

ACWA fieldwork placement requirements – diploma and higher education level courses

1. Background

Fieldwork placements are an important part of a student's education allowing them to experience the frontline tasks of a community worker and providing the opportunity to develop the practical skills needed in the workplace. A fieldwork placement should allow a student to integrate theory into practice through a range of community and human services experiences.

Fieldwork placements are neither volunteer nor observational placements, as they involve:

- specific types of tasks;
- supervision by appropriately qualified supervisors; and
- contact between the education provider and the agency at which the fieldwork placement occurs.

Fieldwork placements must be conducted in accordance with these fieldwork placement requirements. ACWA reserves the right to vary the *Fieldwork placement requirements –diploma and higher education level courses* from time to time.

This policy document outlines the obligations and requirements to be met by education providers in relation to fieldwork placements to gain and maintain accredited course status for higher education and diploma level courses.

2. Responsibility of education providers

Education providers must:

- a) ensure there is a suitably qualified and experienced fieldwork placement coordinator
- b) ensure that there are sufficient fieldwork placement supervisors for the numbers of students
- c) ensure that qualification of the fieldwork placement supervisor is equivalent to or higher than the qualification level they are supervising and that this qualification is in a welfare or community work-related discipline
- d) ensure that a fieldwork placement supervisor has three year's broad and relevant practical experience (post-qualification) in the community services industry
- e) ensure that all enrolled students are provided with fieldwork placements which comply with the *Fieldwork placement requirements –diploma and higher education level courses*
- f) arrange fieldwork placements within the designated course duration and in line with the course delivery structure
- g) monitor and assess the appropriateness of each fieldwork placement, having regard to:
 - (i) the qualifications of the agency supervisor/s;
 - (ii) the capacity of the agency supervisor/s to provide adequate supervision to the student;
 - (iii) the progress of students undertaking the fieldwork placement;

- (iv) any complaints made by the agency, agency supervisor/s or the student in relation to the fieldwork placement; and
 - (v) relevance and skill level of placement tasks in relation to professional community work practice.
- h) ensure the agency has sufficient information about these fieldwork placement requirements prior to the commencement of a placement.

3. Fieldwork placement specifics

4.1 Fieldwork placements must:

- a) be for a minimum of 400 hours duration in two separate placements
- b) not be less than 140 hours in duration in any one fieldwork placement
- c) not occur in the first semester of the approved course to ensure that students are exposed to some of the underpinning practical and theoretical concepts prior to their first fieldwork placement
- d) occur at least one term apart to ensure that appropriate classroom instruction occurs to facilitate adequate integration of learning and practical experience
- e) occur during normal agency hours when agency staff are present
- f) not require a student to work more than eight placement hours per day
- g) occur for a minimum of two full days per week
- h) vary significantly, in context and role, between each placement (that is, students should not undertake similar tasks or be engaged with similar clients)
- i) each occur in a different field of practice with a different agency supervisor
- j) have a formal written agreement prepared which details the tasks, roles and responsibilities to be undertaken by the student; this agreement must be signed at the beginning of the placement and signed off at the end of the placement by the student, the agency supervisor, the task supervisor (if applicable) and the fieldwork placement supervisor.

4. Fieldwork placement supervision

To ensure that a student obtains the most benefit from a fieldwork placement, the education provider must ensure that the supervision in place at the agency is of an appropriate level as follows:

- a) The supervision of the student in the agency is to be oriented to the student's educational goals.
- b) The agency supervisor must work on the majority of the days that the student attends the agency, to ensure continuous monitoring of performance and professional progress.
- c) The agency supervisor must have an educational qualification in a welfare or community work-related discipline that is equivalent to or higher than the qualification level they are supervising

plus a minimum of at least three years practical experience in a community services setting including at least 2 years post-qualification experience

- d) For diploma level courses, a **task supervisor** must have a minimum of certificate IV level qualification in community services and have at least three years of practical experience in a community services setting. For courses at bachelor degree and above, a **task supervisor** must have a minimum of diploma level qualification in community services and have at least three years of practical experience in a community services setting
- e) An agency supervisor can only supervise up to three students under direct supervision at the same time if:
 - (i) they are employed on the days and times that the students are present;
 - (ii) supervision is a normal part of their role;
 - (iii) they have responsibility for the same duties and functions of the agency if students were not attending; and
 - (iv) no more than three students are on placement at the agency at the same time.
- f) An agency supervisor may only supervise more than three students where:
 - (v) the agency supervisor's role as defined by their position description is that of a student supervisor; and
 - (vi) where each student is assigned a suitably qualified task supervisor.

5. Liaison

Liaison visits provide a student with the opportunity to raise concerns or ask for external assistance in relation to the fieldwork placement, while also giving the agency an opportunity to provide feedback on the capabilities of the student.

- a) There must be a minimum of three agency liaisons per student for each fieldwork placement. Liaison may take a variety of forms and may include but is not limited to face-to-face meetings, video conferencing and telephone. There should be at least one face-to-face, teleconferencing or video conference meeting
- b) Face-to-face, teleconferencing and video conferencing must involve the student, the agency supervisor, the task supervisor (where applicable) and the fieldwork placement supervisor.
- c) The purpose of liaison is to discuss, facilitate and evaluate the educational progress of the student and to resolve any problems which may have arisen during the course of a placement.

6. What students should gain from a fieldwork placement

Fieldwork placements should be used by students as an opportunity to experience different types of community welfare-related work, while also using classroom based learning in a workplace setting.

- a) Fieldwork placements should provide a student with the opportunity to demonstrate their increasing ability to operate as a 'work-ready' community work practitioner.
- b) A fieldwork placement should require a student to integrate theory and practice in the areas of:

- case management
 - community development strategy
 - working with groups
 - policy development
 - reflecting and improving on professional practice
- c) Examples of appropriate roles that a student may fulfil while engaged in a fieldwork placement include:
- individual and group assessment
 - early intervention
 - casework
 - case management
 - client services
 - program planning and development
 - family welfare and support work
 - advocacy and support work
 - community development work
 - community work
 - social welfare work.
- d) To ensure that students obtain a hands-on experience of community welfare work, no more than 5% of the hours in each fieldwork placement may be occupied with non-community welfare related activities, such as:
- administrative duties except where they directly relate to the student's position and responsibilities
 - food delivery
 - food preparation
 - personal care activities
 - domestic duties (including cleaning the agency premises)
 - respite
 - childcare
 - entertaining clients
 - recreational or leisure activities (without a focus on the psycho-social aspects of client engagement).

7. Credits/RPL placements

- a) Students may seek recognition of prior learning (RPL) for earlier or current work experience in relation to **one** fieldwork placement.
- b) Where no RPL or credit is obtained, one placement may be undertaken in a student's current workplace, however, it must comply with *Fieldwork placement requirements – diploma and higher education level courses*.

8. Fieldwork placement reports

- a) Students will be required to complete a written report about each fieldwork placement. The fieldwork placement report must:
 - i. clearly outline details of the tasks (duties and responsibilities) the student undertook whilst completing their fieldwork placement;
 - ii. provide a reflective and analytical overview of the fieldwork placement;
 - iii. provide evidence that the student has been able to correlate their classroom learning with their fieldwork placement experiences; and
 - iv. be written in the student's own words and must not include any references from teachers, other students or from publicly available documents such as agency websites, brochures etc., unless the student cites and acknowledges the reference source.
- b) Supervisors must not insist on changes to the report; however:
 - i. Where the report reveals a deficiency in the fieldwork placement, the agency supervisor and/or fieldwork placement supervisor may make appropriate comments and indicate what action has been taken to remedy the deficiency and/or reporting inaccuracy.
 - ii. The agency supervisor (including the task supervisor where applicable) and fieldwork placement supervisor and the student must each sign and date the report showing they have read it, and that it broadly captures the experience of the student on the fieldwork placement.

ACWA has developed a fieldwork placement completion form which may be used by education providers as a fieldwork placement report template. The *Fieldwork placement completion form* may also be used as a guide for a fieldwork placement report format.

9. Exceptions

- a) Any variation to the fieldwork placement requirements must have prior written approval from ACWA.
- b) A detailed written submission to vary the fieldwork placement requirements must be submitted to ACWA as soon as the need for a variation is discovered.

10. Definitions

Agency means an organisation at which a student completes a fieldwork placement.

Agency supervisor means an appropriately qualified employee of an agency who supervises a student engaged in a fieldwork placement with that agency.

Direct supervision means day-to-day task supervision of a student provided by an agency supervisor.

Fieldwork placement means the placement of a student at an agency for the purposes of gaining practical experience in the profession of community welfare work.

Fieldwork placement completion form means the *ACWA Fieldwork placement completion form* (as amended from time to time), available on the ACWA website or from ACWA staff.

Fieldwork placement coordinator means a suitably qualified employee of an education provider who is employed to coordinate and supervise the fieldwork placement arrangements of students enrolled in an approved course.

Fieldwork placement supervisor means a suitably qualified employee of an education provider who is employed to supervise individual fieldwork placements of students enrolled in an approved course.

Task supervisor means a suitably qualified employee of an agency who is responsible for the 'day-to-day' supervision of a student engaged in a fieldwork placement

ACWA reserves the right to conduct an audit during the course accreditation process and/or during the course accreditation period.

Enquiries to ACWA

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