

Mandatory Minimum Qualifications – Frequently Asked Questions

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FAQs about Recommendation 209

What is meant by mandatory minimum qualifications?

Mandatory qualifications will result in a **minimum qualification threshold**, to ensure that from 1 July 2021 all new specialist family violence practitioners have formalised knowledge, skills and competencies that are consistent across the specialist family violence sector. This baseline must be sufficient to support the safety and wellbeing of adult and child victim survivors of family violence, and to work with perpetrators to take accountability for their behaviour.

When will Recommendation 209 be implemented?

From 1 July 2021, any new practitioner employed as a specialist family violence practitioner in a Government funded service must meet the minimum qualification threshold or be working towards satisfying the threshold through the various pathways to employment.

Why does there need to be a mandatory minimum qualification?

Recommendation 209 is intended to professionalise the specialist family violence sector and sets a consistent service standard for people accessing Victorian family violence services. Minimum qualifications are not being implemented to address a skills-deficit.

What is the role of organisations in supporting practitioners work towards meeting the minimum qualifications?

Organisations are required to have in place a professional learning plan with practitioners that are working towards meeting the mandatory minimum qualifications policy requirements. This plan will outline the program of formal learning that practitioners will

undertake to meet the policy within the appropriate time limit as per the pathway that they have entered the workforce.

FAQs about the Minimum Qualification Threshold

What are minimum or equivalent qualifications?

A minimum qualification is a Bachelor of Social Work or equivalent. Equivalent qualifications are qualifications or a combination of qualifications and formal learning that meet all seven equivalency principles. This can be met either through a single qualification or through multiple courses of education and training. These qualifications encompass the baseline attitudes and values, knowledge and practice skills required to promote the safety and wellbeing of victim survivors of family violence, including children, young people and older people, and to hold people who use violence to account for their behaviour.

For example, this may be through the completion of a related Bachelor degree and undertaking a Diploma or Graduate Certificate to meet missing principles.

What is the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)?

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is the policy for regulated qualifications in the Australian education and training system, agreed upon by Commonwealth, State and Territory ministers. A key objective of the AQF is to facilitate pathways to, and through, formal qualifications in higher education, vocational education and training (VET), and schools.

What is a related qualification?

Related qualifications are qualifications that meet four or more of the equivalency principles. During the 5-year transition period, candidates who hold a related qualification can be employed while working towards an equivalent qualification. Related qualifications provide a solid foundation for further education and training to reach equivalency.

If a candidate holds a related qualification or has significant professional experience, what are they expected to do?

If the recruiting organisation deems that a candidate has significant professional experience and/or a related qualification (the qualification meets at least four of the equivalency principles), the candidate must be working towards an equivalent qualification to be eligible for employment as a specialist family violence practitioner. This employment pathway is only available during the 5-year transition period.

What is meant by a candidate 'working towards' a qualification?

A practitioner must have a professional learning plan agreed with their employer which outlines the way that the employee will meet the minimum qualifications policy within the time limit according to the pathway that they entered employment. This may include being enrolled in a course and studying part-time or full-time.

Does a candidate need to have Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) registration to be employed?

No, there is no requirement for candidates to hold AASW registration.

FAQs about Pathways to Employment

When does the transition period begin/end?

The transition period will begin on 1 July 2021 and end on 30 June 2026.

What will happen after the transition period?

After the 5-year transition period, all new specialist family violence practitioners must:

- hold a Bachelor of Social Work or equivalent qualification; or
- be working towards meeting the policy where they have entered on the pathway for people who hold significant cultural knowledge and experience or lived experience and experience barriers to accessing formal study.

What is meant by lived experience?

Candidates with lived experience bring a depth of knowledge and expertise about how to create a more inclusive system that better responds to diverse needs, attributes and experiences, based on their own experiences of family violence, culture, disability, youth, LGBTIQ, or other aspects of their lives.

What is meant by 'appropriate support' for candidates with significant cultural knowledge and experience, or lived experience?

Support must include supervision with a qualified and experienced practitioner and may also include a mentoring relationship, allocated hours for study within the working week and/or study leave, professional development opportunities, etc.

During the transition period, will employers be required to accept candidates that hold a related qualification or have significant professional experience?

The mandatory minimum qualifications policy sets a minimum requirement to be considered for a position in the specialist family violence sector. This policy does not replace organisational recruitment policies and processes, and as such, employers can set a higher minimum qualification for their positions where required by business needs.

FAQs for the Current Workforce

Does this affect current specialist family violence practitioners?

No, **the existing specialist family violence workforce is exempt**. Anyone who is employed as a specialist family violence practitioner up to 30 June 2021 or has been on a break for four years or fewer, will not be required to meet the minimum qualifications.

What if a practitioner is on carer's leave or long service leave at the time of implementation?

Practitioners already employed in the specialist family violence workforce as at 30 June 2021, including practitioners on approved leave (including maternity and long service leave) at that date, are considered exempt from the policy and will not be required to meet the minimum qualifications.

What is meant by continued service?

Continued service refers to the ongoing period in which a candidate has been employed in a specialist family violence role, including when changing employers, or when taking carers', parental and long service leave or leave without pay.

Specialist family violence practitioners are permitted to be absent from the industry for up to four years for any reason, without being required to hold a mandatory minimum qualification. This aligns to the Community Services Portable Long Service Leave scheme enacted on 1 July 2019.

FAQs for the Future Workforce

Which future practitioners will this change apply to?

Specialist family violence practitioners in Government funded specialist family violence services or Government funded non-specialist services who are providing direct specialist services to victim survivors and/or perpetrators, including:

- risk assessment and safety planning
- intake and crisis support
- case management and service navigation.

Workers with oversight (e.g. managers, supervisors) of new specialist family violence practitioners who are working towards a minimum or equivalent qualification.

Which future practitioners won't this change apply to?

The mandatory minimum qualification requirement **does not apply** to the following practitioners:

- Government funded non-specialist services who are providing direct non-family violence specialist services to victim survivors and/or perpetrators
- Courts and Police staff
- Staff in Government funded specialist family violence services that provide:
 - reception/appointment bookings
 - administration
 - basic service navigation (e.g. booking crisis accommodation)
 - staff managers who do not provide services to victim survivors.

- Primary prevention practitioners
- Men's Behaviour Change facilitators

Do any exemptions apply for candidates without a minimum or equivalent qualification?

If a candidate has significant professional experience in a related field, and holds a related qualification, they must be working towards an equivalent qualification to be eligible for employment as a specialist family violence practitioner during the 5-year transition period.

If a candidate brings significant cultural knowledge and experience, or lived experience (for example, of disability, migrant or refugee experience, of family violence) and experiences barriers to accessing the pathways above, they may be eligible for employment as a specialist family violence practitioner. Once employed, the new practitioner must be working towards a minimum or equivalent qualification with appropriate support and must have supervision with a qualified and experienced practitioner.

What if a candidate is returning to work in family violence after more than four years in another sector?

The candidate may be eligible to be employed during the 5-year transition period where they hold at least 5 years' relevant professional experience or a related qualification. After the transition period, the candidate would need to meet the mandatory minimum qualifications requirements to be considered for employment.

Do all staff working within a specialist family violence service need to meet the mandatory minimum qualifications?

Only practitioners working within Victorian Government funded organisations that provide specialist services to victim survivors and/or perpetrators are required to meet the mandatory minimum qualifications.

Are existing practitioners who have worked as a specialist family violence practitioner interstate or overseas exempt?

No, only practitioners who have worked in Victoria are exempt. Interstate or overseas practitioners that do not hold an equivalent qualification may be able to enter the sector on the time-limited pathway with either 5 years' relevant experience or with a related qualification during the 5-year transition period. The significant cultural knowledge and experience and/or lived experience pathways will also be available to these practitioners.

FAQs about Equivalency Principles

What are the equivalency principles?

The equivalency principles were designed to assist individuals, organisations and government to determine whether a candidate holds a minimum, equivalent or related qualification for

the purposes of engagement as a specialist family violence practitioner. The decision about whether a qualification meets the threshold is at the discretion of the recruiting organisation.

The equivalency principles outline the key competencies required to work as a specialist family violence practitioner. These have been developed in close consultation with the specialist family violence sector, peak bodies and representatives from the higher education and vocational training sectors.

While the equivalency principles have been designed to be specific to specialist family violence work, they also align with the social work practice standards, established by the Australian Association of Social Practitioners (AASW), and reflect key learning outcomes of the Bachelor of Social Work degree, accredited by the AASW.

The alignment between the equivalency principles and the Bachelor of Social Work directly reflects the purpose and intent of Recommendation 209. The Royal Commission recommended that, no later than 31 December 2020, all specialist family violence practitioners in a funded service hold a Bachelor of Social Work or equivalent.

How are the equivalency principles used?

A qualification may be considered an **equivalent qualification** if it meets all seven equivalency principles.

A qualification may be considered a **related qualification** if it meets at least four of the equivalency principles.

The final decision regarding whether a qualification is an equivalent or related qualification will be made by the recruiting organisation.

FAQs about Policy Development, Impact and Monitoring

Do the mandatory minimum qualifications requirements replace the need for training and professional development?

No, mandatory minimum qualifications requirements do not replace organisational induction, training and professional development processes and policies. Employees must continue with ongoing professional development, to ensure their practice evolves with new research, evidence, and developments.

How will the implementation of mandatory minimum qualifications be monitored during the transition period?

The impact of the implementation of mandatory minimum qualifications on the family violence sector will be monitored by Family Safety Victoria and an external transition monitoring advisory group, which will include representation from the specialist family violence sector including employers and the education sector. A review of the impact of the policy will be undertaken prior to the completion of the 5-year transition period.

Will this impact the number of applicants for advertised specialist family violence roles?

No. Similar sectors have shown that qualified practitioners hold a professional career path in high esteem, therefore professionalising the specialist family violence sector is likely to be more attractive to some potential candidates. Analysis of the impact on recruitment processes will also be included in the review.

How were Aboriginal services and communities engaged in the development of this process?

In line with self-determination, the design of the approach for Aboriginal specialist family violence practitioners is being led by Aboriginal communities through the development and implementation of Dhelk Dja, the Aboriginal 10-year Family Violence Agreement. The Aboriginal Strategy Unit at Family Safety Victoria is supporting this process.