participants and approach

The HEP is responsible for preparing a meeting schedule for the site visit and should liaise with the Chair of the Review Panel to ensure that key stakeholders can be met by the Review Panel including but not limited to:

- Dean
- Deputy Vice-Chancellor/PVC (Academic/Teaching and Learning)
- Head of School/Program
- Library, IT support
- Educational and counselling support staff
- Field education participants
- Employers
- Students
- Graduates
- University/faculty leaders
- Social Work Head
- Social Work Program staff
- External participants and employers
- Students/graduates

Stage 3 Site visit (4 weeks)

Party responsible	Activity	Schedule
Panel	Pre-site visit Panel meeting to develop protocols, allocate tasks, and identify areas of focus and key questions to explore with the HEP, SWAOU and stakeholders.	Week 1
Panel, HEP/SWAOU	Site visit activities as scheduled. SWAOU supplies any additional information requested by the Review Panel. Panel advises HEP/SWAOU of initial findings including areas of non-compliance that require attention.	Weeks 2-3
Panel	Review site visit outcomes, confer on revision of decisions and recommendations of review report. Agree distribution of tasks in completing the draft final review report.	Week 4

4.4 Stage 4: Draft report and provider response

The primary focus of the accreditation report is on whether the social work program meets, or is capable of meeting, the ASWEAS criteria. The report includes the following sections:

1. Executive summary
2. Provider and program context
3. Program structure and content
4. Degree requirements, admissions and learning outcomes
5. Governance, staffing and program delivery
6. Subjects/Units offered
7. Commendations
8. Recommendations
9. Details of review meetings and communications.

The final decision of the Review Panel on accreditation of the program should be unanimous and the report co-signed by all members. In the event that the Panel cannot agree, the Chairperson will request that AASW appoint a mediator to assist.

Stage 4 Report drafting (6 weeks)

Party responsible	Activity	Schedule
Chairperson	With input from Review Panel, complete draft final review report and distribute to SWAOU, copied to AASW staff.	Week 1
SWAOU	Provide response to the draft final review report to the review Chairperson.	Week 2
Chairperson	With input from Review Panel, assess HEP/SWAOU response, amend or confirm recommendations. Consult with AASW CEO and staff on recommendations. Finalise draft final review report. Submit to AASW, copy to SWAOU and Panel members.	Weeks 3-4
SWAOU	Provide response to the draft final review report to the review chairperson.	Week 5
Chairperson	Submit final report to AASW, copy to SWAOU and Panel members.	Week 6

4.5 Stage 5: Ratification of report

The final review report is considered by the AASW Executive and staff who then prepare a Decision Paper for the Standards & Assessment Committee and AASW Board. The Decision Paper will include a summary of the review process.

AASW CEO and staff will assist the Panel Chairperson in the formulation of a clear recommendation statement. Accreditation will not be awarded if the report identifies areas of non-compliance with ASWEAS. In these instances, conditional accreditation should be recommended.

Following the Board's ratification of the Panel's recommendation for accreditation the AASW CEO will advise the HEP, SWAOU and Panel of the outcome of the accreditation review.

Stage 5 Submission of Final Report (4 Weeks)

Party responsible	Activity	Schedule
AASW Staff	Consult with and advise the Panel Chairperson on the recommended outcomes of the review. Provide AASW Executive with final accreditation report and Decision paper on the review process.	Week 1
AASW Executive	Provide Standards & Assessment Committee and AASW Board with a summarized report and a Decision paper for approval. Papers must be tabled at the next scheduled Standards & Assessment Committee and Board meeting following receipt of the final accreditation report. HEP to be advised as to the date the paper is being discussed by the AASW Board	Week 2
AASW Standards & Assessment Committee	Consider recommendation of Accreditation Panel and confirm that it is satisfied that due process, consistent with the stated accreditation procedures has been followed.	Week 3
AASW CEO	Formally advise the HEP, SWAOU and Review Panel of the Board of the outcome of the accreditation review.	Week 4

4.6 Appeal process

AASW has adopted key elements of the appeals process and criteria required under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act 2009, that is:

1. The HEP has thirty (30) days to seek a review of an accreditation decision.
2. An appeal can only be made on the basis of procedural fairness and/or a decision considered unjustified or unreasonable.
3. The grounds for appeal must be supported by evidence.

Stage 6 Appeal Process (6 Weeks)

Party responsible	Activity	Schedule
HEP/SWAOU	Lodge appeal within 30 days of receiving advice on outcome of the accreditation review.	Week 1
AASW Executive AASW staff	Notify CEO of the appeal. Provide HEP/SWAOU with written advice on criteria and procedure. AASW internal Review Panel appointed.	Week 2
AASW Executive	Coordinate internal Review Panel meetings and report outcome to AASW Board.	Weeks 3-5
AASW CEO	Formally advise the HEP, SWAOU and Review Panel of the Board of the outcome of the appeal.	Week 6