

## **Fit and proper screening for student social workers (v3)**

Social work is a profession that involves working with among the most vulnerable and marginalized members of society. It is, moreover, a profession with deep roots in human rights and social justice. Consequently, the integrity and ethics of social workers can be argued to be as important as their knowledge and skills.

There are two main measures of this that are legally prescribed in South Africa:

1. The Police Clearance Certificate (PCC)
2. The National Child Protection Register (NCPR), Part B

Students studying towards a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) are required to register as a student social worker with the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP), at the end of first or beginning of second year. SACSSP requires you to have a PCC as a condition of registration. If SACSSP does not register you as a student, you cannot do the social work internship (field practice), which means you cannot study social work.

The 'fit and proper' screening is thus vitally important.

### **Police Clearance Certificate (PCC)**

According to the Social Service Practitioners Bill (2016, section 47(1)(e)), a person may be refused registration if they have "been convicted of an offence in a foreign country and sentenced to imprisonment without the option of a fine or, in the case of fraud, any other offence involving dishonesty or any sexual offence, to a fine or imprisonment or both". The SACSSP uses the Police Clearance Certificate (PCC) as a key way to determine 'fit and properness'.

In practice, this means that, even if a person has a BSW, if they have a criminal record, they will be judged to be not a 'fit and proper' person and thus be denied registration as a social worker. There are some criminal matters that would probably be excluded, such as involvement in political action or a traffic fine.

The SACSSP requires all student social workers to have a clean PCC prior to their registration as student social workers and will not register a graduate as a social worker without a clean PCC. Thus, a person with a criminal record who enrolls for the BSW will probably never be permitted to register as a student social worker, which means they cannot complete the practical components of the BSW.

For these reasons, universities require students to obtain a PCC early in their studies – certainly, before they start field practice in their second year. Moreover, a student who successfully completes the first year of the BSW, but is then found to have a criminal record, will be required to deregister from the BSW and to transfer into another academic programme.

### **National Child Protection Register (NCPR)**

Part B of the NCPR is a register of persons who have been convicted of some form of child abuse. Clearance of all employees of any service concerning the care, protection and development of children is required by the Children's Act (2005), including such services

as Early Childhood Development Centres (essentially play schools and preschools for smaller children).

According to the Children's Act (section 43):

**43.** Further to the provisions of section 123(1) of the Act relating to types of prohibited employment or activity of a person whose name appears in Part B of the National Child Protection Register, no such person may-

- a) be employed or involved in any position, where he or she will be placed in a position of authority, supervision or care of a child;
- b) be employed or involved in any position, where he or she will be able to gain access to a child or to a place or places where children are present or congregate;
- c) own *or* have any economic *or* business interest in any entity, business concern or trade relating to the supervision or care of a child if such interest would cause that person to have direct access to or would place him or her in a position of authority, supervision or care of a child.

Given that all student social workers will work with children at some point in their training, this means that all students must provide evidence that their names do not appear on the NCPR Part B.

### **Application procedures**

All BSW students are, therefore, required to provide evidence that they do not have a criminal record and that they have not committed an offence against children. Both the PCC and the NCPR Part B clearance are required. Students apply for these themselves, according to the following procedures:

**PCC.** To apply for a PCC, report to your local police station where you will provide your full set of fingerprints. You must have your ID book with you. The cost is currently R114 per applicant. Details of the procedure for application for this certificate is set out on [https://www.saps.gov.za/services/applying\\_clearance\\_certificate.php](https://www.saps.gov.za/services/applying_clearance_certificate.php). Please rely on the information provided by the SAPS for the details of the application procedure.

**NCPR (Part B).** To inquire if your name appears on the NCPR (Part B), you need to complete Form 30 ([download here](#)). Submit this to DSD, who are required to provide you with a response within 21 working days (i.e. one month). You can post the form to the address on the form or email it to [CPRenquiries@dsd.gov.za](mailto:CPRenquiries@dsd.gov.za). There is no cost for this application.

Provide both documents to the Head of the Department of Social Work at your University, according to the procedures set down by your university. Your university may require you to obtain these documents prior to registration in first year, or at the time you apply for registration as a student social worker with the SACSSP. In either case, your continuation in the BSW is dependent on obtaining a clear record on both the PCC and NCPR (Part B).