

## Programme Recognition Standard - Flexibilities: COVID19 (PRS-F)

Consultation with the education sector was carried out in the first lockdown in March 2020 resulting in the SWRB issuing interim guidelines to create flexibility in Programme Recognition Standards requirements. The interim guidelines were reconsidered in 2021 as a result of the Delta variant emerging and further lockdowns affecting specific parts of Aotearoa.

The main concern raised each time was the ability of programmes to continue to meet the SWRB's Programme Recognition Standards (PRS) should any field education placements be cancelled or significantly curtailed due to COVID-19. The Board provided the following information in April 2020:

- ***The SWRB does not support a reduction in programme quality or standards because of COVID-19***
- ***The safety of students, educators, social workers, and their clients and communities remain paramount to the SWRB***
- ***The SWRB Board expects that all programmes will advise the SWRB secretariat of any changes made to programme delivery, including field education, because of responding to COVID-19***
- ***Priority should be given to facilitating fieldwork education for those final year students, for whom the impact of COVID-19 is likely to be greatest.***

The SWRB remains committed to this approach and continues to encourage institutes delivering social work education programmes to safeguard students, and their learning, to the greatest extent possible.

The guidelines developed after the first lockdown in March 2020 are not fit for purpose in the COVID19 environment we are experiencing today. Ongoing lockdowns for some regions have resulted in some graduates experiencing two lockdowns in the final two years of their degree.

At the November 2021 Board meeting, the SWRB confirmed that they do not want to prohibit students from graduating by extending study arrangements, nor does the SWRB want to add any additional burden for students who are in the process of applying for provisional registration.

The Board considered a number of options on ways to balance the intent of field placement with the realities of the Covid-19 environment. As a result, the SWRB Board have agreed that a fit for purpose approach is to introduce an additional sign off from a Registered Social Worker who has some oversight of the new graduate in their place of employment, if they have done less than 50% on site placement over the 120 days. The sign off will be required when the graduate applies to move from Provisional to Full Registration. The sign off will provide reassurance to the Board that despite not having met the Programme Recognition Standards, the graduate has achieved the required learning in a supervised work-based environment.

## **Programme Recognition Standard - Flexibilities: COVID19 (PRS-F)**

NOTE: This document replaces the previous Covid19 Interim Guidelines released in April 2020. All changes from the previous guidelines are underlined.

### **1. Programme Recognition Standards (PRS):**

#### **a) PRS 2.9 - Distance programmes will have a minimum of 20 days face to face social work skills teaching over the course of the programme.**

- a. Whilst the COVID-19 Protection Framework traffic light is at Red or Orange, individual institutes will need to follow their institutes guidelines relating to the provision of face-to-face social work skills teaching.
- b. The SWRB supports institutes delivering distance programmes to develop alternative and innovative means of delivering face to face social work skills teaching, whether that be through the use of social media platforms or other virtual means. It remains the responsibility of institutes to assure the SWRB that students have developed sufficient skills and are competent to practice as a beginning social worker.

#### **b) PRS 2.10 - All students must have marae-based experience.**

- a. Whilst the COVID-19 Protection Framework traffic light is at Red or Orange, individual institutes will need to follow their institutes guidelines relating to the provision of marae-based experiences.
- b. The purpose of the marae-based learning is to contribute to student's competence to work with Māori. Completion is expected at an early stage within a programme, to ensure that students have core competencies to work with Māori.
- c. Therefore, the SWRB considers that very few students who are anticipating graduation after four years of study, would not have already had a marae-based experience.
- d. The SWRB requires any institutes with final year students in this position to make early contact.

#### **c) PRS 3.1 - The programme will require students to undertake a minimum of 120 days of field education in the final two years of the programme. Fieldwork specific tasks can be embedded into the 120 days.**

- a. The SWRB expects all students to complete 120 days of field education, which may be counted in hours (900 hours).
- b. Any days or hours completed on a placement that is suspended, as a result of COVID-19 will count towards this standard.
- c. The SWRB's strong preference is for all social work students to have two placements in two different agencies, totalling 120 days. However, the SWRB will allow the 120 days to be completed within a single agency where students experience at least two different fields of practice, with two different field education supervisors.

#### **d) PRS 3.2 - Field education will be delivered through a collaboration between the tertiary education provider, the agency, and practitioners supporting the students in the field education.**

- a. If required, TEIs can develop online alternatives to on-site face-to-face fieldwork education, for up to 50% of their placements, as long as the learning experiences offered ensure that the placement learning outcomes and competencies can be met. Any alternative fieldwork education experiences can be supervised by an experienced social work practitioner, or a Registered Social Worker (RSW) member of academic staff.

- b. As an additional step to full registration, students who have had less than 50% on-site, face-to-face placement can be provisionally registered but will require a supervisor or managers sign off at the end of the provisional period. The manager or supervisor must be a Registered Social Worker (RSW). Educators are required to identify graduates who have undertaken less than 50% on-site field education when they submit the list of graduates eligible for registration at the end of the academic year.
- e) **PRS 3.9 – There will be at least two placements, both of which must be a minimum of 50 days duration over a minimum of three days a week.**
- If a placement is suspended before planned completion for COVID-19 related reasons, the student may continue fieldwork at another agency or in an alternative fieldwork experience.
  - Any days or hours completed on a placement that is suspended will count towards the 120 days requirement.
  - Placements may be divided across more than one agency or team setting and separated by time if necessary. Placements may be shorter than 50 days, but must be at least 20 days, as long as assurance can be provided to the SWRB that the student experiences at least two separate fields of practice. Exceptions to this standard can be applied on a case-by-case basis for students who have experienced significant periods of lockdown.
- f) **PRS 3.10 - Students will be exposed to at least two potential fields of practice in differently structured settings.** Exceptions to this standard can be applied on a case-by-case basis for students who have experienced significant periods of lockdown.
- g) **PRS 3.11 - A student will undertake no more than one field education experience within the student's place of work.**
- A student may undertake both placements in their place of work providing that both placements meet the requirements of 3.10 & 3.12 and placements are in two different fields of practice, and both field placements have separate field education supervisor. Exceptions to this standard can be applied on a case-by-case basis for students who have experienced significant periods of lockdown.
- h) **PRS 3.13 - Supervision will be the joint responsibility of the educational institute and the agency providing the field education experience.**
- Supervision will remain a joint responsibility. However, where a student is undertaking an alternative field work placement due to COVID-19, they may be supervised by an RSW member of academic staff.
- i) **PRS 3.14 – All students doing field education will have supervision, of at least a minimum of 1 hour per week or equivalent, provided by a social worker with full registration, at least 2 years of supervised social work practice in New Zealand and a current Practising Certificate.**
- This supervision may now be done remotely.
- j) **PRS 3.15 – Wherever possible, at least one field education experience will be supervised on site by a social worker who holds full registration, at least 2 years of supervised social work practice and a current Practising Certificate.**
- Students may be able to have external supervision by a RSW in both of their placements, or by an RSW member of academic staff in an alternative fieldwork experience.

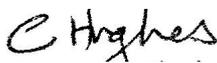
The SWRB recognises that these are extraordinary times, and we will remain vigilant in supporting social work education programmes and providing additional guidance as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. In support of social work education, we have mentioned a number of times that exceptions to standards can be applied on a case-by-case basis for students who have experienced significant periods of lockdown. This is recognition that as educators you are best placed to make case by case decisions about the learning needs of individual students, whilst also recognising the role of SWRB in maintaining the standards for social work education.

In order to identify students who have completed less than 50% on-site placement, we are asking academic staff, who sign off on the lists of graduates eligible for registration, to identify those students.

The SWRB has put in place these amendments to the PRS based on the latest information and government guidance regarding COVID-19. Should circumstances change we reserve the right to make further adjustments and will in due course, or as the COVID-19 Protection Framework traffic light changes, review our position.

Together we hope to support students and educators dealing with the impact of COVID-19. We want to thank you all for letting us know about the challenges and experiences in the education sector.

Ngā mihi



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