Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers

Equivalency Policy - Social Work

Manual:	Policy – Operations	**Policy #:**	Op-6
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 work to a person who "has a combination of academic qualifications and experience performing the role of a social worker that the Registrar determines is substantially equivalent to the qualifications required for a degree in social work from a social work program accredited by the Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE-ACFTS)" (Ontario Regulation 383/00 s. 7.(1)1.iii.).

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 the criteria and process to assist the Registrar to determine if an applicant's combination of academic qualifications and experience are substantially equivalent to an accredited degree in social work based on the curriculum learning objectives and the content categories outlined in the CASWE-ACFTS *Standards for Accreditation 2014*.

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:

"**Focused program of study**" means a degree completed at a recognized post-secondary institution that concentrates exclusively on a single field of study. Such a program is intended to equip graduates with specialized knowledge and skills, leading to certification in a specific area or professional level knowledge in that area.

"**Recognized institution**" means a university 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 worker**" means the role of a person who assesses, diagnoses, treats and evaluates individual, interpersonal and societal problems through the use of social work knowledge, skills, interventions and strategies, to assist individuals, dyads, families, groups, organizations and communities to achieve optimum psychosocial and social functioning.[1]

"**Substantially equivalent**" means equal in value in essential and material requirements to the qualifications required for a degree in social work from a social work program accredited by the CASWE-ACFTS.

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

5. Requirements

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

a. Program duration:

An applicant must possess a minimum of a university-level bachelor's degree, based on the norm of a four-year degree programme (or three years in Quebec), covering 20 full courses or 120 credits. The substantial equivalent of a four-year first degree may include a three-year bachelor's degree and a graduate degree, or a three-year bachelor's degree supplemented by at least one additional year of another focused program of university-level study.

b. Program relevance to the practice of social work:

The applicant's degree must be related to the practice of social work or a closely associated field of study.

c. Institution status:

The applicant's degree must be granted by a university recognized in its own jurisdiction and authorized to grant degrees. For institutions outside Canada and the United States, the third-party evaluation report from a credential assessment agency approved by the

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

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 worker is equivalent to the qualifications required for a degree in social work from a program accredited by CASWE- ACFTS.

d. Balance of general education and professional education:
The applicant's degree must demonstrate a balance of general education (at least 40% course credits in the liberal arts, humanities and social sciences) and professional education (at least 50%) and include a field practicum of at least 700 hours.

e. Content areas:
The Applicant must demonstrate, through academic course credits, that their degree program has social work content judged to be minimally equivalent to 10 full undergraduate university level courses in all 12 areas. For clarity, the social work content areas cannot be demonstrated through work experience, non-university-level courses, non-credit courses completed at a university, or professional development courses.

Each course submitted for evaluation will be assessed in accordance with the CASWE-ACFTS *Standards for Accreditation 2014* and may be applied to fulfill the requirements of only one sub-area only.

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 social work content areas.

The social work content areas are outlined as follows:

i. **Social Work Theory**
This content area refers to the applicant's knowledge of various theories within the social work context. The applicant should demonstrate that the applicant's education links together the interdisciplinary theoretical knowledge base of social work and professional practice. Additionally, knowledge encompasses a range of theoretical perspectives and encourages critical thinking, discussion and debate.

The content area may be demonstrated through the completion of courses relating to:
(a) knowledge of Canadian social work and social welfare history and social policy (full)[2];

[2] The term "full" when used to describe these courses means one full credit university level course.

(b) knowledge of the origins and dimensions of social problems in Canadian society (full); and
(c) an understanding of social work's origins, purposes and practices (full).

ii. **Social Work Practice**

This content area refers to the applicant's knowledge, and/or experience performing the role of a social worker, related to the social work profession including ethical practice and the ability to engage in generalist practice with individuals, families, and groups. The applicant should demonstrate that the applicant:

- Is grounded in reflective and culturally competent practice;
- Is engaged in persistent inquiry into theoretical and research bases in the field;
- Employs professional approaches and interventions to enhance individual, family, group, community, and population well-being;
- Identifies as a professional social worker and adopts the value perspective of the social work profession;
- Adheres to social work values and ethics in professional practice; and,
- Engages with individuals, families, groups, and/or communities through professional practice.

The content area may be demonstrated through the completion of courses relating to:

(a) an understanding of, and ability to apply, social work values and ethics in professional situations (full);
(b) practice methods and professional skills required for generalist practice at a beginning level of competence (full);
(c) awareness of self in terms of values, beliefs and experiences as these impact upon social work knowledge and practice (half)[3]; and,
(d) understanding of other related occupations and professions sufficient to facilitate inter-professional collaboration (half).

iii. **Support for Social Justice, Human Rights and Awareness of Oppression**

This content area refers to the applicant's knowledge of, and/or experience performing the role of a social worker, with diversity[4], the promotion of social justice, and the impact of oppression, particularly but not exclusively, in the context of Canadian society. This includes knowledge and/or experience of human rights and responsibilities and respect for human diversity. The applicant's knowledge and/or experience seeks to facilitate well-being and participation of people, promote social and economic justice, and address structural and organizational sources of inequities.

[3] The term "half" when used to describe these courses means one half credit university level course.

[4] Diversity throughout this document refers to a range of characteristics including, but not limited to age, colour, culture, disability/non-disability status, ethnic or linguistic origin, gender, health status, heritage, immigration status, geographic origin, race, religious and spiritual beliefs, political orientation, gender and sexual identities, and socioeconomic status.

The content area can be demonstrated through the completion of courses relating to:

(a) knowledge related to practising sensitively in a range of geographical regions and with diverse ethnic, cultural and racial populations (half); and
(b) knowledge related to practising sensitively with oppressed groups in Canadian society (half).

iv. **Critical Analysis**

This content area refers to the capacity of the applicant to use critical thinking in professional practice, including analyzing complex social situations and making professional judgments, consistent with the values of the profession.

The content area can be demonstrated through the completion of courses relating to:

(a) knowledge related to human development and behaviour in the social environment (full); and
(b) knowledge of multiple theoretical and conceptual bases of social work knowledge and practice (full).

v. **Research**

This content area refers to the applicant's knowledge of systematic inquiry such as research and evaluation demonstrated by the ability to undertake systematic inquiry and critical evaluation related to social work knowledge and practice (full).

vi. **Experience**

(i) Experience Performing the Role of a Social 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 worker for at least one year.

Social work practice may be demonstrated through paid work experience, internship or practicum experience. It cannot be demonstrated through volunteer work.

The applicant must have had direct responsibility for providing social work services to individuals, groups, and/or communities.

(ii) Supervision

During the period of time in which the applicant performed the role of a social worker, at least 700 hours of practice must have been supervised by a Supervisor.

(iii) Currency of Practice

An applicant for registration must have engaged in the practice of social work within the five 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 worker.

6. Process

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

a. 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 degree program completed by the applicant is related to the practice of social 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 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.

b. 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 deemed acceptable by 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 degree program and their professional experience to determine whether they are substantially equivalent to the content of a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree program accredited by CASWE-ACFTS.
- 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.

7. 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 of a social 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 academic requirement, the re-application should include satisfactory evidence of completed university-level courses or academic qualifications from a university that offers an accredited degree in social work.

If the practice requirement was not previously met, the applicant should provide documentation of experience performing the role of a social 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.

8. Registrar's Discretion

This Policy serves as a guide based on the CASWE-ACFTS *Standards for Accreditation 2014*. In appropriate circumstances, the Registrar has discretion in applying 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 section 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 work. Further, this section is not intended to alter the qualifications standards, which are fundamentally based on a university-level program in social work.

9. 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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