

Social Work Placements

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) – Guideline

The discipline of Social Work at Flinders University supports the recognition of prior learning (RPL) for Master of Social Work (MSW-GE) and Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) students approaching their first field education topic. In accordance with the [education and accreditation standards](#) set by the [Australian Association of Social Workers](#) (AASW), RPL will only be considered in relation to:

- *formal work experience*, tasks and duties (not life experience) in line with social work roles, tasks and functions; and
- one (the *first*) field education topic in a social work program.

Eligibility criteria

Eligibility to apply for RPL is based on currency of work experience, specifically a minimum of three (3) full-time equivalent years' practice in a relevant context within the past seven (7) years, of which at least one (1) year of full-time equivalent has been in the last three (3) years (i.e. of the date of application).

'Practice' that is considered relevant in this context includes direct practice skills associated with human services work such as assessment and counselling, and methods such as case work or community work.

A 'relevant context' is defined as that which takes place within an organisational context that provides or relates to the delivery of human services.

Applicants will be asked to provide copies of the relevant job and position specification/s for the purpose of determining whether they are eligible to apply for RPL.

Please note: The granting of RPL for a field education topic is considered very carefully; it is not a given. It is therefore important that students interested in RPL continue to engage in the placement planning process (for first placement) throughout stages one *and* two of the application process.

Applying for RPL

The process of applying for RPL involves two stages, as follows. The focus of this first step is to determine whether you are eligible for RPL (Stage One) and, hence, whether you are able to pursue this via submission of a full application (Stage Two).

Stage One:

Students interested in applying for RPL should prepare a written application consisting of:

- a *cover letter* (max. 1 page) that includes your name, student ID number, and relevant (field) topic code and provides a summary of your case for RPL in accordance with the eligibility criteria specified above;
- job or *position descriptions* (official or organisationally produced) concerning the work experience/s relevant to your application; and
- a current *curriculum vitae* that covers the time period relevant to your application.

Please ensure that your curriculum vitae covers the minimum 7-year period and includes detailed information for each position held (i.e. job title, employing organisation, dates employed (by month/year), and basis of employment (full or part time and time fraction)).

Stage One applications must be submitted **no later than week 5** (Friday, C.O.B.) of the semester that precedes the relevant field topic.

This means that RPL applications in relation to a field education topic in semester 1 must be submitted by week 5 of semester 2 in the preceding year, or for a field education topic in semester 2, by week 5 of the preceding semester (semester 1).

Applications should be submitted electronically via the [Ask Flinders](#) portal by clicking on the 'Request Support' tab/link (or by email: askflinders@flinders.edu.au). You will be contacted by email if further clarification or information is required.

Please retain copies of electronic documents/files as you will be required to submit these again if you proceed to a Stage 2 application.

Outcome of Stage 1 application

You will be advised of the outcome of your application within 2 weeks of the date of submission.

- ⇒ If it is determined that you are eligible for consideration of RPL, you will be invited to proceed to Stage Two of the application process.
- ⇒ A determination that you are NOT eligible will conclude the application process.

Please note that requests for partial credit on the basis of RPL will not be considered.

Stage Two

Students who are deemed eligible to apply for RPL will be invited to proceed to Stage Two involving the submission of a full application. Your application should include:

1. A *revised cover letter* (max. 1 page) that includes your name, student ID number, and relevant (field) topic code and provides a summary of your case for RPL;
2. A current *curriculum vitae* covering the time period relevant to your application;
3. Job or *position descriptions* (official or organisationally produced) relating to the work experience/s relevant to your application;
4. The contact details for two professional *referees* who are qualified social workers and have direct knowledge of your practice experience; and
5. A *portfolio* for assessment that:
 - demonstrates how your work experience meets the relevant learning outcomes (based on the AASW practice standards) for the first field education topic (refer to the Learning Outcomes for RPL document); and
 - demonstrates your capacity to integrate theory and practice, social work ethics and values; and
 - has been independently verified by a qualified social worker as an accurate account of your experience, skills and abilities.

NB: A 'qualified social worker' is one that holds an academic social work qualification that has been accredited by the AASW. A suitable person, for the purpose of this application, could include a current or former manager or former colleague who is in a position to verify the accuracy of your claims. Current colleagues, people who report to you, friends, and family members are not appropriate for this purpose and will not be accepted.

Stage Two applications must be submitted **within 4 weeks** of the date of the invitation to apply and/or no later than **week 10** (Friday, COB) of the semester preceding the relevant field topic.

This means that RPL applications in relation to a field education topic in semester 1 must be submitted by week 10 of semester 2 in the preceding year, or for a field education topic in semester 2, by week 10 of the preceding semester (semester 1).

Process of assessment for a stage two application

Your application for RPL will be assessed by a panel made up of Field Education Liaison staff and at least one other person who is a qualified social work practitioner and/or a social work program staff member with expertise in RPL. In considering your application, the Panel may ask you to provide further information and/or to revise your portfolio, in part or in full.

- ⇒ You will be advised of the outcome of your application within 4 weeks of the date of submission.
- ⇒ A determination that your application does not demonstrate the required standards will conclude the process and no credit will be granted.

Subsequent placement

The Australian Association of Social Workers requires, where RPL (credit) has been granted for a student's first placement, that their next (final) placement:

- does not have policy or research as its primary focus;
- is undertaken in an Australian setting which will enable extensive experience in *direct practice* including case work and practice with individuals, group work, and/or community practice skills;
- is supervised by an on-site social worker (an exception may be made in remote areas with limited placement options as long as high-quality external supervision is available); and
- is in a setting that is *different* to that which the student has worked in previously (and upon which their RPL application was based).