

HOW TO BECOME A SOCIAL WORKER DOWN UNDER

There are great opportunities for qualified and experienced social workers in Australia, as *Katherine Van Greuning* explains

Opportunities are numerous in Australia for qualified and experienced social workers, especially in the areas of child welfare, families, mental health and child protection.

The starting point for anyone wishing to live, work and migrate to Australia and gain employment as a social worker is to have their qualifications assessed by the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). A positive skills assessment is essential if you are looking to migrate on a permanent basis.

Australian employers of social workers use the AASW assessment as the benchmark for employment of overseas education social workers. Many include this requirement in specific job descriptions and it is part of key election criteria.

GETTING ASSESSED

Those looking to obtain a positive skills assessment will be required to hold a Degree in Social Work, equivalent to an Australian Degree in Social Work or other accepted qualification(s).

Each application is assessed independently against five criteria before an official outcome is provided. These are as follows:

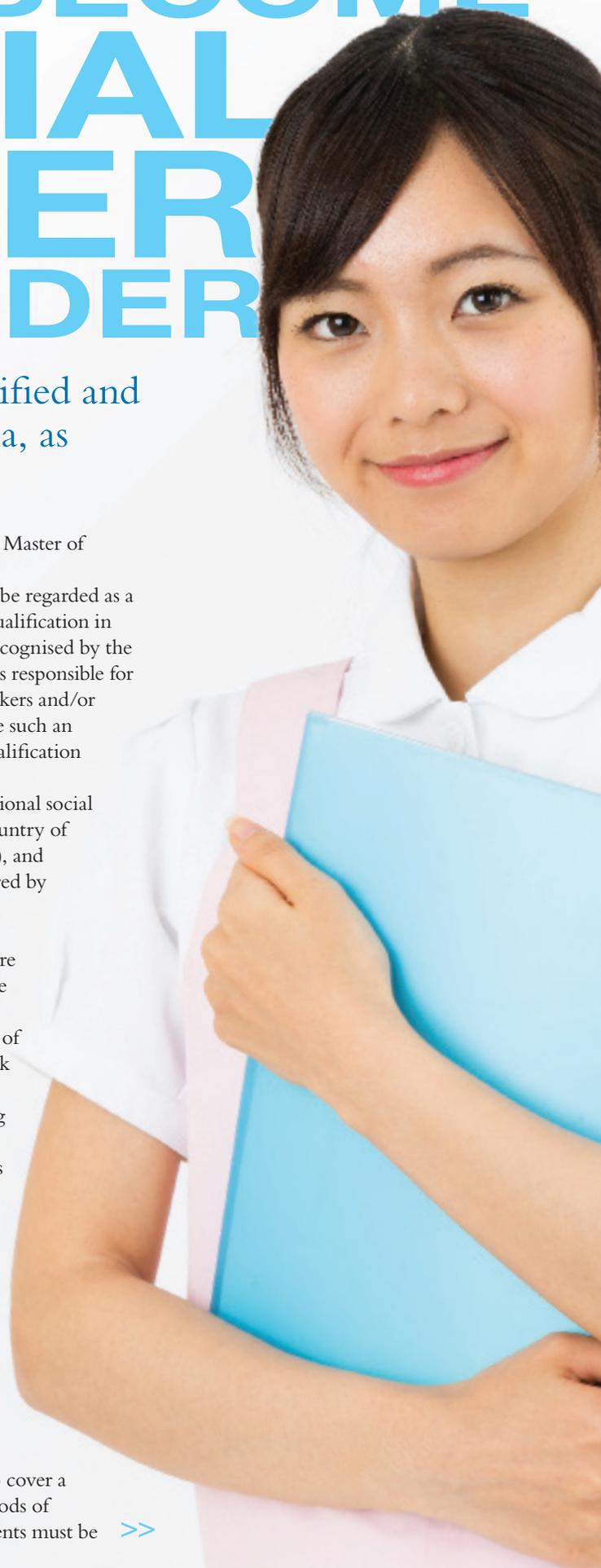
1. The qualification must be a specific qualification in social work. Related qualifications such as Social Care, Sociology or Psychology, for example, will not be accepted unless they also include a professional qualification in social work such as a relevant

undergraduate degree and Master of Social Work).

2. The qualification must be regarded as a professional social work qualification in the country of training, recognised by the official association which is responsible for accreditation of social workers and/or social work courses (where such an association exists). The qualification must enable eligibility for membership of the professional social work association of the country of training (where applicable), and where eligibility is conferred by formal qualification. The qualification must enable registration/licensing where such conditions exist in the country of training.

3. The learning outcomes of the professional social work qualification should be comparable to the learning outcomes required to be demonstrated by graduates of AASW accredited social work qualifications.

4. An applicant must have completed at least 980 hours of field education in at least two field placements and with two contrasting practice foci at least one of which was in direct practice. Field education placements are required to cover a range of social work methods of intervention. The placements must be >>



taken over two academic years in conjunction with the professional social work program of study.

5. High-level English language skills are essential to the practice of social work in Australia. All applicants applying to have their qualification assessed to determine AASW membership eligibility must provide evidence with their application that they have sufficient English language skills – achieving a minimum score of 7.0 or higher in each component (listening, reading, writing and speaking), in one sitting of the Academic IELTS (International English Language Testing System) test.

Test results must be obtained within three years prior to submitting the application. Exemptions are available if you can prove all your secondary education was taught and assessed in English, in the UK and; if you

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successfully completed three years or more full-time tertiary study (at Bachelor Degree level or higher), that was taught and assessed in English, in the UK.

A UK Four-year Bachelor degree or relevant bachelor degree followed by two-year postgraduate diploma or master degree in social work (with CQSW OR DipSW) are usually assessed as meeting AASW assessment requirements.

Other UK social work courses are also considered, such as the Certificate in Social Service (CSS), or a two-year non-graduate Diploma in Social Work. A three-year Bachelor of Social Work qualification, A Relevant first degree followed by one year postgraduate diploma or master in social work. Processing times for the assessment are approximately 25 weeks from the time you submit a complete application.

Please refer to the AASW website (www.aasw.asn.au) for further information about the assessment process.

SALARY EXPECTATIONS

Social workers in Australia typically earn a base salary of between A\$65,000 and A\$90,000 per annum depending on their qualifications and level of experience.

The Australian government's Job Outlook website (joboutlook.gov.au) has

very useful statistics about typical job salaries, as do some recruitment agencies, such as Hays (au.indeed.com/salaries/Social-Worker-Salaries).

The social worker industry employs 28,300 social workers. The number of social workers has grown very strongly over the past five years and is expected to rise over the next five years (to May 2022) to 34,700. Around 25,000 job openings are likely over this time from workers leaving and new jobs being created. Around 88.6 per cent of the work force is female

VISA OPTIONS

To work in social work Down Under you need a visa. Here is a brief rundown of the main visa types.

The Working Holiday temporary visa is available if you are aged between 18–30 years with no dependent children. If you

are looking to work and travel, then this temporary visa may suit your needs. You must be outside Australia to apply for this visa and hold a UK or eligible passport. This visa is valid for 12 months from date of entry into Australia and is a multiple entry visa so you can leave and re-enter as you wish within the 12 months.

You can work for one employer for up to six months. If you undertake three months (88 days) of paid specified work in regional Australia and have evidence to support this, while you were the holder of your first working holiday visa and apply before the first one expires while still under 31 years of age, you can apply for a second working holiday visa (inside or outside of Australia).

For detailed explanations of accepted specified regional work visit the Department of Home Affairs website (www.homeaffairs.gov.au). Work demands and skill shortages fluctuate, as they do in any country and this has an impact on the opportunities available.

SKILLED INDEPENDENT VISA

The occupation of Social Worker is on the Medium and Long Term Strategic Skilled List (MLTSSL) List of occupations. This means that with enough points you can



Social workers with plenty of practical work experience are much in demand

apply for a skilled independent visa (subclass 189) or opt to apply for State nomination to increase your point score, if more points are required at the time you are ready to apply for your visa.

The minimum points score required under the General Skilled Migration (GSM) program and the points tested pathway is 60 points. However, in recent months this score has been raised by the Department of Home Affairs (DOHA) to 70, 75 and 80 points. This means that you need to maximise your points where possible or face a potentially long wait to receive an invitation to apply for the visa.

You must be under 45 years of age to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) via the DOHA computerised SkillSelect system. Those with the highest scores will be invited before others.

A registered migration agent can advise you how to maximise your score and work out a plan to suit you.

STATE NOMINATION

For social workers with a points score of 55 or 60 there is an option to apply to be nominated for permanent residency by a State or Government Territory. This is a way to boost your point score to at least 65 points, enabling you to be considered

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by the relevant State or Government Territory for a skilled visa.

If five points are required the visa will generally be offered for permanent residency and if 10 points are required, the visa will be a provisional regional skilled visa valid for four years, with a pathway to permanent residency after a qualifying period of having lived in the specified regional area for two years, and having worked for at least one year full time of those two years in any occupation immediately before you apply for the permanent visa, provided you (and any accompanying family members) have met all other criteria at the time of application.

State and Territory governments have their own state migration plans and update their list of occupations in demand as their needs change. They also have their own criteria regarding the level of work experience and/or language competency and if a job offer is required. The Victorian government's skilled migration department, for example, require an

IELTS score of 7 in each section of the test and two years' experience to be nominated as a social worker. You can check out more details at liveinmelbourne.vic.gov.au.

The Temporary Skill Shortage visa (TSS) pathway, replacing the 457 visa, is dependent on you being employed in the nominated position. If the position ceases you have only 90 days to find a new approved sponsor. This visa will have two streams – a two-year short term stream and a medium stream up to four years. It is



■ Katherine Van Greuning is an Australian Registered Migration Agent and director of getme2oz.com. Getme2Oz has contacts with UK based social worker recruitment companies currently offering temporary skilled work visas under the Temporary Skill Shortage visa pathway. For more information and to discuss your specific visa options call 01227 732434. You can also e-mail Katherine@getme2oz.com or visit www.getme2oz.com

important to note that a two-year visa under this pathway will not lead to permanent residency in the future.

The good news is if you are sponsored under the medium stream and have worked for your employer full-time for three years you may then be able to be sponsored for a permanent visa under the Employer Nominated Stream (ENS) (subclass 186) or the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) (subclass 187). Both of these visas have separate pathways. If you are between 45 and 50 years of age, you will not meet the requirements unless: you held or had applied for your subclass 457 on 18 April 2017 and are applying under the TRT stream or you meet one of the age exemptions for these visa subclasses – further information is available on www.homeaffairs.gov.au/Trav/Visa-1/186-?modal=/Trav/Work/Work/Age-Skill-and-English-Language-Exemptions-Permanent-EmployerSponsored-Programme.

Make sure you get any offers to transition from the TSS visa to a permanent visa in writing, in case of any potential unforeseen changes, such as changes in department managers and policies. It may save you a lot of stress in the long run.

Hiring the services of a registered migration agent with experience in this area at the outset may save you a lot of stress and heartache to ensure you are fully aware of meeting the visa conditions and necessary pathways if securing a permanent visa is your end goal.

All applicants will need to meet health and character requirements.

The key thing is if you follow the correct pathway you can enjoy all the best Australia has to offer and continue to progress your chosen career while enjoying a great work-life balance. This, after all, is one of the major reasons cited by numerous applicants as to why they choose to relocate to Australia.