1. Purpose

1.1 This procedure is established pursuant to the University’s Administrative Procedures for Student Work-Integrated Learning Placements.

1.2 The purpose of this procedure is:
- to protect the public, students, placement providers and the reputation of the University;
- to establish responsibilities in respect to student fitness for placement; and
- to provide a framework for the management of issues or concerns regarding a student’s fitness for placement.

2. Scope

2.1 This policy applies to students enrolled in the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree and Master of Social Work (MSW) degree in the Discipline of Social Work.

3. Definitions

3.1 Fitness for placement means having the health and attributes necessary to carry out a field education placement in a social work setting in a safe, ethical and professional manner.

4. Principles

4.1 The Discipline of Social Work within the College of Education, Psychology and Social Work has a duty of care to ensure that students who are required to undertake a field education placement:
- have the physical, emotional and psychological capacity to carry out their placement without the risk of harm or injury to self or others;
- can meet the ethical standards required to carry out their role as a student in a fieldwork placement in a social work setting.

4.2 It is the responsibility of students to report any physical, psychological or psychiatric condition, disability or impairment that may compromise their fitness to undertake a placement or their ability to carry out their placement without the risk of injury or harm to self, or others (e.g.
agency clients, agency staff).

4.3 It is the responsibility of students to comply with any pre-placement requirements, including but not limited to any requirement to complete and submit a ‘fitness for placement’ declaration and complete any criminal history checks.

4.4 All reports and documentation relating to a student’s fitness for placement will be treated as confidential and will not be disclosed to any persons or parties, except where it is necessary for the administration of a student’s enrolment or progress in the course including matching and facilitating a placement with an agency.

5. **Pre-placement requirements**

5.1 Before commencing a placement, students are required to:

- obtain a screening and background check processed through the South Australian Department of Communities and Social Inclusion (DCSI);
- complete Child Safe Environment (CSE) training;
- provide evidence of current immunisation status where requested by an agency;
- attend a pre-placement interview with Field Education staff; and
- complete and submit a ‘self-declaration’ regarding their medical fitness to undertake a field education placement.

5.2 Students who do not complete pre-placement requirements will not be permitted to commence a placement.

5.3 Where a student does not obtain a clearance from the DCSI they will not be permitted to enrol in a field education topic.

6. **Medical fitness**

6.1 Students with a physical, psychological or psychiatric condition, disability or impairment, including substance abuse or dependence, that may impair their capacity to perform safely in a placement in a social work setting must declare the condition.

6.2 Where there is an existing condition it must be declared prior to the commencing of placement. Should a condition arise during a placement, a student must contact the Manager, Field Education or a Field Education Coordinator and declare the condition.

6.3 On receipt of a declaration, the Manager, Field Education (or nominee) may request further medical documentation from the student. The Manager, Field Education (or nominee) may also seek advice in confidence from staff in the University’s Health, Counselling and Disability Services and may recommend that a student make an appointment with a Disability Advisor in Health, Counselling and Disability Service to discuss an Access Plan.

6.4 In accordance with the *Guidelines for Reasonable Adjustment to Assessment and Teaching Methods for Students with Disabilities*, a student with a disability, medical condition or impairment may request a reasonable adjustment to his or her placement. Students seeking reasonable adjustments must make an appointment with a Disability Advisor. Any recommendations regarding reasonable adjustments must be documented in an Access Plan and discussed with the Manager, Field Education (or nominee).

6.5 Recommended reasonable adjustments may be subject to further negotiation and discussion between the student, Disability Advisor, and the Manager, Field Education (or nominee). The Manager, Field Education (or nominee) may also seek advice, in confidence, from potential agencies regarding the practical implications of any requested reasonable adjustments.

6.6 Any reasonable adjustments to a placement, including the provision of additional support, must not compromise the requirement for the student to carry out their placement safely and...
to practice at a level expected of a student social worker. A student undertaking a modified placement will be expected to meet the learning outcomes of the topic and any field education requirements specified by the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW).

6.7 Where the Manager, Field Education (or nominee) receives a declaration from a student under Clauses 6.1 or 6.2 or is contacted by a student with an Access Plan they will arrange a meeting with the student to discuss:

- the nature and severity of the student’s condition;
- any reasonable adjustments to a placement that might be implemented to minimize the impact of a disability, impairment or medical condition as documented in an Access Plan;
- any strategies or requirements that may need to be put in place during the placement to monitor and safeguard client and the student’s own safety; and
- whether it would be appropriate for the student to defer enrolment in a field education topic until such time as the student receives a medical clearance from their general practitioner or treating specialist.

The student may be accompanied at the meeting by a staff or student member of the University, a family member or an employee of the Flinders University Student Association. If the student is unable to attend an interview, an alternative process will be put in place (e.g. telephone discussion).

6.8 Following discussion with the student, the Manager, Field Education (or nominee) may approve one of the following decisions/courses of action:

a) permit the student to undertake a placement with no restrictions; or
b) permit the student to undertake a placement, subject to certain requirements designed to monitor and safeguard the safety of the student’s own safety and that of others; or
c) permit the student to undertake a modified placement based on approved reasonable adjustments; or
d) recommend that the student defer his or her enrolment in a placement topic.

6.9 The decision of the Manager, Field Education (or nominee) will be documented and placed on the student’s file, along with a copy of the Access Plan if relevant.

6.10 Where a student agrees at the meeting convened by the Manager, Field Education (or nominee) under Clause 6.7 that the severity of their condition is such that deferral of enrolment in a placement topic is warranted, the student will be notified of this agreement in writing and informed of any conditions they need to satisfy (e.g. submitting a medical clearance) prior to be permitted to enrolling in a field education topic.

6.11 Where a student does not agree with a recommendation by the Manager, Field Education (or nominee) that the severity of their condition, impairment or disability warrants deferment of enrolment in a field education topic, the matter will be referred to the Fitness Review Panel for a determination.

7. Professional ethics and conduct

7.1 In accordance with Section 6 of the University’s Administrative Procedures for Student Work-Integrated Learning Placements, and the Field Education Manuals for the Bachelor of Social Work and Master of Social Work, an agency may request and/or a Field Education Coordinator/Liaison Officer may withdraw a student from a placement where:

a) the student is consistently unable to perform satisfactorily, where they receive an appropriate and reasonable level of supervision, particularly in respect to the performance of skills in relation to client safety;

b) the student performs in a manner detrimental to the professional experience of other students;
c) the student breaches the legal, ethical or professional codes of the agency or the AASW;
d) the student demonstrates gross negligence in the performance of an assigned duty;
e) the student behaves in a manner deemed to constitute misconduct or gross misconduct;
or
f) the student fails to disclose information prior to commencing placement that impacts on
their ability to meet duty of care requirements to themselves and agency clients or staff.

7.2 Where a student has had their placement terminated for the reasons cited in Clause 7.1
above will normally receive a Fail (F) grade recorded for the field education topic. Prior to
recommending a Fail (F) grade for the topic the Manager, Field Education will verify reports
from the agency and/or a Field Education Coordinator/Liaison Officer regarding the student’s
behaviour and professional conduct. Depending on the reasons for the termination, mitigating
circumstances may be taken into account.

7.3 In circumstances where an agency and/or a Field Education Coordinator/Liaison Officer
reports behaviour or conduct which involves gross misconduct, a serious breach of the legal,
ethical or professional codes of the agency or the AASW, or represents a significant risk to
the safety of clients or staff in the agency, the Manager, Field Education may report the
student to the Fitness Review Panel.

7.4 From time to time, the College may receive reports from an agency, member of the public, or
a staff or student member of the University which raises serious concerns about the capacity
of a student to meet and maintain the standards and requirements specified in the ethical and
professional codes of the AASW or to perform in a manner that would meet their duty of care
requirements to the clients or staff in an agency hosting field education placements.

7.5 Where the College receives a report about a student under Clause 7.4 it will be referred to the
Manager, Field Education in the first instance. The Manager, Field Education will undertake a
preliminary investigation to gather and evaluate the relevant facts, evidence and
circumstances.

7.6 As part of their preliminary investigation the Manager, Field Education may request further
information and documentation from the organisation or individual reporting concerns about a
student’s ethical conduct or capacity to meet and maintain ethical requirements and
standards. The Manager, Field Education may also interview the student.

7.7 Where the Manager, Field Education forms the view, based on his or her preliminary
investigation, that there is prima facie case that the student would pose a significant risk to
the safety of the clients or staff of an agency or would not be able to perform in a manner
consistent with the ethical or professional codes of the AASW they may report the student to
the Fitness Review Panel.

7.8 Where the College receives a report under Clause 7.1 or 7.4 which raises significant
concerns about the capacity of a student to meet and maintain the standards and
requirements specified in the ethical and professional codes of the AASW, especially in
relation to children and other vulnerable client groups, it can require the student may be to
obtain a new clearance from DCSI.

8. Fitness Review Panel

8.1 The Fitness Review Panel will comprise:

- Discipline Leader, Social Work (Chair);
- The Director of Studies of the degree in which the student is enrolled;
- A Field Education Coordinator appointed by the Head of Discipline of Social Work.

8.2 Normally, the Manager, Field Education will submit a written report to the Fitness Review
Panel. The report will:
specify the particulars of the student’s conduct or behaviour which raised concerns about their fitness for placement;

• present a case as to why the student’s conduct or behaviour would pose a significant risk to the safety of the clients or staff of an agency or demonstrates that the student would not be able to perform in a manner consistent with the ethical or professional codes of the AASW; and

• include the report and any representations made by the individual or organisation that raised the concerns about the student’s fitness for placement and any other relevant documentation.

8.3 Where the Manager, Field Education is not available or has a conflict of interest in the particular matter, the Discipline Leader, Social Work may appoint a Field Education Coordinator to prepare a report regarding the student’s conduct and behaviour and fitness for placement.

8.4 The student will be notified in writing of the particulars of the conduct and behaviour which had raised concerns about their fitness for placement and invited to present a written case as to why they should be permitted to enrol in a fieldwork placement topic. The student will be invited to attend a hearing of the Fitness Review Panel. The student may be accompanied at a hearing of the Fitness Review Panel by a staff or student member of the University, a family member or an employee of the Flinders University Student Association.

8.5 The Fitness Review Panel will consider the report of the Manager, Field Education, any written submissions from the student, information presented at the hearing by the student and the Manager, Field Education.

8.6 The Fitness Review Panel as part of its deliberations may request further information and documentation from the organisation or individual reporting concerns about a student’s fitness for placement.

8.7. The Fitness Review Panel may take any of the following courses of action:

• take no action (i.e. permit the student to enrol in a field education placement with no restrictions);
• permit the student to enrol in a field education placement, subject to meeting specified conditions;
• determine that the student be precluded from enrolling in a placement topic for a specified period of time;
• refer the conduct of the student to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) under the provisions of Statute 6.4: Student Conduct.

8.8 The Head, Discipline of Social Work (Chair) or the Secretary to the Fitness Review Panel will notify the student within five (5) working days of the Panel’s decision and the reasons for the decision. The notice of decision will be sent to the student’s nominated postal address by registered mail and University email account.

9. Appeals

9.1 If a student wishes to appeal against a decision of the Fitness Review Panel to preclude them from enrolling in a field education topic and/or the conditions imposed on their enrolment in a field education topic, the student must write within 20 working days to the Manager, Student Policy and Projects in accordance with the Student Appeals and Complaints Policy and Procedures.

9.2 The student may only appeal against the decision, outcomes and/or conditions on the grounds that:
• the appropriate policy was not adhered to or the correct procedures were not followed in considering the matter; or
• the decision was made without due regard to facts, evidence or circumstances.

10. Related policies and documentation

• Administrative Procedures for Student Work-Integrated Learning Placements
• Guidelines for Reasonable Adjustment to Assessment and Teaching Methods for Students with Disabilities
• AASW Code of Ethics
• Student Appeals and Complaints Policy and Procedures
• Social Work Field education Manuals
• Information on pre-placement requirements for social work;
• Information on how to obtain a screening and background check through the South Australian Department of Communities and Social Inclusion