

SWIMMING BETWEEN THE FLAGS: ACCREDITATION STANDARDS AS SAFEGUARD OR UNNECESSARY CONSTRAINT

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BEACH FLAG WARNING SYSTEM



Single
Tropical Storm Warning

Double
Hurricane Warning
(74mph or higher)
Water Closed To Public Use



Red
High Hazard
(High Surf and/or
Strong Currents. No
Swimming Advised)



Yellow
Medium Hazard
(Moderate Surf and/or
Currents. Swim With
Caution)



Green
Low Hazard
(Calm Conditions.
Exercise Caution)



Purple
Dangerous Marine Life
(Jellyfish, Stingrays,
Dangerous Fish)



THE USE OF METAPHORS

Metaphors offer a structure that aids us in establishing a relationship between something that we already know and something else we are trying to understand

Ely, M., Vinz, R., Downing, M. & Anzul, M (1997) *On Writing Qualitative Research: Living by Words*. Falmer Press (p113)



THE ROLE OF THE AASW

In the absence of a legislated regulatory framework, in Australia, the social work profession is self-regulating.

The AASW is the body mandated by members, HEPs, and the broader professional community to establish and maintain professional social work standards, and to regulate admission to the profession in Australia

To achieve these ends, the AASW carries responsibility for

- Accrediting social work programs
- Validating the credentials of overseas-trained social workers

AGREED PURPOSE OF PROFESSIONAL ACCREDITATION



To describe the entry-level standard of knowledge and skills that clients and service users should expect from social workers

To ensure consistency and comparability of social work programs across Australia through an independent quality assurance process

(Joint Statement: Professions Australia and Universities Australia, 2016)

AN AMBIGUOUS RELATIONSHIP



The AASW has no mandatory power to set or to enforce the regulatory framework for which it has delegated responsibility.

Its relationship with HEPs is underpinned by a longstanding mutual agreement and relies on the HEPs' continuing respect and engagement.

It's power-base depends on employers' preference for social work graduates from accredited universities

CONFLICTED INTERESTS



The AASW Board is the final decision maker

But

The accreditation process is dependent on volunteers, many of whom are social work educators,

- **Who are members of a small network of collegial relationships**
- **Whose own courses are periodically reaccredited**

The accreditation dialogue sometimes becomes softened

ASWEAS: MOVING THE FLAGS



The Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS) underpin the accreditation process.

The Standards articulate the criteria for accreditation and specify accreditation and review processes

A review of the ASWEAS (2012) was initiated in 2016

REASONS FOR THE REVIEW



1. Changes in the landscape

Systemic and emerging issues for social work education in Australia

- Increases in the number of courses
- Resource pressures
- Changing technology

2. Deficiencies in the definition, maintenance and monitoring of the 'safe area'

- Ambiguities and confusions in the language and structure of the 2012 Standards framework
- Inadequacies in reporting and accreditation processes

ESTABLISHING THE NEW SAFE AREA: CHALLENGES



Challenge One: Clearly delineating the territory: defining

- *Professional* accreditation concerns
- *Regulatory* responsibilities

Challenge Two: Incorporating many voices, negotiating with multiple stakeholders

- An educational dialogue
- A political exercise

Challenge Three: providing a coherent, useable set of review and accreditation documents



CHANGES MADE

The 2017 ASWEAS is an explicit regulatory framework.

The standards are presented in a single regulatory document, which specifies:

- Generic and professional graduate attributes of entry-level social workers
- Required teaching and learning content and processes
- Governance and staffing structures
- Areas upon which HEPs must report to ensure compliance

INFORMING THE BEACH USERS



In August 2017, the Board of the AASW launched the latest edition of ASWEAS,

We are now

- Negotiating its implementation with HEPs
- Finalising the accreditation process:

STORMY WEATHER



Inherent systemic tensions have become more explicit

- **Maintaining standards potentially threatens employment**
- **Specifying the HEPs' contractual responsibilities to students is confronting**

Not everyone got what they wanted

- **For some, the Standards go too far; for others not far enough**

FLAGS OR NO FLAGS?



.... it is best to swim at patrolled beaches. Travelling around Australia you will find that many beaches are not patrolled, often these are long stretches of rugged and dangerous coastline that are best enjoyed from the sand for very good reason, if you get into trouble at these beaches, you are on your own.

<https://www.worldnomads.com/travel-safety/oceania/australia/australia-beach-and-sun-safety>