



ASWB Exam Primer

In August of 2022, the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) published national, state, and school exam pass rate data in the [2022 ASWB Exam Pass Rate Analysis](https://www.aswb.org/aswb-social-work-examination-update/) to contribute to and lead engagement in profession-wide conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion. The data revealed disparities in exam pass rates for different demographic groups including black test-takers and older test-takers. Learn more about ASWB’s initiatives in response to the pass rate analysis here: <https://www.aswb.org/aswb-social-work-examination-update/>.

As the data publication coincided with the development of the Social Work Licensure Compact, some in the profession began asking questions about the Compact’s inclusion of the exam in the statutory language. The Q&A below is meant to explain how the Compact incorporates the ASWB exam and what this means for states considering joining the Compact.

As a general principle, occupational licensure compacts must be reflective of the current licensing standards that are common among the states in order to build the requisite trust among policymakers for enactment. The drafters of the Social Work Licensure Compact felt it necessary for the Compact to contain some measure of examination requirements consistent with the common standards among states.

Category of Licensure	Number of Jurisdictions Who License	Number of Jurisdictions Who Require ASWB Exam
Bachelors	45	41
Masters	50	49
Clinical	54	54

Q: Does the Compact include the ASWB exam?

A: The Compact does not explicitly name the ASWB exam. CSG does not advise professions to name specific institutions in the statutory language to ensure the longevity of the Compact. Naming things like exam providers or specific credentials/certifications could lead to a scenario where if those things are no longer prevalent in the states it would require the Compact to be redrafted and reenacted to reflect this evolution.

The Compact does include a term for, “Qualifying National Exam”. As defined in section 2 of the Compact, the Qualifying National Exam is, “*a national licensing examination approved by the commission.*” Currently, the only national licensing examination available to states is the ASWB exam. The drafters of the Social Work Licensure Compact intended this to serve as a placeholder for the commission to designate the ASWB exam as the approved Qualifying

National Exam, without naming the ASWB exam in statute for the reasons stated above. This would give the commission flexibility to approve future national licensing exams if they were to become a common standard for licensing.

Q: Is the Qualifying National Exam a requirement for states to join the Compact?

A: As stated in section 3 of the Compact, states do not have to require the Qualifying National Exam for all of their licensees. However, they must require the Qualifying National Exam for licensees applying for a Multistate License. For states to enact a licensure compact, policymakers must have a level of comfort that the practitioners entering their state via the compact are as capable as the practitioners licensed in their state. This “trust” is created by relying on the common standards for licensing among the states. The drafters of the Social Work Compact utilized a “Qualifying National Exam” to demonstrate to policymakers that they can indeed trust that licensees authorized to practice under the compact.

The use of a Qualifying National Exam does not prohibit a state from establishing alternative competency measures for licensure.

Q: What about social workers who were never required to take the ASWB exam?

A: There are some practicing social workers who were licensed prior to their state adopting the ASWB exam as a licensing requirement. Section 4 of the Compact allows the commission to create rules that would allow for these social workers who have been continually licensed to be eligible for a Multistate License. In these instances, the social worker would not need to pass the ASWB exam.

Q: What if I live in a state that doesn't require the Qualifying National Exam? Can I still use the Compact?

A: The Social Work Compact does contain an optional pathway that member states may adopt for practitioners in a category whose licensure requirements do not match those established in the compact. If a member state chooses to make this pathway available, the licensee could be awarded a multistate license once they demonstrate to the state licensing authority that they meet the requirements established in Section 4 of the compact for their category of licensure. Section 3 of the Compact specifies that a state will designate which categories of licensure where it currently meets the eligibility requirements for the purposes of issuing multistate licenses.

If a state does not meet all of the eligibility requirements at any one particular category, then that state cannot issue Multistate Licenses for that category. As stated previously, one of the requirements in section 3 is that the state must require the Qualifying National Exam for those who wish to apply for a Multistate License.

If a state does not require the Multistate License applicant to pass the Qualifying National Exam, licensees in that state may take the ASWB exam and petition the state board on an individual basis, but the state is under no obligation to process that application and issue the Multistate License.

Q: What is substantial equivalency?

A: Section 4 of the Compact gives the commission flexibility to determine if there are other alternative competency assessments that would be deemed “substantially equivalent” to the

Qualifying National Exam. Rather than dictating those alternatives to the states, the drafters of the Compact believed it best to let the member states determine how alternative paths to licensure should address eligibility for a Multistate License.

To learn more about ASWB's response to the exam pass rate analysis, please see

<https://www.aswb.org/aswb-social-work-examination-update/>

For additional questions please contact socialworkCompact@csg.org