

## *Discussion Paper: Informing the 2016 ASWEAS Review*

### **Introduction**

The [Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards](#) (ASWEAS) 2012 sets out the principles, standards and graduate attributes for social work education in Australia. Specifically, it sets out the criteria for the accreditation of a professional social work program which then establishes the standards for the social work profession. The AASW has performed this role since the 1960s.

The periodic ASWEAS review was scheduled for 2017 but has been brought forward to 2016 in acknowledgment of changing and emerging issues for education providers and the profession. The AASW is seeking to ensure our standards are contemporary and benchmarked against our international colleagues and other allied health professions, which students are adequately prepared to enter the workforce and take up professional social work positions.

The AASW recognises and appreciates the energy and commitment from key stakeholders to contribute to the development of social work education standards. Stakeholder engagement is critical to inform the standards and advise about the changing landscape of tertiary education, employer responsibilities and consumer expectations. This enables us to ensure our standards are relevant, applicable and contemporary.

A number of engagement strategies are planned to seek input from stakeholders. Members will be regularly informed about the consultations and opportunities to contribute through our electronic e-bulletins, website, forums and committees.

The 2016 ASWEAS review presents opportunities to work collaboratively to establish minimum standards for graduate entry into our profession and position social work as a valued and specialist profession.

## 1. Objective of the 2016 ASWEAS review

In commencing the 2016 ASWEAS review, the AASW would like to acknowledge the significant contribution of those involved in the previous review and development of the ASWEAS (2012). We would also like to acknowledge the input from all stakeholders in the implementation of these standards since that time and in their relationship with the AASW. This history has provided us with a point from which to reflect and build upon to ensure Australian entry-level social work programs adequately prepare students for professional practice and, in turn, address safe and quality service provision to the community.

The primary objectives of the 2016 review are to:

- apply a continuous improvement approach to further articulate education standards in a clear and consistent manner
- address the language and structure of the document to ensure ease of access and present information in a manner that is appropriate and accessible
- articulate the evidence base underpinning the standards
- separate operational and procedural requirements from the standards and present them in a new operational manual
- benchmark our standards with international associations and other allied health professions.

## 2. Consultation and engagement

The review process commenced with:

- examination of the log of issues raised by stakeholders in the interpretation and implementation of the current ASWEAS
- review of international social work education and accreditation standards and models
- review of Australian allied health association education and accreditation standards and models
- review of organisational approaches to the documentation of standards and different structures
- engagement and feedback from AASW National Committees
- survey of AASW members who are recent graduates of an Australian entry-level social work program
- engagement in a literature review to inform, review and/or strengthen the evidence base of some standards requirements.

The ASWEAS review [timeline](#) describes the opportunities for contribution and participation in the consultation process.

## 3. Standards definition and structure

Standards Australia in their *Standardisation Guide 003: 'Standards and Other Publications' (2014)* document define standards in the following way:

published documents setting out specifications and procedures designed to ensure that products, services and systems are safe, reliable and consistently perform the way they were intended to. They establish a common language that defines quality and safety

criteria. Standards are practical and set achievable goals. They are based on sound industrial, scientific and consumer experience and are regularly reviewed to ensure that they keep pace with advances in technology.

Standards are developed for a number of purposes, accreditation being one such purpose. A standard will often contain *requirements* or *criteria* statements that convey the key areas that need to be addressed to meet the standard and may also contain *indicators*, which are statements about measurement of the standard. Standards used for conformity (i.e. accreditation) assessment should be couched in mandatory language terms to ensure that there is no ambiguity in their requirements, and it is only these mandatory requirements that are assessed for accreditation purposes.

The Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards set standards and procedures for what is to be taught in social work education programs, how it is to be taught and who may teach it. Our educational standards have considerable influence on the capacity and standing of the profession in Australia and internationally.

Standards may be supported by other documentation (such as a handbook) to aid in their implementation and/or provide additional information to users of the Standard(s).

### **The ASWEAS (2012) Structure**

The current document structure is a *core* or *summary* document with six associated *guidelines*.

The *core/summary document* is structured in the following way:

- Introductory information
- Principles for social work education
- Standards for social work education: Content and learning outcomes
- Standards for social work education: Structure, delivery and process
- Standards for organisation arrangements and governance of social work programs
- Procedures for program accreditation
- Implementation and review
- Guidelines, References, Acknowledgements and Glossary.

The six (6) *guidelines* of the ASWEAS document are:

- Guideline 1.1 Guidance on essential core curriculum content

The four core curriculum areas are:

- mental health
  - child wellbeing and protection
  - cross-cultural practice
  - practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.
- Guideline 1.2 Guidance on field education programs
  - Guideline 1.3 Guidance on Recognition of Prior Learning, articulation and credit transfer
  - Guideline 1.4 Guidance on organisational arrangements and governance of social work programs
  - Guideline 1.5 Guidance on reaccreditation reviews
  - Guideline 1.6 Guidance on new programs

## **Some items for consideration in formulating the ASWEAS (2016)**

- Reduce the potential for ambiguity by presenting information once
- Clearly articulate minimum requirements and avoid language that could be misinterpreted, such as 'guideline'
- Ensure information is easily accessible and is indexed
- Separate standards from operational procedures
- Ensure language is 'best practice', consistent and contemporary when describing standards
- Provide clarity about inspirational and innovative standards that are separate from minimum accreditation standards.

### **Proposed Structure of ASWEAS (2016)**

A proposed structure for the ASWEAS (2016) document:

**Title:** The focus/topic of the standard

**Standard Statement:** A statement about the goal of the standard

**Standard Explanation:** The intent and guiding principles of the standard

**Criterion:** List of the key areas to be addressed to meet the standard

**Indicator:** Statement of how the achievement of the 'criteria' can be reviewed/ measured.

Integration with other AASW standards such as *Practice Standards* (2013) will be addressed.

## **4. Issues for consideration**

Some of the issues with the ASWEAS (2012) that has been gathered from stakeholder feedback and operational process are represented in this paper under headings to promote thinking and articulation of positions around key topic areas. These areas are:

### 1. Minimum standards for teaching and learning

This includes the program mode of delivery, face to face teaching and learning requirements, academic staffing and teaching into the program, staff/student ratios and class sizes, field education requirements, Recognition of Prior Learning / Credit Transfer

### 2. The inclusion of Core Curriculum

This includes the requirement for core curriculum within a generalist model of education, the topics that are required, the depth of the core curriculum,

### 3. Academic Staffing

This includes minimum levels of staffing, direct teaching into the program, distinction between Bachelor and Masters programs, delivery across multiple campus, class sizes

### 4. The structure of the document

This includes a structure of core and supporting documents rather than one document, language expression and consistency, indexing and referencing, being able to clearly see the standard and associated requirements and indicators, having operational processes

## 5. Identified gaps / areas to strengthen

This includes terminology and definitions, the interface with AQF requirements, the interface with the AASW's international qualification assessment and membership eligibility requirements, program entry requirements, supporting documentation to operationalise or provide example of the standards, the evidence base to some requirements

These headings are replicated in the submission template with stimulus questions to address some of the described issues. The written submission structure will enable us to record and collate stakeholder information in a way that promotes the identification of themes and thinking to inform future review activity and draft ASWEAS content

## 6. Publication of submissions

Permission will be sought to publish submissions in a member-only area of the website to enable viewing by others. Only submissions under 1500 words will be published. Prior to publication, submissions may be edited for accuracy.

### Summary

We have purposefully taken time to undertake the preparatory thinking and scoping work for this review so that we are positioned to engage with all stakeholders to achieve the review's objectives. The process illustrates a commitment by the AASW to conversations and opportunities to inform the development of the education standards and their documentation. Education standards alone only go part of the way in entry level social work education and graduation of social workers prepared and skilled to work with vulnerable Australians, across a range of settings and complexities using a range of skills and interventions. Graduate entry into the profession remains a shared responsibility of all stakeholders and collaborative relationships are critical.

If you wish to make a written submission to the 2016 ASWEAS review please submit using the [submission template](#).

The AASW will acknowledge receipt of all submissions received.

Submissions will be received up until COB 22 July 2016

Prepared by Melissa Robertson  
Senior Manager – Education and Knowledge Development