



**Flinders**  
UNIVERSITY

College of Education,  
Psychology & Social Work

**INSPIRING  
ACHIEVEMENT**

# Social Work Pre-placement Handbook



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## 1. Purpose of Handbook

This handbook has been prepared to help students navigate the steps involved in the Field Education pre-placement process and into a successful and rewarding placement experience. Prior to going on placement, students are required to prepare for professional practice in a placement organisation as well as meet University compliance requirements.

## 2. AASW and social work education

The AASW is the professional representative body for Australian social workers. It sets the standards for professional education and practice in social work which are set out in the [Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards \(ASWEAS\)](#).

Social work education requires the integration of theory and practice. This is done by bringing together students, the University, placement agencies and field educator/s to work towards the shared goal of integrated social work knowledge, skills and values. Field education in social work at Flinders aligns with the profession-specific (Social Work) Graduate Attributes (Section 2 ASWEAS 2021) and constitute 'entry-level fitness for practice'.

## 3. What is field education?

ASWEAS 2021, Section 4, describes field education as 'a distinctive pedagogy for social work education. It enables students to integrate classroom learning with professional practice so that students notice and refine their ways of thinking, doing and being. Field education socialises students into the profession through immersion in real practice contexts, while allowing a constructive and reciprocal learning space to develop. Students make sense of what it means to be a social worker by developing their professional identity, integrity and practice frameworks. Supported by field education partners in practice settings, students achieve deep learning through experimentation, reflection, feedback and critique of practice experiences. Through this process of engagement and refinement of their understanding of their role, and of themselves as professionals, they understand the complex, changing and ambiguous nature of practice.'

## 4. Work integrated learning

The University's [Work Integrated Learning Policy](#), and associated [Work Integrated Learning Procedures](#), provide the framework for field education in the social work program. Work integrated learning (WIL), as defined in the policy, is a 'broad term referring to any structured and purposefully designed learning and assessment activity in a course curriculum that integrates theory with the practice of work'.

Social work placements are a form of work integrated learning which enable students to 'demonstrate development towards meeting required professional standards of practice, in accordance with professional accreditation requirements. Thus, while social work placements must meet the accreditation requirements set and monitored by the Australian Association of Social Workers, they must also comply with the University's WIL Policy and Procedures. In addition, the Social Work Charter on Professional Conduct for Student Social Workers sets out the expectations for social work students in relation to professionalism and behaviour.

## 5. How do I enrol in the Field Education Topic for Placement?

Students are advised to enrol as soon as possible in their relevant field placement topic (SOAD3102, SOAD9107, SOAD4007 or SOAD9208). Students will be required to enrol and un-enrol via the [Student System](#). If the topic does not appear and a student **has completed all pre requisites**, lodge an [Ask Flinders Request](#) for further information and course advice.

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## 6. How do I prepare for Placement?

The organisation of placements occurs the semester before a student's placement is due to commence. Before students can commence their placement, they must pass pre-requisite Topics and complete other compliance and administrative tasks. A Student Pre-Placement Checklist has been prepared to guide students through all pre-placement tasks. It is strongly recommended that students complete this Checklist so they don't miss any pre-placement requirements. Students who do not complete all pre-placement tasks within the timelines provided will not be matched to a placement.

## 7. How are Field Placements structured?

The Flinders University Field Education program operates in accordance with the Australian ASWEAS (2021), with particular reference to section 4 Field Education.

### 7.1 What is the length of placement?

Students are required to complete a total of 1000 hours of field education to graduate. They fulfill these requirements by undertaking two separate placements of 500 hours each.

Field placements are non-semester topics and it is imperative that students are available to commence placement, or engage in placement related activities, at least one month before semester begins.

Semester 1: Mid February to mid-July  
Semester 2: Late July to early December.

### 7.2 What days do I attend placement?

Students are required to attend placement four days per week, which means approximately 18 weeks (4 – 5 months) to complete each 500 hour placement. Bachelor and Master's of Social Work students have different availability to attend placement due to their study timetable:

- BSW students attend placement Tuesday to Friday
- MSW students attend placement Monday to Thursday

### 7.3 When do placements start?

Placements commence mid February (NS1) and end of July (NS2). Some students start date for placements may vary depending on a students' availability (e.g. if they attend non-semester topic intensives) and the agency's schedule (e.g. some agencies have set dates for orientation). Any variation to the nominated start date beyond two weeks before or after placements commence must be approved by the relevant Field Education Topic Coordinator.

### 7.4 Where are placements located?

Most South Australian students will undertake placements in the metropolitan Adelaide region. This includes the outer areas of Adelaide such as Gawler, Victor Harbor and Murray Bridge. Some opportunities exist for rural placements for MSW final placement students living in Adelaide. Interstate students mostly undertake their placements in their home state.

### 7.5 What kind of placements are offered?

Social Work is a generalist degree. In accordance with the ASWEAS (2021) requirements, students will undertake field education experiences that enable them to demonstrate their ability to meet AASW practice standards *across a range of diverse client groups and environments*. This means students should expect, across two placements, to undertake their placements in different organisations, having different client groups and different methods of social work practice. Therefore, students can be placed with government, non-government and private placement organisations, which cover a variety of fields of practice (e.g. homelessness, domestic violence, mental health, schools and aged care) and methods of practice (e.g. working with individuals and groups, community development, social policy, advocacy and research).

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## 7.6 Will I have an onsite social work supervisor?

Most students are likely to have one placement with an on-site social work Agency Field Educator and one with an External Field Educator (external social work supervisor) appointed by the University. If you have an External Field Educator, you will also have an Agency Field Educator to oversee your day-to-day activities.

## 7.7 Are there travel guidelines for my placement?

A large proportion of placements are in the outer northern and south metropolitan areas, reflecting the areas of greatest social need. Consequently, students may be required to travel up to one and a half hours to their placement (one way), depending on public transport routes and availability. Occasionally a student may be required to travel up to two hours, but every effort is made to keep travel within one and a half hours or less.

It is highly recommended that students hold an Australian drivers licence or recognised International Drivers Licence as this is a requirement of many placement organisations, as well as having access to your own vehicle.

## 8. Who is responsible for placements in Social Work?

The College of Education, Psychology and Social Work WIL team are responsible for placement compliance, matching and other pre-placement administrative tasks. Matching is undertaken by staff with Social Work qualifications with support from WIL administrative staff.

## 9. How will I receive information about Field Placements?

There will be a pre-placement information session available for students early in the Semester. The WIL team will communicate regularly with you via emails from [swplacements@flinders.edu.au](mailto:swplacements@flinders.edu.au) and the Social Work Field Education FLO site.

FLO is the Flinders Learning Online platform, with a corresponding FLO site with required learning material and resources for each topic students enrol in. Students studying Social Work at Flinders University will gain access to a separate pre-placement FLO site called Social Work Field Education Placements in the semester before they are due to go on placement. Students can find the FLO Application via their Okta Dashboard. For a video resource on how to use FLO and how it will assist in your learning, please [click here](#).

Students also need to become familiar with the University's field placement management system, InPlace. Students will have their own page on InPlace, where documents will be stored and contain information about placements. Click [here](#) for InPlace User Guide.

## 10. What are inherent requirements?

Inherent requirements are the abilities, skills and behaviours needed to participate, progress and graduate from the social work program. The inherent requirements inform decisions about field education, in relation to whether a student is considered 'fit' to commence, or continue, their social work placement. 'Fit' in this context encompasses both health (physical, emotional, psychological) and capacity (cognitive, skills, disposition). 'Fitness' for placement concerns your ability to engage safely, ethically, and professionally in a social work or related setting. This means that concerns about your fitness can be raised even when you have passed the prerequisite topics. Please talk to the relevant MSW or BSW Course Coordinator if you have any concerns about meeting social work's inherent requirements.

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## 11. What are my compliance requirements to be eligible for placement?

Students need to obtain a number of compulsory clearances and undertake compulsory training before being allocated a placement. For South Australian students these include:

- Department of Human Services (DHS) screening checks in 3 areas: Working with Children Check, Aged Care and Vulnerable Persons
- Nationally Coordinated Criminal History Check (NCCHC)
- Safe Environment – Through their eyes training (previously Child Safe Environment training) and certificate
- Hand Hygiene certificate
- Compulsory student compliance disclosures and declarations (marked with a red asterisk \* on InPlace)

Interstate students are required to obtain a [National Coordinated Criminal History Check](#) (NCCHC) and a Child Safe Environments Certificate, or the interstate mandatory reporting equivalent. Hand hygiene certificate and complete the compulsory student disclosures and declarations (marked with a red asterisk \* on InPlace)

Please Note: you will not be matched to a placement until all compliance requirements are met.

### 11.1 Who can verify my DHS application?

The DHS application process requires students to confirm their identity through the submission of verified identity documents. When completing your application, domestic students will select the 'verify online option' and verify their own ID. International students must select 'organisation to verify' and forward a copy of their 100 points of ID to [swplacements@flinders.edu.au](mailto:swplacements@flinders.edu.au)

### 11.2 How do I submit my completed clearances and required documents?

Once students receive their clearances, they will need to upload them on InPlace. Click [here](#) for further information about how to upload compliance documents.

### 11.3 Do particular placements have additional requirements?

There are also additional requirements in certain placement areas:

- SA Health placements – compulsory immunisations and, in some cases, online Sunrise EMR & PAS (formerly EPAS) and Basic First Aid Training
- School Placements – a RRHAN-EC Fundamentals Course
- Some residential aged care agencies – Statutory Declaration, influenza vaccination

Students who are not compliant at identified checkpoints before placement is due to commence, will not be able to proceed with placement.

### 11.4 Where do I get my name badge?

Wearing a student name badge whilst on placement is part of accountability and professional practice. Students can contact the Flinders Unicard Copy Shop to organise a name badge. Name badges are similar to your Student ID Card (photo included) and are \$4.40. Flinders Unicard Copy Shop is cashless, therefore students must have money loaded on their ID Cards. Students are able to get a new photo on their ID cards for an additional \$10. If you are unable to pick up your card from campus, Flinders Unicard Copy Shop can organise to post it to you for \$10.

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## **12. Can students who live in Adelaide find their own placement?**

It is against our policy for students in the Adelaide metropolitan region to organise their own placement (for many reasons, including our agreement with agencies and our responsibility to meet ASWEAS (2021) requirements). Students are asked not to contact agencies to find a placement.

Conversely due to their local knowledge (and often contacts) interstate students are required to take the lead in finding their own placements with support from the WIL team.

## **13. How are interstate student placements organised?**

Interstate students are required to find their own placements with the support of the WIL team. This is because interstate placements are highly competitive, and students often have local knowledge that can assist in securing placements - particularly in rural locations. Interstate students should contact [swplacements@flinders.edu.au](mailto:swplacements@flinders.edu.au) as soon as possible in the semester before they are intending to undertake their placement. Refer to the Interstate [Placement Information Sheet in the Documents and Forms section](#) for more details about the interstate placement process and student responsibilities.

## **14. How does the placement matching process work and how long does it take?**

While there are some exceptions the placement matching process takes around 12 weeks to complete. Students will receive information about their allocated placements via email and FLO throughout this process.

### **14.1 What factors are considered in matching a student to a placement?**

Social work involves a range of placement offerings (e.g. working with individuals, community development, social policy and research) and practice focuses/target populations (e.g. aged care, domestic violence, child protection, homelessness, mental health etc) working with people across the lifespan. Further, as previously described ASWEAS (2021) requires students have a diversity of learning experiences. It is therefore expected that students will be open to diverse placement contexts and fully engage in their placement learning regardless of where they are placed.

The placement matching process has to consider multiple factors, including ASWEAS (2021) requirements, practical considerations (e.g. Access Plans, driver's licence, where students live, availability of onsite social work supervision) and host organisation requirements.

Agencies may have particular requirements that preclude some students from consideration. Host organisation requirements include: driver's licence; minimum and maximum days a student can attend placement; dates for starting and/or completing placement; student's level of experience; first or final placement students; after hours availability; variations in attendance (e.g. later start time); student's communication skills; and students ability to speak a particular language (e.g. Arabic).

## **15. Will variations to placement structure or arrangements be considered?**

### **15.1 What if I have a medical condition or disability that needs to be considered?**

The Social Work program is committed to facilitating the integration of students with disabilities into the University community. Reasonable adjustments can be made for students with disabilities provided those adjustments do not compromise topic requirements and ASWEAS (2021). If students have a disability that may affect their ability to successfully complete a placement, they should contact [Disability Services](#) within the University Health, Counselling and Disability Services who may be able to prepare an [Access Plan](#) for them.

Students with an existing Access Plan who have any concerns about their ability to meet placement requirements are advised to have it reviewed the semester before enrolling in a Field Education topic. Students with an Access Plan who require accommodations in their placement arrangements should, in the first instance, email the WIL team at [swplacements@flinders.edu.au](mailto:swplacements@flinders.edu.au)

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### **15.2 Do I have to attend placement four days a week?**

Yes, but in exceptional circumstances consideration will be given to students attending fewer days. Students requiring any changes to attendance days or time will require an Access Plan.

### **15.3 Can I get credit for prior work experience?**

Students who have considerable prior experience working in human service agencies may be eligible to apply for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), effectively crediting them for placement. RPL will only be considered for the FIRST placement in MSW or BSW and requires students meet specific criteria set by the ASWEAS (2021). If granted RPL the ASWEAS (2021) outlines conditions for a student's final placement following RPL. 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](mailto:askflinders@flinders.edu.au)). You will be contacted by email if further clarification or information is required. Refer to the RPL Guidelines and the RPL Evidence Guide.

### **15.4 Can I do placement in my current place of employment?**

Students who are currently working in a human service organisation may be able to apply to undertake their placement in their current place of employment. Their employer will need to make adequate workplace adjustments to ensure students will not have a placement in their current work role, under their current supervisor and have protected time to engage student learning as specified by the University. Refer to the [Work Based Placement Information Sheet](#) for an overview of the key steps that must be taken by students during the WBP application process. Students undertaking a WBP must follow and complete the Flinders University compliance standards, even if the agency does not require the additional compliance checks.

### **15.5 Can I do a placement in country South Australia?**

First and final placement MSW students who live in country (rural) South Australia can undertake their placements in the location where (or near where) they are living, provided a suitable placement is available. Placement opportunities are also available to final placement MSW students living in Adelaide who wish to undertake a placement in a country area, however international students are not eligible to apply for a country placement until their final placement. International students must also check that they meet their Visa requirements around enrolling in Distance Education. There are limited placement opportunities for final placement students to undertake their placement in Alice Springs and first and final placement students on Kangaroo Island. Financial subsidies are available for both domestic and international students. Refer to the [Rural Placements Information Sheet](#) for more information.

## **16. How do I prepare for a Placement Interview?**

Students are required to attend an interview with the agency they are matched to (before their placement can be confirmed). Preparation for this commences with an introductory email to set up the interview. First impressions matter and students need to be professional in all communication leading up to, and during, their interview. Guidance on setting up an email signature, template email communication and how to prepare for an interview can be found in the Placement Interview Guideline module on the Social Work Field Education Placements FLO site.

## **17. What do I need to take to an interview?**

Students should take a copy of their compliance documents to their interview. The placement offer may be confirmed at the interview, but this doesn't always happen due to different agency processes. If students haven't heard from the interview chairperson after one week they should contact them to confirm their placement. Students must also email [swplacements@flinders.edu.au](mailto:swplacements@flinders.edu.au) if they have not had their placement confirmed one week after their interview.

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### **18. What happens if I'm not successful at the Placement interview?**

Where students have not been successful at their placement interview, every attempt will be made to match the student to an alternative placement agency. The ability to rematch will depend on several factors including the reasons for an unsuccessful first placement match, timing in the pre-placement process or semester and availability of placements. If a student has two unsuccessful placement matches, they may be required to un-enrol and undertake their placement later in their study program. Students must email [swplacements@flinders.edu.au](mailto:swplacements@flinders.edu.au) if they have not been successful at their interview.

### **19. What if I have completed the pre-placement requirements but can no longer go on placement?**

Students who have been matched to a placement but no longer wish to pursue this must email [swplacements@flinders.edu.au](mailto:swplacements@flinders.edu.au) as a priority. Students whose placement has already commenced should advise their Field Education Liaison and/or Topic Coordinator as soon as possible, withdraw from the topic and un-enrol using the Student System.

### **20. When will my Field Education Liaison be allocated?**

Students will be allocated to a Field Education Liaison (FEL) once their placement is confirmed. Your allocated FEL will contact you by email to confirm their contact details. If you are concerned that you have not heard from your FEL, please contact your Topic Coordinator using the contact details provided in the Topic Information Booklet (available on the topic FLO site). If you require an External Field Educator (EFE), your FEL will confirm the contact details of your EFE.

