



THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF WELFARE AND COMMUNITY WORKERS INC.

THE ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE PROFESSIONALS

Vic. Reg. No. A0036440S

ABN 28 696 828 620

Submission 55

The Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

INQUIRY INTO SKILLS RECOGNITION, UPGRADING AND LICENSING

I refer to your letter of 6 May 2005.

The Australian Institute of Welfare and Community Workers (AIWCW) is the relevant Australian assessing authority for the skilled occupation of Welfare Worker (ASCO Code 2512-11).

Skills assessments are based on the same criteria as used to determine whether a person is eligible for admission to membership of the AIWCW – the Association for Community Service Professionals. There are two broad criteria:-

- (1) Graduation from a two-year course of at least AQF Diploma level with a curriculum similar to a recognised Australian Diploma of Community Welfare Work which has been approved by the AIWCW.
- (2) Graduation from a qualification which is of at least equivalent to a two-year AQF Diploma course with a curriculum relevant and closely related to a recognised welfare course such as the Diploma of Community Welfare Work. In addition to this "Other Relevant Qualification", applicants must also have at least three years of relevant professional experience (of at least 30 hours per week) in the past 10 years, as well as being able to demonstrate that they have a practical understanding of the Core Competencies for welfare workers.

At the present time the AIWCW assesses about 100 applications a year.

Application forms and information are available on our website as well as being available as an email attachment for those making a request by email, in addition to being available through the post.

Because of the relative small number of assessments made by the AIWCW, we can provide a "personalised" service which tends to "weed out" inappropriate applications. We entertain the concept of providing advice and guidance to a large number of potential applicants before they actually submit an official application for assessment. This advice is either through the information on our website and/or through responses to emails, post and telephone enquiries. The more information that can be given to potential applicants gives them a greater understanding of the process and what is required for a positive assessment to make the process more efficient. If an application is not suitable, a detailed response is provided so that the applicant is quite clear and can understand why the application was not successful - although the incidence of unsuccessful applications is not great because of the pre-application information and help provided.

AIWCW Inc. National Office
PO Box 42
Flinders Lane Post Office
MELBOURNE VIC 8009
Phone: 03 9654 8287
Fax: 03 9654 1081
Email: info@aiwcw.org.au
Website: www.aiwcw.org.au

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The incidence of the awareness and acceptance of recognised overseas qualifications by Australian employers is not known. However, we are noticing an increase in employers requiring welfare work professionals to be a member of their professional body. Once a skilled migration application is processed as a positive assessment, the applicant is eligible for membership of the AIWCW when they arrive in Australia. Applicants already in Australia are invited to become a member of the AIWCW at the same time as their assessment advice is given to them.

Welfare work is a national profession, with appropriate Australian academic qualifications being provided on a national basis through the Australian National Training Authority Community Services Training Package. The AIWCW is the national organisation appropriate to the assessment of welfare work qualifications. There is no occupational licensing by state and territory regulators. A maximum consistency is obtained in the recognition of qualifications because of the one authority doing the assessing. The fact that there are no state and territory regulators is not seen as a problem in relation to the assessment of applications. A problem would be created if occupational licensing by state and territory regulators were introduced.

If licensing of welfare workers is seen as an issue, then the regulator should be nationally located because:-

- the AIWCW is the only recognised professional authority for determining the appropriateness of qualifications and experience for the profession;
- nationally provided academic qualifications have already been determined as being appropriate for the profession (as late as 2003); and
- the relatively small number of “active” welfare work professionals.

Whilst the process of regulating the industry would have the advantage of ensuring that only appropriately qualified people can hang up their shingle to promote themselves as welfare workers, the aspect of GST exemption for the provision of their services and the provision of Provider Numbers would need to be considered and recognised. It is difficult for welfare workers to obtain Professional Indemnity and Public Liability Insurance without them being a member of the Professional Association. Even then, it is quite a costly exercise, even though the Association obtains the insurance for them through a “group scheme”. If the industry was regulated it may make it cheaper to obtain the insurances, but then again, if the insurance providers know that the industry is regulated, they may capitalise on the situation.

As far as the AIWCW is concerned, the skills assessment and recognition of overseas qualifications for welfare workers is working efficiently and without any hassles. Where the applicant provides all the information required, an assessment is generally completed within 10 working days of its receipt. Where all the information is not provided, the assessor works with the applicant to ensure that the information is received without any fuss or delay. The assessing is done on a pro-active basis with assistance being given to the applicant rather than taking an arbitrary approach of refusing the application just because all the information is not submitted in the first instance.

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If the AIWCW sees any inefficiencies or barriers in the current process it is in the fact that it is often necessary to explain to enquirers that whilst the AIWCW is the relevant assessing authority for Welfare Work (2512-11), why can't the AIWCW provide assessments for the following skilled occupations which are considered to be similar to welfare work, if their qualifications/experience are not of a sufficiently high standard to achieve an assessment as a welfare worker:-

- Community Worker (ASCO 2512-13)
- Disabilities Services Officer (ASCO 3421-17)
- Family Support Worker (ASCO 3421-19)
- Parole or Probation Officer (ASCO 3421-11)
- Residential Care Officer (ASCO 3421-15)
- Youth Worker (ASCO 3421-13)
- Welfare Centre Manager (ASCO 1299-15)

Community Worker is in the same Unit Group as Welfare Worker in the ASCO groupings and, apart from Welfare Centre Manager, the other occupations are all listed in the ASCO Welfare Associate Professionals group.

AEI-NOOSR is unable to provide any information in relation to the number of applications received for these classifications, but it is considered that the number assessed would be insignificant. Notwithstanding the insignificant number involved, it seems logical that they should be assessed by the same authority that assesses the Welfare professionals – that is, the AIWCW.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require additional information, comment or clarification.

Yours sincerely

(Deane Welsh)
Office Manager/Overseas Assessments
AIWCW

30 June 2005