



Professional Housing Education

Recognition of Swinburne University of Technology Housing Courses

Panel Report

October 2008

Introduction

The AHI takes great pleasure in recognising the Swinburne University of Technology housing courses, the Graduate Certificate in Housing and the Graduate Diploma in Housing.

The Recognition Panel found that the courses offer a very high standard of education to the social housing workforce in Australia and New Zealand. The dedication of staff to their students is evident in their attention to detail in teaching, administration, course material and learning resources. The housing research that supports the housing courses is good quality and focused on core issues.

Ensuring that housing course content is of benefit to social housing practitioners fulfils one of the AHI's core functions as a professional association. We were pleased to undertake the recognition of Swinburne's housing courses in close collaboration with University staff. In doing so, we have learnt a great deal about the courses, the University, our industry and our own organisation. This is the first time we have undertaken professional recognition so we entered the process with some caution. At the end, we are impressed and inspired.

We would most particularly like to thank the academic and administration staff of Swinburne University for their support of the recognition process, for promptly providing us with all the materials we asked for and for their passionate and thoughtful participation in discussions. Without their openness and considerable efforts, and resources contributed by the University and the Institute for Social Research, this recognition process would not have been possible.

Professor Russell Crawford, Dean of the Faculty of Life and Social Sciences
Professor Terry Burke, Professor of Urban Studies, full-time Course Convenor and tutor
Dr Kathy Arthurson, Program Leader, Cities, Housing and the Environment, part-time tutor
Mr Scott Ewing, Senior Researcher, part-time tutor
Associate Professor Kath Hulse, Director, Swinburne/Monash Research Centre, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
Mike Pelling, Principal Business Development, Swinburne Institute for Social Research
Robyn Timms Student Liaison
David Hudson, Editor
Toni Kilsby, Student Operations Director
Fiona O'Donnell, Librarian
Associate Professor Peter Ling, Professional Learning

We thank past and present students for sharing their experiences so freely and enthusiastically:

Monique Bosland
Dennis Hartmann,
Marcus Tansing

Many thanks also to members of the recognition panel for their engagement with the recognition process, for their investigation and insight:

Jan Berriman (Chief Executive Officer, Melbourne Affordable Housing. Past student)
Mike Berry (RMIT)
Tony Chalkley (Deakin & RMIT Universities)
Joan Ferguson (Chief Executive, AHI and Panel Chair. Past student)
Brendan Moran (Director, Housing SA North)
Angela Percy (Policy Analyst, Housing Tasmania)
Therese Quinlivan (Director, Community Housing Aotearoa)

1. Background

1.1 Why does the AHI want to recognise the Swinburne housing courses?

The Australasian Housing Institute is the professional association of people working and volunteering in social housing in Australia and New Zealand. Our purpose is to support people working in social housing to achieve excellence in their work, and the best possible outcomes for their clients, local communities and for their organisations. We focus on the promotion of professional standards of practice in social housing including the professional recognition of housing courses.

The rationale for the AHI in undertaking the recognition of professional education in social housing is:

- To ensure quality social housing education delivery in pursuit of excellent social housing education standards
- To ensure that learners are acquiring qualifications that are meaningful and valid
- To give consumers of social housing services full confidence in the knowledge and skills of social housing providers
- To set a benchmark for assessing the suitability for professional membership
- To ensure the process is constructive in its evaluation and carried out with integrity and in an accountable manner, and
- Ultimately, to improve the service provision to social housing client

AHI Criteria for the Recognition of Professional Housing Education 2008

The AHI believes strongly in the need for a professional housing education for housing workers and does not underestimate the challenges inherent in providing this. The sector starts from a base where there are still disputes about whether or not we are a profession. The workforce is varied and dispersed. Although most housing employers have invested to some degree in professional education, the majority of people development funding has gone to Cert IV and in house training. The AHI supports and values entry level and on the job training, **but professional education and professional development activities must also be available to housing practitioners if they are to achieve professional standards of practice.**

The AHI wants professional housing education in Australia and New Zealand that is as good as any in the world, education that is high quality and with content that reflects Australasian theory and practice. The opportunity to review the Swinburne housing courses and to reflect on the future of the workforce in partnership with the Swinburne researchers and academics is exciting and will be of huge benefit to housing practitioners.

1.2 What guides the process for the recognition of housing courses?

The AHI works in partnership with higher education institutions to achieve the recognition of social housing courses. Housing courses are assessed through an assessment of:

- the content and structure of the course against a set of knowledge, skill and learning expectations considered essential for a social housing professional
- the staff and educational resources utilised in the delivery of the course
- the quality assurance processes that the University has in place in regard to admission standards, assessment, and the ability of the profession to influence the course content, structure and teaching methodology.

Course recognition is based on meeting the assessment criteria defined in the AHI's Criteria for the Recognition of Professional Education in Housing (**Supporting Document 6.1**).

The recognition process involves: pre-visit discussion, document review and planning; a visit to the educational institution to provide an understanding of those aspects of the course which cannot be judged from documentation alone; and the preparation of a report and recommendation for recognition or provisional recognition or a decision not to recognise the course.

The full process required by the AHI Board and overseen by the Education and Practice Committee is outlined in the AHI Process for the Recognition of Professional Education in Housing (**Supporting Document 6.2**)

2. How we assessed the Swinburne housing courses

2.1 Learning about the course and the institution

Swinburne University of Technology offers two housing courses in the Faculty of Life and Social Sciences (FLSS). Both were submitted by the Institute for Social Research (ISR) for professional recognition by the Australasian Housing Institute (AHI).

- N079 Graduate Certificate of Social Science (Housing Management and Policy)
- N0807 Graduate Diploma of Social Science (Housing Management and Policy).

The ISR provided the AHI with material to consider prior to the visit to Swinburne:

- the Swinburne University Generic Student Attributes (**Supporting Document 6.3**)
- background material on the origins, context and development of the Swinburne housing courses (**Supporting Document 6.4**)
- Units of Study for Housing Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma (**Supporting Document 6.5**)
- Swinburne Housing Graduate Attributes (**Supporting Document 6.6**)
- Student Evaluations (**Supporting Document 6.7**)
- People directly involved with Swinburne Housing Course Development, Teaching and Learning (**Supporting Document 6.8**)
- Typical Assignments by Unit of Study (**Supporting Document 6.9**)
- Sample module: Module 6 on Allocations Policy from unit of study HAS487 Housing Practice (**Supporting Document 6.10**)

2.2 Visit and Agenda

The panel visited the Swinburne University campus on 4 and 5 June 2008. The Dean of Faculty welcomed the panel and emphasised high value Swinburne places on the housing courses.

The two day visit followed an agreed agenda:

<p>Day 1</p> <p>Welcome: Russell Crawford, Dean FLSS</p> <p>Briefing & Discussion:</p> <p>University context - opportunities, challenges & constraints –Swinburne Housing Team</p> <p>Future prospects in higher education under new government – realistic assessment</p> <p>Research links to teaching</p> <p>Rationale for Swinburne Housing studies - Who for? Why Swinburne? Why still Swinburne?</p> <p>Panel Interview: Impact of courses on social housing sector- broader impact & achievement</p> <p>Overview of Housing Courses and Meet Academics: Development and changes to courses since inception; curriculum design and content</p> <p>Panel Interview: curriculum design, content, delivery</p> <p>Panel Interview: course assessments</p> <p>Selected student feedback</p> <p>Day 2</p> <p>Panel Interview: Housing administrative staff</p> <p>Panel Interview: Relationship Swinburne Housing courses and AHI framework</p> <p>Tour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 1pm Student Operations -Toni Kilsby, Director ➤ 1.30pm Fiona O'Donnell Library ➤ 2pm Russell Crawford Dean, FLSS ➤ 2.30pm Associate Professor Peter Ling Professional Learning <p>Panel Review</p> <p>Close with panel and housing team</p>

2.3 Inspections

During the visit the panel were shown the Faculty facilities and the library. The library visit showed the panel the range of learning materials available to students and how they can remotely access library resources. The issue of access for New Zealand based students was raised and while New Zealand based students cannot currently borrow books the required texts can easily be placed online for access by request.

The panel also visited the administration centre. There are opportunities for the housing course to more fully use technologies to improve learning. The team is currently discussing possibilities to utilise recent funding. One option is podcasting, with each student being provided with an iPod to hear recorded lectures. The technology choices for learning are expected to change as younger people enter the sector.

2.4 Interviews

Individual interviews were held with:

- Dean of the Faculty of Life and Social Sciences, Professor Russell Crawford
- Director of Student Operations, Toni Kilsby
- Associate Professor Peter Ling, Professional Learning
- Past students (Monique Bosland, Dennis Hartmann, Marcus Tansing)

Their comments are summarised below.

2.4.1. Dean of the Faculty of Life and Social Sciences

The Dean described the 2015 vision for Swinburne as an 'aggressive plan' to grow research productivity and income by 20%, increase international student growth and institute a professional development reward system. For the housing courses this means expanding the course, based on market demand, and improving its sustainability. Also being considered are off campus education programs, for example a housing course partnered by a New Zealand university and joint PhD models.

The panel were interested in the percentage of fees that are directed back to the housing courses to maintain the current high standards. The university view is that a vibrant research program will keep the housing area well resourced. The relationship between TAFE and the university produces a 'home grown' market and articulation agreements with other TAFEs.

The Dean identified the housing team and the research, which keeps the course relevant and constantly updated, as strengths and the impact of travel and workload on staff as limitations of the distance education model.

2.4.2 Director of Student Operations

The Director of Student Operations emphasised that both course have an extremely high retention rate of 93%. This is thought to be due to their quality and tailoring to the niche housing market and to the individual attention and support available to students. There is a strong commitment to retain these positive features of the housing courses.

2.4.3 Associate Professor Peter Ling, Professional Learning

Associate Professor Peter Ling provided information in relation to educational technologies that are currently available at Swinburne. Recent additions include: lectures on itunes; podcasting in some areas; lectopia- automated recording in major lecture venues that can be downloaded or streamed; virtual

classrooms where it is possible to text chat on line with virtual whiteboard to post graphics; wikis to assist group of students to work together; the use of blogs to reflect on learning; e-journals; mark as you go; e-portfolios with the facility to gradually build up work; and video conferencing.

Technologies have opened possibilities for learning which support distance education particularly well by enabling students to access learning materials and to connect with other students remotely. The housing courses are currently developing ways to better use technologies to support student connection and learning.

2.4.4 Feedback from Past Students

Three past students provided their insights into the courses based on their own experiences.

Points raised included:

- There are sometimes difficulties managing study, work and other life commitments
- Housing staff, both academic and administrative, are very supportive
- Having access to learning resources on the internet is helpful
- Doing the course is made possible with the practical and financial support of employers
- Completing the courses aids a housing career
- Face to face contact through tutorials reduced the problems associated with distance education
- Completion of the course provided inspiration to do more study and developed research and writing skills
- Assessment was applicable to the workplace, in most instances
- Challenges provided through course content enhance work experiences
- Coverage of the broad social housing context widens a student's understanding beyond their own part of the sector
- The course is empowering by confirming the value and validity of their own ideas and practices
- The links between teaching and research brought the course to life and made it more than just theory
- Some greater flexibility around required units of study would be good
- Education is valuable and should be accessed by everyone
- The chance to do a job swap as part of understanding aspects of the course would be good

2.5 Meetings

Participants at meetings held by the panel across the two days included all academic and administrative staff, other than Kathy Arthurson who was unable to attend due to illness.

Discussion covered a range of topics:

- University context - opportunities, challenges & constraints
- Future prospects in higher education under new government
- Research links to teaching
- Rationale for Swinburne housing studies
- Impact of courses on the social housing sector
- Overview of the housing courses
- Development and changes to courses since inception
- Curriculum design and content
- Course delivery
- Course assessment
- Course administration
- Relationship of Swinburne Housing courses to the AHl recognition framework

2.5.1. University context - opportunities, challenges & constraints

Including future prospects in higher education under new government, research links to teaching and the rationale for Swinburne housing studies

Swinburne University of Technology is an applied university, with an industry focus that is particularly strong in the area of housing. Swinburne Institute for Social Research [ISR] sponsors the housing courses, and is a Tier One research centre, one of six such key research units in the University. As a result it attracts additional resources to enable some academic staff to concentrate purely on research. It is also a member of the AHURI research network.

Swinburne performs well overall in university rankings in relation to teaching quality [4th], flexibility and responsiveness to students.

Moreover, the higher education division of the University facilitates a close relationship with Swinburne TAFE which provides both a competitive and strategic advantage overall to the University.

The Faculty of Life and Social Sciences [FLSS] was formed in 2005 in response to a Commonwealth policy shift that refocused universities around research. The Institute for Social Research gained financial certainty and stability, but lost some autonomy in the process. An initial loss of direction in relation to engaging-liaising with the social housing sector and marketing the housing program has since been regained. The Faculty supports an administration team dedicated specifically to the housing courses.

The ISR supports strong links between research and teaching, with a positive impact for both. Research ideas emerge from teaching programs and tutorials, and research, particularly in the Cities, Housing and the Environment [CHE] program area, helping to keep course content up to date. The CHE is able to tease out links between housing and relevant social issues such as social inclusion, technology, homelessness. Having the housing and research teams within one building facilitates the exchange of ideas. It is complemented by a housing PhD network including the AHURI symposium network across Australia.

New policy directions for the government in 2008 are likely to include an emphasis on skills shortage and social inclusion. Other policy directions for higher education to tap into will include climate change, environmental sustainability, the built environment and human capital.

2.5.2. Impact of the housing courses on the social housing sector

Approximately 80 students enter the program each year, and around 1,300 students have graduated to date [estimated to be between 15-20% of the public housing workforce – AHI 2006.] Student scholarships are offered by each of the State Housing Authorities (SHAs) and by Housing NZ. At the beginning of the courses the participation of public housing was 60% and community housing 40% This has reversed in recent years as government policy has changed. The emphasis in the course has been more towards public housing reflecting the reality of initial funding. This is being incrementally rectified.

While housing authority funding for student places has been for both public and community housing staff public housing has had greater membership of the Course Advisory Committee in recent years. It was observed that overtime community housing peaks have become less involved with promotion of the courses and there is work to be done to further re- involve community housing. In addition, AHI membership is broader than the public and community sectors and there is scope to consider an ever wider group of people interested in social housing issues, ranging from people working in real estate, property development, homelessness, finance, retirement villages, student housing and defence housing authorities. The changing student target group presents dilemmas about how best to position the course content.

Impact evaluation for Universities is undertaken as part of a national system. A recent move to web-based student evaluations has reduced the rate of response and the statistical significance of impact data for the housing courses.

There are strategies to measure student satisfaction at course level. Formal feedback is sought at the student residential, with a good response rate. This feedback is taken into account in planning (for example the residential has been brought forward in the year to February based on student feedback). Students are asked for feedback during their last subject and the casual contact between the administration staff and students results in the collection of important data.

Informal feedback is gathered from SHAs through the annual staff visits to each jurisdiction and has been positive. This feedback is from the people in HR workforce development areas and service delivery areas including client services.

Anecdotal data suggests that students supported by their agency do well. All SHAs are highly aware and supportive of professional development opportunities for their staff. Some jurisdictions are more supportive than others, with the interests of managers playing a stronger role in student outcomes, in New Zealand for example.

There has been no formal tracing of students' career paths after graduation, which would be useful data for the development of a housing workforce strategy. Future linking of the qualification to job specifications or increments would assist in establishing the value of a housing education. Added to the personal empowerment students report from undertaking the course and gaining a housing qualification, formal recognition of the qualification would directly link professional education to job prospects.

In 2006 the courses gained a Commonwealth education Carrick Award for their contribution to student learning in social housing and, in 2007 gained an AHI award in recognition of the contribution to social housing.

Indigenous students

Indigenous students have in the past completed the course, supported by a mentoring program and some specially developed learning materials.

The University offers all Indigenous students additional support services. Examples of these include the delivery of TAFE courses in workshop mode to suit learning and lifestyle needs and the option to graduate while still on campus.

There has been no specific marketing to Indigenous housing organisations and there are no current Indigenous enrolments. This area needs significant attention at policy and practice levels to identify the most appropriate professional development opportunities for the Indigenous workforce. Re-establishing an Aboriginal/Islander/Iwi Mentoring Program could be a useful step towards encouraging enrolments and maintaining students in the course.

2.5.3. Overview of the housing courses

The Graduate Certificate and the Graduate Diploma were established in 1995 following a two year industry consultation on housing education and training needs. They were the first of their kind in Australasia and remain the only taught tertiary level specific housing education on offer.

Graduate Certificate students must have a minimum of five years work experience in housing management or administration, or in a related area such as the social and community sector, public administration, private real estate or property development. Alternatively they must have an appropriate degree such as

Humanities, Social Science, Business, Architecture, Construction or Planning. Students who successfully complete the Graduate Certificate may articulate into the Graduate Diploma.

The courses are taught in distance education format. Each module is a self-contained study program on a particular topic, with further reading and exercises supported by Swinburne's on-line learning management system, Blackboard, and on-line library services. There have been additional modules developed in response to specific workplace requests from some jurisdictions. such as individual themes from the courses, for example allocations policy and practice and a completely new program on the Leadership Program for Housing. The latter was then formally recognised by Swinburne as an optional subject in the housing courses.

Students are increasingly funding their own study. Enrolments are slightly down in 2007, thought to be in part related to increased SHA spending on Certificate IV courses and in part to SHA restructures.

2.5.4. Development and changes to courses since inception

The content and approach of the Swinburne housing courses has evolved over time. Input to these changes has come from student evaluations, the consultative input of the Course Advisory Committee and teaching and research staff. The nested housing courses have completed three five-year cycles of the University's accreditation system, each necessitating evaluation, review and strategic changes.

Strategic decisions are made each year about what will be updated to ensure the units remain current and effective. Removed modules are sometimes available on CD Rom as extra information for students (for example the tenant participation unit). At the request of employers, course content is sometimes adapted as workshops or courses for specific groups.

Minor changes have been made to the order of the units. Students reported that the Australasian Housing System unit was a difficult starting point, so Housing Practice was brought into the first Semester. This change seems to be working well, but has raised issues about the lack of community sector content at the beginning of the course. There are broader implications here for whether course changes and enhancements influence recruitment to the course or whether they are a response to actual student enrolments.

Given the constantly changing political, economic and policy landscape, the panel were interested in the flexibility and responsiveness of the housing courses to develop and deliver new modules and adapt existing material. Minor amendments to units can be made quickly but approval must be sought for significant changes. With current requirements it takes the Commonwealth about 18 months to process new material that was developed by Swinburne in only three months. This delay can impact adversely on the quality of teaching and even deter responsiveness to the changing external environment.

It was agreed that it is too early to read the signals of the new government. Higher education institutions are waiting for information about a new model that may provide more flexibility, timeliness and responsiveness in the approval of course amendments.

The relevance of some course material to the New Zealand context was identified as an issue, with an option to explore local partnering or franchising to ensure the Swinburne housing product meets the needs of the New Zealand workforce.

2.5.5. Curriculum design and content

The group explored the relevance of the courses to parts of the housing sector with specialist needs, such as for example defence force housing, disability services, retirement villages, student housing and social developers. There was discussion about how these areas are, or can be, incorporated in the courses while

taking into account the need to determine fixed course parameters. It was agreed that particular attention needs to be paid to the integration of homelessness/SAAP and community housing content into the course to increase student access from these parts of the sector.

There is currently a single module on planning which the Swinburne team are keen to expand to 2-3 modules, particularly emphasising the area of affordability. This move would increase understanding of planning system and go more towards meeting criteria in this area.

There was discussion about how to maintain the integrity of content of the courses. While it is critical for the courses to remain current and relevant, care must be taken not to 'water down' the content too much through 'over inclusion' of information in a constantly shifting environment. The ongoing professional development of the social housing sector is reliant on not losing the core elements of the housing courses. Solutions to emerging needs may be offered by providing parallel streams (for example a choice of homelessness or property management and finance) and by developing specialist modules (for example one on Residential Supervisors).

2.5.6. Course delivery

The courses are arranged such that each week covers a discreet body of knowledge. The modules are quite substantial, with additional reading suggested where possible. Learning materials are mailed out and also provided online. Additional reading cannot currently be placed on the web because of copyright. The technology learning support is being built incrementally and currently consists of CD ROM material supported by Blackboard.

Students have clearly indicated that they want to connect with each other and they have this opportunity in tutorials. Three tutorials are held in each jurisdiction each semester. The costs of these are covered by student fees.

A half-day orientation is conducted by the Course Convenor for Year One and Two students at the beginning of each academic year in each capital city. Telephone conferences are offered for students in remote centres. A residential is held each year for all Year Two students in the Graduate Certificate, and there is a separate workshop for Graduate Diploma and Master's students.

Swinburne has learnt a lot from the delivery of the educational courses. They have a better understanding from contact with the students about how complex housing issues are. They have grappled with the changing educational environment and recognised the importance of having a wide mix of knowledge and skills in their team. They have found that teaching public policy to a group who live and breathe the topic is rewarding and productive.

2.5.7. Course assessment

Entry requirements for the course are pitched such that previous learning and experience is recognised, but there are no course exemptions available for previous courses of study or experience.

Assignments for the Graduate Certificate take the form of a short report, briefing or evaluation that replicates work activities but in a more critical and academic way. Students must complete all assignments at a pass level and attend the Year Two residential in order to obtain the Graduate Certificate. Graduate Diploma assignments are assessed at a higher level and there is an additional requirement of a substantial piece of original research. For students who have not previously undertaken tertiary level study there is a tendency to select more familiar subject areas, to reduce the pressure and workload of assignments. This contributes to the high success rate for the course, but does perhaps result in students maybe not challenging themselves with new skill and knowledge areas.

Assessments are conducted using a range of methods. There are no large essays and short sharp report writing skills are encouraged, based on what students are actually required to do in workplace. Some subjects are more practice based and use short answer questions and relevant exercises.

The first semester assessment is designed to give students an indication of areas in which they are doing well and those in which they are expected to improve. Individual support is provided to students to assist them to complete assignments. The assessment is spaced at halfway and end points of each module, and tutorials are timed to support the assessment process.

The university has prescriptive quality assurance processes. The form of assessment is left up to individual academics but assessment methods are reviewed by the University Assessment Panel each year. Terry Burke is a member of this panel. The quality assurance processes are an internal accreditation that goes through the faculty academic board, divisional advisory committee and then the academic board of the university before it is signed off. The housing course assessment is seen as an exemplar for other departments to match.

2.5.8. Course administration

There is an overlap between administration and academia that is unusual in the university context and significantly contributes to the success of the course for students. Administration is integral to the success of the courses, and this is reflected in the close and supportive working relationships across the housing team and the value placed on each person's role.

Administration staff handle issues such as relationships with SHAs in each jurisdiction, enrolment fluctuations, editing of course material and pastoral support of individual students. Fee setting is now the responsibility of a university fee setting committee, which does not necessarily consult with the delivery area or the industry. This may have implications for future fee increases how they reflect the value of the courses and in industry participation. At their current price the fees are perceived as reasonable.

The staff attribute the low 7% drop out rate in part to the attention paid to individual students, having a key contact key person in each state, offering 'counselling, and problem solving and pushing students when this is required. Attention is particularly focused on the first year students. Detailed feedback and guidance are provided on first assignment. The style, quality and depth of learning material is also thought to impact favorably on the retention rate.

It was noted the University management information system has had some logistical problems that impacted on the course, for example with problems such as inconsistency in moderation and double marking.

2.6 Visit summary

Extensive discussion over the two days of meetings between the Swinburne housing team and the panel, as documented above, ensured the panel gained a firm understanding of the course context, structure, content, delivery and the key issues facing staff, students and the sector. The staff team and other key individuals from the University made presentations to the panel, responded to our questions, showed panel members the University facilities and engaged in lively debate.

The panel thanks the Swinburne staff for their care and openness in facilitating this part of the recognition process and enabling the panel to collect valuable data to support our conclusions about the housing course.

Our main evaluative findings are outlined in Section 3, commentary on our findings in Section 4 and recommendations from the recognition process and suggestions for future collaboration between Swinburne and the AHI in Section 5.

3. Evaluation

3.1 Evaluation against the Criteria

The AHI recognises university courses which

- Ensure learners acquire housing qualifications that are meaningful and valid; and
- Enable social housing tenants, service users and partner agencies to have confidence in the knowledge and skills of the people providing social housing services who have attained these qualifications.

The Swinburne nested housing courses, the Graduate Certificate of Social Science (Housing Management and Policy) and the Graduate Diploma of Social Science (Housing Management and Policy), were evaluated against the knowledge, skills and learning expectations set out in the AHI Criteria for Recognition of Professional Education in Housing (**Supporting Document 6.1**).

The AHI is committed to forming a genuine partnership with universities seeking recognition for their courses, to achieve shared goals in relation to excellence in housing education. With this in mind, the panel agreed with Swinburne that the stipulation in the Criteria that all core knowledge expectations should be met in recognised courses is not intended to be as prescriptive as to exclude quality housing education that does not match the described content list to the letter. This is discussed further in relation to the legal context for housing in section 3.3 below

3.2 Course Design and Structure

The Swinburne housing courses have a good reputation across Australasia and are well regarded by past students and employers. They are the only surviving university level housing specific qualifications. Without the Swinburne courses there would be no opportunity for housing professionals to gain a housing specific tertiary level qualification and there would be an imbalance in the professional education, training and development opportunities available to social housing professionals.

University processes ensure high quality teaching and high level expectations of student, and that teaching methods and learning outcomes are monitored and moderated through the University quality assurance process. The courses are rated highly by the University.

The independent review provided by the recognition process is important to ensure that this professional qualification addresses the needs of the profession by providing an education that is well designed and structured to deliver the knowledge and skills outcomes needed by housing practitioners. Whilst there are difficulties inherent in the distance education model for teaching staff and students alike, Swinburne has succeeded in structuring a course that provides regular face to face contact and individual support on demand, and times tutorials and workshops to fit in with the assessment timetable. Assessment tasks are carefully designed to reflect the requirements on students in the workplace, to maximise the educational value of undertaking these tasks.

There is no comprehensive qualitative data to confirm that graduates are better able to perform as housing professionals, but anecdotally students and employers recognise that the course delivers increased confidence, knowledge and competency.

3.3 Curriculum and Content

The housing course curriculum has been assessed as highly relevant to the social housing sector providing an appropriate balance of skills, techniques, knowledge and competencies across the AHI's expectations for professional housing education and practice. There is an appropriate coverage of core and elective knowledge and skills.

It was agreed that Swinburne does what it does extremely well and that it cannot be expected to address every gap in coverage. The VET sector, workplace training and professional development through the AHI are alternative options for expanding the scope and content of professional development for housing practitioners.

There was lively debate during the process of recognition between the panel and the Swinburne housing team about the need or otherwise to include certain topic areas and the focus and balance of the existing courses, particularly since the guidelines were derived from the UK CIH qualifications framework. It is agreed that not every elements of the essential knowledge and skills requirements identified in the AHI Criteria for Recognition of Professional Housing Education can possibly be catered for in a single course, and there is no agreement about whether all are applicable in the Australasian context.

The curriculum will of necessity be constantly reviewed as the sector and the operating environment change. We cannot conclusively answer certain key questions and will need to continue the debate:

- Who is the target group?
- What topics need to be picked up elsewhere?
- What issues are there for Indigenous students?
- Can there be increased tailoring to New Zealand?

The most notable mismatch between in the course content and the AHI Criteria is in the omission of the core knowledge area of legal issues from the Swinburne housing courses. The University system does not facilitate cross-institution cooperation in the delivery of parts of a qualification, and Swinburne does not have a legal department to support the development of a legal component to the course. The AHI maintains the view that legal education is essential for a well rounded housing professional, but acknowledges that at present there is an insurmountable barrier to this being integrated into the housing qualification offered at Swinburne. This does not detract from the value of the housing qualification as a measure of professionalism.

The sequence of subjects taught was also discussed. In particular the decision to move the overview of the Australasian Housing System to the second semester in response to student feedback that it was a challenging topic to start the course. The AHI accepts that this was educationally the most appropriate action to take, but from the point of view of the professional association there are worries about the shift in emphasis in the course and the 'down-grading' of the key message about professionalisation – that all housing roles and organisations play an interrelated role in a single social housing system that is an integral part of complex legal, social, economic and environmental systems. This does not detract from the professionalism instilled in graduates through undertaking a very challenging and comprehensive housing course.

3.4 Facilities and Equipment

Not applicable

3.5 Staff

The Swinburne housing teaching and administration team is made up of individuals highly committed to the housing course and attuned to the needs of their students. The team constantly updates their knowledge and skills, and engage with the industry. Individually they are dedicated, knowledgeable, and supportive of each other and of their students. They provide value for money education, good administration, good pastoral care and good learning materials. For example, the extreme care and attention to detail taken with the editing of the learning materials is highly beneficial to students and ensures the highest quality is maintained.

Swinburne is part of the AHURI housing research network, and their housing research outcomes are very highly regarded among housing practitioners. The close working relationship between the ISR and housing course teaching and administration staff ensures the course content remains current and of a high quality, and that research priorities reflect sector issues. Swinburne's research into areas of work such as housing access has enabled housing practitioners to evaluate their own work and explore new ways of working with a clear evidence base.

Swinburne University has a high regard for the housing team and the ISR, and for the products they deliver. They have clearly been seen to have developed a niche market and to be doing very well in that niche.

3.6 Teaching Methods and Delivery

Distance education is a teaching model that requires particular skill and inventiveness on the part of the teaching and administrative staff and commitment and motivation on the part of the students. Swinburne has put considerable thought into teaching practices, learning materials and student support, and students clearly recognise and appreciate these efforts. Individuals are given every opportunity to make the best use of the University's human and physical resources and contact with each other. Supports are tailored to students' circumstances as far as this is possible, for example, with phone tutorials for students in remote areas and a mentoring program for Indigenous students. Learning materials and assignments are designed with the needs and expectations of the workplace firmly in mind.

Distance education is the only appropriate method of delivery for an Australasia-wide housing education. Swinburne continually reviews and improves teaching methods and delivery, and in doing so minimises the barriers and problems.

3.7 Teaching Resources

Teaching resources are of a high standard. The library is a fabulous resource and accessible to all students. The use of technology in the delivery of the course is well developed, appropriate and inventive. The quality of teaching materials is very high.

3.8 Conclusions

The recognition process provides external endorsement and confirmation that Swinburne has an outstanding track record in the housing area in teaching and research and has the infrastructure in place to continue delivery of a highly resourced distance education program. The strong, well developed links with TAFE create a pathway for students from Certificate IV in Social Housing while also ensuring a threshold number of students to progress in the post graduate courses. The link between practice and research ensures that courses draw on a bank of good current practice to inform course content and directions. It is hoped that recognition by the Australasian professional association adds a level to the current outcomes offered to students and the industry.

From the AHI perspective, with only one institution providing education targeted to housing professionals, it is important to check the quality in a structured and dispassionate way. The process of recognition offers something to members and the professionalism of the sector overall. Large amounts of funds are spent by SHAs on education and training and it is important to reflect on how these funds are directed. Recognition has practical and symbolic benefits for the social housing sector and the process has strengthened connections with educators and researchers.

4. Commentary on Issues Raised

4.1 Introduction

The Swinburne nested housing courses rate highly on all professional education measures previously determined by the AHI.

The Swinburne recognition was the first test of the AHI recognition criteria and process and has identified areas where the guidelines could benefit from clarification and adjustment. In particular, it is clear that it is not a reasonable expectation that the required knowledge and skills for a social housing professional be provided by the single institution offering specialist education in housing in Australasia.

The key issues that have arisen from the process relate to the constraints that challenge the academic staff, researchers and course administrators at Swinburne. These are where the University and the AHI can best focus our relationship, working together from the perspective of educators and professional development specialists to remove or ameliorate the difficulties in the way of achieving the best possible education outcomes for the social housing workforce.

4.2 Single provider

It is not reasonable to believe that one nested postgraduate Certificate and Diploma housing course will cover all the bases for the diverse and geographically far-flung social housing sector across Australasia. However, Swinburne has done remarkably well as a single provider in a non-competitive environment. Swinburne's strategy is to support and supplement other education resources and services, to provide a complete education for housing workers in conjunction with other relevant generalist and specialist graduate and postgraduate courses available elsewhere. It has achieved high levels of success in a very difficult operating environment, through thoughtful design and delivery.

Swinburne has sought solutions to limitations inherent in being a single provider. For example, it cannot be expected to have all the knowledge for all strands of the social housing profession located within the one institution. Developing a legal stream in the housing courses is not viable without a legal department or a partnership with another University. The University system by its nature places barriers to partnerships between teaching institutions, and this is a major problem for developing modules in subject areas not currently researched or taught at Swinburne. In the area of community renewal a partnership will be trialled between Swinburne and UNSW to establish a module on community renewal, drawing on expertise at UNSW.

A single professional education provider, however excellent, leaves the social housing sector in a very vulnerable position. On the other hand, the social housing market is small and unused to professionalism compared to other human services markets and too many service providers in the current environment would be simply unviable. At present less than 1% of the social housing workforce graduate from Swinburne each year. Looking to the future, competition may become a factor for Swinburne to take into account. The size of the market is not just related to the size of the industry but also to the level of demand for housing education. If the industry does become more serious about demanding a housing education, Swinburne may be hard pressed to meet all housing education needs.

4.3 Focus and interests of the profession

The social housing sector is growing and redefining itself but the social housing workforce and the organisations that employ them do not widely acknowledge their profession or embrace a requirement to undertake ongoing professional education in their chosen field. There are two implications for Swinburne:

the demand for and uptake of educational opportunities is not as wide spread as it could be; and there is a current focus on vocational and on the job training rather than professional education.

The largest portion of the sector is public housing, and their particular needs and interests are reflected throughout the housing course and in the composition of the Course Advisory Committee. There is scope to seek further input from other parts of the sector, and more widely from the private sector (which shows an increasing interest in and engagement with social housing) and to adapt and tailor materials to varying needs where this is viable and useful. The challenge will be not to water down content in trying to meet needs.

It is critical for Swinburne that adapting and tailoring the course to encourage a wider student base does not lose SHAs and Housing NZ in the process. These agencies provide the core support for current students and a substantial income stream for Swinburne. Resource issues do necessarily to some extent limit what the Swinburne housing courses can achieve. Of a \$450,000 income for the University from student fees at present, only \$250,000 is put directly to the provision of the course and a reduction in this would put pressure on an already hard pressed team.

New policy directions likely to be of interest and importance across all parts of the housing sector are housing policy, affordable housing, social inclusion, workforce skills and human capital and climate change/environmental sustainability. Swinburne has expressed their intention to review and redevelop modules to reflect these emerging issues.

4.4 Distance education

Delivering distance education to a profession is enormously taxing on staff. There is a huge amount to be done in keeping materials updated, providing add-ons and face to face teaching, sustaining partnerships and building relationships with the sector and students. The critical links with research can result in the loss of teaching staff to research.

Swinburne does distance education well. The dedicated administration support for the housing course has been an efficient and effective way to manage some of the challenges, and the quality and flexibility of teaching staff, methods and materials has ensured good outcomes for students. The high student retention rate is very impressive, so Swinburne has clearly done a good job in making distance education work for the people who have done the course. The modules, web based resourcing, availability of administrative and academic staff, peer support and the face to face and residential components within the course are very well received.

Distance education is obviously the best option under the circumstances for a single metropolitan based University seeking to deliver professional education to a geographically dispersed and limited market. However, distance education does not suit everyone. There is scope for further development of residential modules in specific subject areas that would lend themselves well to intensive face to face learning, such as perhaps the future community renewal module.

4.5 How the professional association can support the educators

The AHI believes that we have a very positive and productive working relationship with Swinburne and the recognition process has built on this. Practical ways that the AHI can assist Swinburne in their role as primary housing educator for the Australasian social housing workforce include:

- Urging change in the Commonwealth University course approval process to enable a quicker response in course design and content to reflect policy and practice change
- Assisting to fill a gap in course materials by providing example of good practice that can enhance both the research and the teaching of housing

- Support with the graduation processes
- Joint promotion and branding
- Alumni support
- Adding a student award/joint award to the AHI awards for excellence
- Facilitating mentoring possibilities, including support for indigenous students
- Offering reduced membership fees for graduates
- Providing infrastructure and support for cross-sector field placements between community and public housing
- Offering an AHI scholarship for indigenous students –this would be funded by the AHI and the students selected by Swinburne

5. Recommendations

The panel recommends that

- 1. The N079 Graduate Certificate of Social Science (Housing Management and Policy) and N0807 Graduate Diploma of Social Science (Housing Management and Policy) is recognised by the AHI against the AHI expectations for professional education and practice for the social housing workers in Australia and New Zealand.**
- 2. Swinburne University continues to support the housing team and the ISR to deliver the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma courses to the social housing workforce. This requires sufficient academic and administrative resources to meet need, address a rapidly changing environment and sustain significant engagement with the industry and the AHI.**
- 3. Swinburne and the AHI work together to strengthen the Criteria and streamline the Process for future recognition of the Graduate Certificate and the Graduate Diploma**

5.1 Suggestions for future work arising from discussion

The recognition process identified a number of possibilities for further work to enhance housing education:

1. AHI seek to influence the University endorsed courses changes at the commonwealth level to ensure timely and responsive course developments thus facilitating quick turn arounds for major policy and practice changes
2. AHI continue to provide a range of professional development resources and activities to complement and support the housing education provided by Swinburne eg. Mental Health First Aid, Anti-Social Behaviour Responses
3. Swinburne consider the inclusion of core content relevant to the homelessness, supported accommodation and community housing sectors
4. Swinburne look at new options for delivery of the housing courses in New Zealand e.g. licensing delivery.
5. Swinburne broaden membership of the Course Advisory Committee to assist in broadening course content to cover all parts of the social housing sector and prioritise key knowledge areas eg member from the community housing sector; an AHI representative
6. Swinburne and AHI further explore the possibility of access to library databases for AHI members to support their ongoing professional development
7. Swinburne conduct a short course in Housing Economics, along with related research and Asset Management in collaboration with others
8. AHI and Swinburne explore the possibility of a partnership approach to gathering data about what happens to graduates and their impact on the sector
9. AHI consider creating a scholarship to the housing courses for one indigenous student each year.

6. Supporting documentation

- 6.1 Australasian Housing Institute Criteria for Recognition of Professional Education in Housing
- 6.2 Australasian Housing Institute Procedures for Recognition of Professional Education in Housing
- 6.3 Swinburne University of Technology Generic Student Attributes
- 6.4 Institute of Social Research Background Material – origins, context and development of the housing courses
- 6.5 Units of Study for Housing Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma
- 6.6 Swinburne Housing Graduate Attributes
- 6.7 Student Evaluations
- 6.8 People directly involved with Swinburne Housing Course Development, Teaching and Learning
- 6.9 Typical Assignments by Unit of Study
- 6.10 Sample module: Module 6 on Allocations Policy from unit of study HAS487 Housing Practice