Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers

Equivalency Policy - Social Service Work

Manual:	Policy – Operations	**Policy #:**	Op-5
Approved by:	Council	**Date:**	July 15, 2026

1. Background

Under the terms of the *Social Work and Social Service Work Act, 1998* (the "**Act**") and the regulations made under the Act, the Registrar of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (the "**College**") may grant a certificate of registration for social service work to a person who "has a combination of academic qualifications and experience performing the role of a social service worker that the Registrar determines is substantially equivalent to the qualifications required for a diploma in social service work from a social service work program offered in Ontario at a College of Applied Arts and Technology" (Ontario Regulation 383/00 s. 8.(1)1.iv.).

2. Purpose

As the regulatory body for social workers and social service workers in Ontario, the College's mandate is to serve and protect the public interest. One of the ways the College fulfills its protection mandate is by ensuring that all applicants for registration meet entry-to-practice requirements, and only those with specific educational qualifications are eligible for registration. This Policy sets out criteria and process to assist the Registrar in making such a determination. The criteria used by the College to determine if an applicant's combination of academic qualifications and experience is substantially equivalent to an approved diploma in social service work from an Ontario College of Applied Arts and Technology ("**OCAAT**") are based on the *Social Service Worker Program Standard*, 2018, approved by the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security[1] (MTCU funding code 50721).

3. Scope

This Policy applies to all applicants to the College and the College staff involved in the registration process.

4. Definitions

In this Policy, the following words and phrases have the meanings set out below:

[1] Formerly known as *Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities*.

"**Recognized institution**" means a post-secondary academic institution that has been given authority through legislation or a government-mandated quality assurance process to grant diplomas, degrees and other academic qualifications.

"**Role of a social service worker**" means the role of a person who assesses, treats and evaluates individual, interpersonal and societal problems through the use of social service work knowledge, skills, interventions and strategies, to assist individuals, dyads, families, groups, organizations and communities to achieve optimum social functioning.[2]

"**Substantially equivalent**" means equal in value in essential and material requirements to the qualifications required for a diploma in social service work from a social service work program offered by an OCAAT.

"**Supervisor**" means a person holding an accredited degree in social work, an approved diploma in social service work, and/or is a registered social worker or registered social service worker in Ontario or another Canadian or international jurisdiction where the profession of social service work is regulated. In cases where the profession of social service work is not regulated in the jurisdiction where supervision takes place, the Supervisor must provide evidence that they obtained a social service work diploma from a recognized post-secondary institution.

5. Requirements

An applicant for registration must demonstrate that they meet the following requirements:

a. Program duration:

The applicant must possess a minimum of a college-level diploma or a degree from a university program that is at least two (2) years in length[3] or four (4) academic semesters in duration. The total number of instructional hours completed in the program must be at least 1,200 hours.

b. Program relevance:

The academic program must be related to the practice of social service work or a closely associated field of study.

c. Institution status:

The applicant's academic program must be granted by a post-secondary institution recognized in its own jurisdiction and authorized to grant diplomas or degrees. For institutions outside Canada and the United States, a third-party evaluation report from

[2] Section 1, O. Reg. 383/00.

[3] In this policy, such diploma or degree program is referred to as the "academic program".

a credential assessment agency approved by the College must indicate that the institution is recognized in its own jurisdiction to grant diplomas or degrees.

The College will consider the opinion provided by the third-party credential assessment agency. However, the College will make its own determination as to whether the applicant's combination of academic qualifications and experience performing the role of a social service worker is equivalent to the qualifications required for a diploma in social service work from a program offered by an OCAAT.

d. Program Content

The applicant must demonstrate, through academic course credits, that their academic program meets the requirements below. For clarity, the vocational learning outcomes and the general education requirements cannot be demonstrated through work experience, non-university or non-college-level courses, non-credit courses completed at a university or college, or professional development courses.

Each course submitted for evaluation will be assessed in accordance with the *Social Service Worker Program Standard*, 2018. Practicum or field placement hours may be counted toward experience requirements if completed under the supervision of a Supervisor, but they cannot be used to demonstrate the program content.

e. Vocational Learning Outcomes

The applicant must demonstrate that they have achieved, through the **course credits** obtained in the academic program, the following ten (10) Vocational Learning Outcomes:

i. Develop respectful and collaborative professional and interpersonal relationships that adhere to professional, legal, and ethical standards aligned to social service work.
ii. Record information accurately and communicate effectively in written, digital, verbal and non-verbal ways, in adherence to privacy and freedom of information legislation, in accordance with professional and workplace standards.
iii. Integrate a practice framework within a service delivery continuum, addressing the needs of individuals, families and communities at micro, mezzo, macro and global levels, and work with them in achieving their goals.
iv. Plan and implement accessible and responsive programs and services, recognizing the diverse needs and experiences of individuals, groups, families and communities, and meeting these needs.
v. Examine current social policy, relevant legislation, and political, social, historical, and/or economic systems and their impacts for individuals and communities when delivering services to the user/client.
vi. Develop strategies and approaches that support individual clients, groups, families and communities in building the capacity for self-advocacy, while affirming their dignity and self-worth.
vii. Work from an anti-oppressive, strengths-based practice, recognizing the capacity for resilience and growth of individuals and communities when responding to the

diverse needs of marginalized or vulnerable populations to act as allies and advocates.

viii. Develop strategies and approaches to implement and maintain holistic self-care as a member of a human service profession.

ix. Work with individuals, groups, families and their communities to ensure that service provider strategies promote social and economic justice, and challenge patterns of oppression, discrimination and harassment, and sexual violence with clients, coworkers and communities.

x. Develop the capacity to work with the Indigenous individual, families, groups and communities while respecting their inherent rights to self-determine, and to identify and address systemic barriers that produce ill-effects, developing appropriate responses using approaches such as trauma informed care practice.

The course credits obtained in the academic program that are used to demonstrate achievement of the ten (10) Vocational Learning Outcomes must be equal to a minimum of 680 instructional hours (approximately seventeen (17) vocational courses).[4]

The course credits obtained in the academic program that are used to demonstrate achievement of the ten (10) Vocational Learning Outcomes cannot be applied to demonstrate achievement of the General Education Requirement or the general education instructional hour requirement.

f. Essential Employability Skills

The applicant must demonstrate, in the manner set out below, that they have achieved the following eleven (11) Essential Employability Skills**:**

i. The ability to communicate clearly, concisely, and correctly in the written, spoken, and visual form that fulfils the purpose and meets the needs of the audience.

ii. The ability to respond to written, spoken, or visual messages in a manner that ensures effective communication.

iii. The ability to execute mathematical operations accurately.

iv. The ability to apply a systematic approach to solve problems.

v. The ability to use a variety of thinking skills to anticipate and solve problems.

vi. The ability to locate, select, organize, and document information using appropriate technology and information systems.

vii. The ability to analyze, evaluate, and apply relevant information from a variety of sources.

viii. The ability to show respect for the diverse opinions, values, belief systems, and contributions of others.

ix. The ability to interact with others in groups or teams in ways that contribute to effective working relationships and the achievement of goals.

x. The ability to manage the use of time and other resources to complete projects.

xi. The ability to take responsibility for one's own actions, decisions, and consequences.

[4] A typical course at an OCAAT is comprised of 39-45 instructional hours and has an evaluative component.

The applicant must demonstrate that they have achieved the eleven (11) Essential Employability Skills above principally by obtaining course credits that form part of the academic program.

g. General Education Requirement

The applicant must demonstrate that they have achieved, through the course credits obtained in the academic program, the ***five*** (5) General Education Requirement, in at least one of the following areas of study:

i. Arts in Society: recognize and evaluate artistic and creative achievements.
ii. Civic Life: understand the patterns of human relationships that underlie the orderly interactions of a society's various structural units.
iii. Social and Cultural Understanding: gain an awareness of one's own place in contemporary culture and society by acquiring knowledge of the patterns and precedents of the past.
iv. Personal Understanding: develop and understand oneself as an integrated physiological and psychological entity in order to be a fully functioning person.
v. Science and Technology: understand the basics of scientific inquiry that deals with fundamental or basic questions of science and technology in a non-applied manner.

The course credits obtained in the academic program that are used to demonstrate achievement of the General Education Requirement must be equal to a minimum of 120 instructional hours (typically three (3) to five (5) courses).

The course credits obtained in the academic program that are used to demonstrate achievement of the General Education Requirement cannot be applied to demonstrate achievement of the Vocational Learning Outcomes or the vocational learning outcomes instructional hour requirement.

6. Experience

6.1 Experience Performing the Role of a Social Service Worker

In addition to the formal education outlined above, the applicant must have practised in a setting where they performed the role of a social service worker for at least one (1) year.[5] The social service work practice can take place in the workplace or as part of an academic practicum experience which meets all the requirements, or a combination of the two (2). The requirement for social service work practice cannot be demonstrated through volunteer work.

[5] An applicant must demonstrate at least one (1) year of performing the role of a social service worker on the basis that the applicant has not had the benefit of attending field seminar/field placement or integrated seminar courses which are part of a social service work program. Field seminar/field placement or integrated seminar courses typically link the theoretical curriculum with the applied learning that is acquired in a practicum.

During the year of experience performing the role of a social service worker, the applicant must have had direct responsibility for providing social service work services to individuals, dyads, families, groups, organizations, and communities or any of these.

6.2 Supervision

During the period of time in which the applicant performed the role of a social service worker, at least 650 hours of practice must have been supervised by a Supervisor.

6.3 Currency of Practice

An applicant for registration must have engaged in the practice of social service work within the five (5) years immediately before the date of the application or otherwise satisfy to the College that they continue to be competent to perform the role of a social service worker.

7. Process

Set out below is the College's process to evaluate an applicant's combination of academic qualifications relevant to the practice of social service work and experience performing the role of a social service worker:

7.1 Threshold Assessment Review

An applicant for registration must apply to the College by submitting a completed application in the form provided by the College. The applicant is responsible for ensuring that the College receives official documentation of their academic qualifications directly from the issuing academic institution. For the purpose of conducting the threshold assessment review, the College may also accept unofficial documentation, such as copies of official transcripts or a credential assessment report from a third-party credential assessment agency approved by the College. The applicant must also provide evidence of experience performing the role and supervised practice.

The College will conduct a threshold assessment review of the applicant's educational qualifications and experience. The review will assess whether the academic program completed by the applicant is related to the practice of social service work and confirm that it was conferred by a recognized post-secondary institution. Additionally, the review will verify that the applicant has performed the role of a social service worker under the supervision of a Supervisor.

The College will review the application, supporting documentation and any relevant information provided by the applicant or third parties. The College will notify the applicant in writing regarding the outcome of the threshold assessment review phase.

The outcome of the threshold assessment review may be:

- Issuance of decision confirming that the application is eligible to advance to the secondary review phase.
- Issuance of a Proposal to refuse to issue a certificate of registration and reasons for the decision.

An applicant who receives a Proposal to refuse to issue a certificate of registration and reasons has the right to request a review by the Registration Appeals Committee.

7.2 Secondary Review Phase

- Following receipt of a written decision confirming that the application is eligible to advance to the secondary review phase, an applicant must arrange with their post-secondary institution or third-party credential assessment agency to submit official transcripts or credential evaluation reports directly to the College, along with any other additional documentation required for the evaluation of academic qualifications and experience. All materials must be provided in a format and manner acceptable to the College. All documents submitted to the College must be provided in English or French. Translations must meet the established criteria published by the College on its website.

- An applicant who meets the criteria for "allowable circumstances" may submit alternative documentation as outlined in the College's *Op-9 Acceptable Alternatives to Official Documents Policy*.

- The College will conduct a comprehensive review of all supporting documentation, assessing both the content of the applicant's academic program and their professional experience to determine whether they are substantially equivalent to the content of a diploma in social service work offered by an OCAAT.

- The applicant will receive written communication from the College regarding the outcome of the secondary review phase.

- The outcome of the secondary review phase may be:
    - Issuance of a certificate of registration (provided that all other registration requirements have been met).
    - Issuance of a Proposal to issue a certificate of registration with Terms, Conditions or Limitations.
    - Issuance of a Proposal to refuse to issue a certificate of registration and reasons for the decision.

An applicant who receives a Proposal to issue a certificate of registration with Terms, Conditions or Limitations or a Proposal to refuse to issue a certificate of registration and reasons has the right to request a review by the Registration Appeals Committee.

8. Requirements for Re-Application

Following the Registrar's issuance of a Proposal to issue a certificate of registration with Terms, Conditions or Limitations or a Proposal to refuse to issue a certificate of registration, an applicant may re-apply to the College. However, before re-applying, an applicant should ensure that sufficient time has passed to complete any additional academic course work, academic qualifications, or experience performing the role as a social service worker, as applicable. The required timeframe may vary depending on the number of courses needed to fulfill the academic requirements and/or the amount of experience or supervised practice hours the applicant must accumulate. A re-application that lacks new supporting documentation as described above may be refused.

If the initial application did not meet the education requirement, the re-application should include satisfactory evidence of completed college-level courses or academic qualifications in social service work from an OCAAT.

If the practice requirement was not previously met, the applicant should provide documentation of experience performing the role of a social service worker. This documentation must be confirmed by a Supervisor.

Re-applications will be reviewed after submission of all necessary documents and payment of applicable fees. All supporting evidence must be submitted in a format or manner deemed acceptable by the College.

9. Registrar's Discretion

This Policy serves as a guide based on the Ontario Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security - *Social Service Worker Program Standard*, 2018. In appropriate circumstances, the Registrar has discretion in applying the criteria in the Policy to a particular application for registration. However, a significant variance from this Policy could raise questions about the "substantial equivalence" of the applicant's qualifications.

This Policy assumes that section 9 is not intended to change the requirement of having appropriate academic qualifications as an essential prerequisite for the issuance of a general certificate of registration for social service work. Further, this section is not intended to alter the qualifications standards, which are fundamentally based on a diploma from a social service work program at an OCAAT.

10. Evaluation

This Policy will be reviewed by the Office of the Registrar every three (3) years or as required. Changes to the Policy will be recommended by the Office of the Registrar to Council for approval by Council.

Version Control

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