Article

Swings and slippery slopes: Reflecting on processes of higher education curriculum in the space of globalization and a pandemic

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Abstract: The Asia-Pacific is the most expansive region for social services and health care, ranging from New Zealand in the south to the border of the Russian Federation in the north. Professional education in human services, social work, and allied health is rapidly expanding in this region and globally as the power and influence around these professions 'swings' between different countries in the region. The globalization of social and health care issues is challenging professional higher education and accreditation processes to adjust to producing education graduates who are global professionals, multi-lingual, culturally responsive, and able to work in diverse community contexts and within the 'slippery slopes' of social and economic change. This article explores the development of a new social work curriculum and course for an international higher education provider that was implemented in 2022 and aims to meet the challenges of intercultural learning and skills development in the new plural-lingual and fragmented global contexts. The ethnographic study reveals that education organizations and educators can advocate for and develop globalized, internationalized social work and social care curricula in this unsteady context when supported to do so by regulatory authorities.

Keywords: social work; globalization; plural lingual; ethnography; social care; higher education

1. Introduction

The International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) and partner organisations launched a global strategy to advance social work education, updating the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training, resulting in a worldwide minimum set of standards [1]. The campaign to build minimum standards formally commenced in 2018 when IFSW established an Interim Education Commission because several IFSW member organisations argued that people working in social work education needed a global policy that could be used as an advocacy tool for improving education in their countries.

"The new standards provide a crucial opportunity for the global social work community to work collaboratively towards fostering new ideas and encouraging practice that lifts the baseline of social work education" [1].

The main objectives of the IFSW Global Standards are to:

- Ensure consistency in the provision of social work education while appreciating and valuing diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Ensure that social work education adheres to the values and policies of the profession as articulated by the IFSW and IASSW.

- Support and safeguard staff, students, and service users involved in the education process.
- Ensure that the next generation of social workers has access to excellent quality learning, opportunities that also incorporate social work knowledge deriving from research, experience, policy, and practice.
- Nurture a spirit of collaboration and knowledge transfer between different social work schools and between social work education, practice, and research.
- Support social work schools to become thriving, well-resourced, inclusive, and participatory teaching and learning environments [2].

"The Global Standards aim to capture both the universality of social work values and the diversity that characterises the profession through the articulation of a set of standards which range from the prescriptive to the aspirational. While acknowledging the overarching objectives, the reality is that the social work and human services education experiences and policy frameworks vary significantly across the Asia Pacific regions" [2].

1.1. Social and health care education in a post-pandemic world

The impact of moving social and health services, communications, and processes online during the pandemic, with workers, clients, communities, and management only used to face-to-face services, has been challenging for all the 'care' professions. Remote or distant working—workers being based at home or in restricted service spaces—was something people were not trained for or necessarily supported to do. However, there are positives in the development of remote working for social work, including the flexibility and independence of the work. Clients from groups such as younger people, women, older men, and children are accessing social and health services in greater numbers, ensuring that more and more people are receiving the financial and emotional assistance they may need [3].

The physical distance created by using technology can create safety during a disclosure of personal circumstances, and recent research has revealed that a mix-mode delivery of social services may be the most beneficial to individuals and families [3,4]. Social services education similarly had to 'pivot' to online delivery of the education content and skills development, and research has revealed the significant stress on educators and students during 2019–2021 [5], although again, there are positives in what is now termed 'hybrid' education delivery being more accessible across urbanized and regional communities, specifically in the Asia Pacific.

1.2. Social work in the Asia-Pacific region

Asia-Pacific is the most expansive IFSW and social work practice region, ranging from New Zealand in the south, to the border of the Russian Federation in the north and the Middle East. The major issues of focus in terms of social work responses and practices are child trafficking, climate change, disaster recovery, and societies in conflict. The current expansion of the sheer number and diversity of social services and of workers within the social work profession is profound and impacts many individuals, families, and communities by allowing clients to see themselves in the workers and services they access. Social work practice frameworks in the Asia Pacific

regions are advocating an eco-social approach to a social contract requiring key actions and commitments from all nation states in relation to five equally considered dimensions of sustainability: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership.

Discussion of the diversity of social work practice frameworks in the Asia Pacific region commences with how the term 'Asia Pacific' includes many countries and territories in Southeast Asia, East Asia, Polynesia, Australia, New Zealandia, Melanesia, Micronesia, and South Asia. There have been significant changes in this region in the past 50 years, with the region experiencing economic growth, although volatility and stagnation have characterised recent economics in Japan and Taiwan [6]. Regarding social change, the transformation of traditional cultural, social, and familial structures is widespread with the growth of the middle class and the rising influence of social entrepreneurs and non-governmental organizations. Traditional values such as filial piety and familyism have weakened, and values such as individualism and social justice have taken hold among younger generations. In terms of politics, there has been the collapse of old western colonies, the weakening of monarchies, and a retreat of communist ideologies, with a growing emphasis and international pressure for the rule of law, democracy, and civil society [6].

Social work, as a part of this regional transformation, is often seen as an instrument for creating social stability and/or social control. Social work is also regarded as an important tool of governments for social development, social justice, and human rights, but there is tension over whether the goal of social development should focus solely on economic growth or the development of civil society [6]. The major criticism of Western social work theories is that they are grounded in individualistic ideologies that are not applicable to Asian societies, which have cultural and political histories of collectivistic frameworks. Western interventionist practices are also increasingly challenged by Indigenous populations whose 'ways of knowing' are at variance with white Anglo-Saxon culture [6].

"For example, Western family therapies may need modification because Asians are not so expressive, and they tend to avoid interpersonal confrontation within the family… While community empowerment is perfectly legitimate in Western communities, protests against the government and civil disobedience may be regarded as subversive acts in Asia-Pacific countries without this democratic tradition" [6].

Advocating and upholding human rights and social justice is the motivation and justification for social work across the globe and, more recently, in the Asia Pacific. The social work profession recognizes that human rights need to coexist alongside collective responsibility. Social workers across the Asia Pacific region work actively with all communities to support and be part of social development processes at micro, mezzo, and macro levels toward an eco-social and socially just world [7].

There has been a rapid and significant expansion of professional social work education in Australia, which also serves most of the Asia Pacific region, with a growth to 40+ HEPs in the past decade providing a 4-year Bachelor of Social Work and/or 2-year Master of Social Work (qualifying). Most social work students and graduates in Australia are originating from Asia Pacific nations, and the work of the AASW in terms of representing the profession, social justice advocacy, and professional social work accreditation has been active in terms of consultations and reviews of social work education standards and social work practice standards within

Australia, but this is failing to keep pace with change within the profession in the Asia Pacific region.

1.3. Higher education providers (HEPs)

Independent higher education in Australia exists via federal regulation from TEQSA and the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) [8], which underpin and provide assurance of quality and integrity in the delivery of Australian higher education. The standards were updated on 1 July 2021, with the commencement of the revised Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021.

These new standards allow private higher education providers (HEPs) to seek University college status, a new category which is both an operational and marketing opportunity for private HEPs to mirror public universities in Australia. **Table 1** outlines the current number of different types of higher education providers in Australia [8].

Table 1. Summary table of the national register.

Provider category	*SAA	Non-SAA	Total
Higher education provider (HEP)	12	130	142
Australian university (Public)	40	0	40
Australian university College	5	0	5
Australian university of specialisation	1	0	1
Overseas university	1	0	1
Total providers	59	130	189

*SAA = Self accrediting authority.

The recent context of higher education in Australia for all HEPs included having to respond to and operate within an ideological policy framework for both HE and VET set by the previous Abbott/Turnbull/Morrison LNP Federal government, which had been in power 2013–2022 [9]. Their policy framework profoundly influenced how the government has reacted to the education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, essentially leaving them to be prevailing market forces [10,11]. In 2021–2022, there were significantly lower numbers of international students and a small increase in domestic student enrolments and post-graduate short courses, meaning lower income for all HEPs and an estimated loss of academic and professional staff positions in the sector during 2020–2021 [12].

WHO research on interprofessional education and collaborative practice in social and health care identified that creating accreditation standards for health and social care education programs needs to include clear evidence and the creation of policy and regulatory frameworks to promote collaborative practice as partnerships between education leaders, regulatory bodies, legislators, government leaders, researchers, and professional associations [13]. Barriers to this type of interagency collaboration in the development of professional practice frameworks and accreditation standards were identified as 1) differences in practice, 2) professional philosophies, 3) history of the

profession, and 4) ideological and practical differences in professional education and education standards [14].

In Australia, there is a fragmented and inconsistent approach to social and health care accreditation standards and to practice standards, and these concepts are ill-defined and often lack accountability. Professions regulated under the NRAS are more explicit than the self-regulated and membership professions, such as social work. There are, and always have been, opportunities for greater consistency and collaboration across professions, and there are some indications of beginning collaboration between regulated health professional accreditation and regulatory bodies and national recommendations to reform standards in social and health care via recent royal commissions into aged care, disability care, child protection, and so on [14].

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Ethnographic research and curriculum development

Ethnography, derived from anthropology, is a research methodology that studies social, community, and/or organisational cultures and cultural sense-making. It is linked to inductive research as a focus on local interpretations, aimed at understanding an insider's perspective of the habits, norms, practices, rituals, and patterns of interaction of a group, community, or organisation. Ethnographic research methods are designed using different epistemological approaches, such as critical, interpretivist, and postmodernist, and include auto-ethnography or performance ethnography as guiding frameworks [14,15].

Two important methodological distinctions about ethnography relate to an objectivist approach, which is related to positivist research, with researchers claiming they can maintain objectivity and do not influence or interfere with people or activities under observation [16]. The postmodernist approach to ethnography and participant observation is related to social constructionism as an approach where researchers influence and affect the research setting and are very much a part of the process. Observational objectivity is neither feasible nor desirable—the researcher is part of the production of knowledge. The research described in this article has taken this postmodern approach [14,15].

Ethical issues for ethnographic research are not dissimilar to other forms of qualitative research: informed consent, guarantees of anonymity, and giving back to the organisation, are all issues to be addressed. Additional issues such as committing ourselves as researchers to long-term relationships and trust are especially important as we observe and hear things of a sensitive nature, and we may become a sounding board' for the participants. Van Maanen [17] describes the ethnographic researcher as "part spy, part voyeur, part fan, part member" [14]. This research was approved by the management committee of the HEP as the subject.

Observation is a method of data collection in which researchers participate in and observe events and actions within a specific research field. Participant observation involves the observer being a member of the setting in which they are collecting data. There are quite a few variations of this definition: participant observation as ethnographic research seeks to determine, 'what is going on here?' to better understand

and capture the context within which people interact. Firsthand experience in a setting allows researchers to be open to discovery and inductive reasoning rather than guessing about the context. The research may uncover things that routinely escape the awareness of the participant using a different method; it provides a chance to learn things that people may be unwilling to discuss in interview or survey-type investigations [14,15].

Document analysis is a systematic process for evaluating data from documents, including printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material. Document analysis is data examined and interpreted to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge about a specific topic or process [18,19]. Documents contain text (words), numbers, and images that have been recorded with or without a researcher's intervention, data that can be referred to as 'social facts', which are produced, shared, and used in socially organised ways [20]. Document analysis was used in this research in combination with other qualitative research methods, such as observer reflections and social or organisational data (publicly available), as a means of triangulation of data to confirm the phenomenon of new curriculum development within a new HEP within the international education context [21].

2.2. Data collection

This ethnographic research at IHM was conducted during 2021–2023 via the collection of curriculum and educational documents, archival materials, and artifacts at the Institute of Health and Management relevant to the research, including websites, curriculum documents, government standards, accreditation guidelines, minutes of meetings, policies and procedure documents, emails, social media, reports, organizational research publications, and in-house blogs. Observations of curriculum development documented included reflections of the researchers from meetings, emails, course development processes, course advisory meetings, organizational curriculum processes and reviews, TEQSA processes and reviews, AASW professional social work education accreditation processes, ACHSSW processes, NFEN processes and outcomes, ANZSWWER processes, and other national and international social work development processes (IFSW, etc.).

Data also included unsolicited feedback about curriculum processes and content from academic and professional staff and others via conversations, texts and/or emails. Student evaluations of teaching and learning in 2022 and educator reflections connect organizational processes with educational outcomes. The documents, observations, and reflections were all stored in MS Teams folders accessible by the research team of three (3) academics and the Academic Dean, who oversaw the new course development process within the organization.

The new Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) at IHM was written and developed during 2021, accredited by the AASW in February 2022, and approved for delivery by TEQSA also in February 2022. The BSW commenced delivery to cohorts of 100% international students from primarily East Asian countries in July 2022. To date, there have been three (3) intakes of the course, and the data and evaluations in this article pertain to the period up to the end of Semester 1, 2023.

3. Results

The following table outlines the categories of data collected, summarized, and analyzed by the researchers from the HEP as social work academics and with the required discipline processes and government frameworks. These data represent the complexities of new course and curriculum development within the Australian higher education system for professional degrees such as social work and nursing. The six categories of data, 1) organizational committees, 2) organizational document management, 3) organizational and academic communications, 4) organizational structure and supports, 5) external networks and support, 6) educator reflections, and 7) student surveys, reveal the extant efforts that must be garnered by many people to create a new course to provide to international students.

These data described in **Table 2** were available to the researchers online via the organizational MS Teams, email archives, organizational ICT, and software systems such as SharePoint. Relevant documents had also been stored on staff USBs. No confidential or commercial-in-confidence documents, information, or business analysis have been described here, and documents were accessed, perused, reviewed, and then summarized by the researchers in 2022.

Table 2. Categories of data collection.

Category of data	Types of data
Organizational committees	Discipline/course working groups, course advisory (peer) groups, CDWG, CADC, academic board, board of directors.
Organizational document management	Content documentation, process documentation, internal document templates, TEQSA and AASW course submission templates, course and curriculum documents, planning documents, project management systems,
Organizational and academic discipline communications	Emails, zoom discussions, meeting agendas, meetings, meeting minutes, action plans, phone conversations,
Internal IHM organizational structures and support	HR, library and E-resources, learning designers, IT, executive management, other disciplines, champions.
External networks and supports	AASW, ACHSSW, ANZSWWER, NFEN, IFSW.
Educator reflections	Self-reflection of course delivery + peer observations & reflections
Student surveys	Survey of student satisfaction of unit delivery + resources + organizational performances.

The academic (research) team met monthly during 2022 and as part of the academic team meetings, they discussed the themes and summarized the data, most specifically during September and October 2022 when all the relevant data was available. The following table summarizes the relevant data used to create the thematic analysis. **Table 3** summarizes all the documents collected that describes the processes of course and curriculum development that the academic team participated in. These data are numerous and complex to manage without significant organisational support.

Table 3. Research data on social work curriculum processes.

Organizational & discipline processes	Documents analyzed	Data summarized
AASW accreditation processes and documentation	AASW Australian Social Work Education Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS), March 2020 version & V2.0 Updated August 2021. AASW ASWEAS Field Education Standards, AASW Board Approved Version, April 2021. AASW Australian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics, November 2020. AASW Family Violence Curriculum Best Practice Guide, April 2018.	Australian social work accreditation standards. Australian social work accreditation processes. Australian social work code of ethics. Australian social work practice frameworks and standards.
	Emails (communications) from AASW Quality Accreditation & Credentialling division	Communications directing the accreditation processes and timelines and potential outcomes.
	IHM BSW—AASW ASWEAS Submission, July 2021 draft, September 2021 final version (IHM, 2021)	AASW ASWEAS required content, accreditation standards. IHM and participants' interpretation of ASWEAS requirements, IHM and participants' responses to feedback about BSW content.
	Emails (communications) from AASW ASWEAS Accreditation Panel. Written feedback (word document delivered via email) about IHM BSW—AASW ASWEAS Submission & IHM BSW Curriculum documents, email received by Head, School of Social Work on 6/9/2021.	Panel members' roles in conducting accreditation processes, their communication styles, their interpretations of accreditation processes and ASWEAS requirements, their decision-making processes, and outcomes.
IHM quality assurance frameworks	IHM Templates— IHM Curriculum Development Procedure Plan, 2020 version. IHM Curriculum Benchmarking template, 2020 version IHM Curriculum template, 2020 version & 2021 version IHM Curriculum Review Action Plan, 2020 version & 2021 version. IHM Unit Guide template, 2020 version & 2021 version, example from Master of Nursing. IHM Learner Guide template, 2020 version & 2021 version, example from Master of Nursing.	Purpose and consistency of templates. Use of templates to create curriculum. Version control processes and purposes.
	Discipline specific document and emails (communications) from IHM QA and curriculum development staff. IHM Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Curriculum Development Procedure Checklist. Minutes of IHM CADC and Academic Board meetings (communications and decision-making), IHM Staff Hub – organizational policies and procedures, Staff Hub—Home (sharepoint.com), accessed throughout 2021.	QA management and staff direction regarding managing the QA requirements of curriculum development. QA management and staff interpretations of QA and its relationships to curriculum development, government regulations (TEQSA) and discipline specific (social work) requirements. QA decision-making processes and outcomes and their impact on curriculum development and outcomes.
Federal government higher education policy and regulatory frameworks	TEQSA—Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021, TEQSA website, accessed online 2020–2021. IHEA – IHEA responds to TEQSA Review—Making and Assessing Claims of Scholarship and Scholarly Activity, 14 December 2020.	Australian Federal Government policies and regulations, purpose, aims, changes, motivations, ideologies, policy period 2015–2021. Commentaries on HE policies and role of TEQSA—IHEA cautions that a narrow definition of scholarship will impact diversity and quality in Australian higher education.
TEQSA course approval processes	TEQSA letter—Evidence Requirements: Institute of Health & Management Pty Ltd accreditation of Bachelor of Social Work, dated 10 March 2021 including Attachment A—Evidence Table. Confirmed evidence table for course accreditation (registered provider), blank version, version for Master of Nursing, IHM 2020, Social Work draft version, 2021 & final version 2021. Emails between IHM and TEQSA re BSW. TEQSA letter—Re: Application for course accreditation—valid, Attachment A—Request for Information (RFI), dated 31 August 2021.	TEQSA regulatory decision-making about a specific course (BSW) for a specific HEP (IHM). Government policies versus processes versus outcomes—consistency?

Table 3. (*Continued*).

Organizational & discipline processes	Documents analyzed	Data summarized
IHM CADC and academic board	Agendas and minutes of meetings.	Organizational (HEP) decision-making of academic and quality assurance matter relating to courses and curriculum. Process and discussion/ peer review are important, academic rigor is an individual matter (subjectivity) and is contested.
IHM academic staff responsibility and accountability structures and systems	Emails from and to—Executive Director, CEO, COO, CFO, Academic Dean, Heads of Schools, senior managers of HR, QA	Communication is ad hoc, directed by tasks and deadlines imposed by external factors. Content, process, outcomes, are all contested. Role within the organization directs individual emphasis (content, process, discipline, outcomes) and professional advocacy.
IHM School and Discipline based structures and processes—IHM management	Emails from CEO, COO, and Academic Dean. Executive Management Team meetings, agendas, and minutes. IHM Strategic Plan 2021–2024.	Business ownership and management directs organizational processes, budgets, financial planning, reputation, compliance are paramount in a management model. Planning is growth, income, marketing.
IHM School and Discipline based structures and processes— Curriculum development	IHM CDWG meetings, agendas, and minutes. IHM 'Teams' (software) based systems and processes of information, messaging, documents, peer reviews, as October 2021 the following courses were being developed; Master of Nursing, Bachelor of Nursing, Bachelor of Social Work, Graduate Certificate in Advanced Nursing, Graduate Certificate in Nursing, Master of Public Health, Medical Career Advancement Program (MCAP), Dental Career Advancement Program (DCAP) Interns and DCAP Part 2.	Discussions and discourses around Heads of Schools peer support processes, and the reviewing academic courses and curriculum as peers. Head of School use of curriculum templates across diverse courses. Academic advocacy for discipline curriculum content and assessments, discipline purpose.
IHM School and Discipline based structures and processes—Staffing	BSW Proposed Academic Staff List July 2021. Emails to and from HR. Informal discussions regarding staffing, with and between Academic Dean, CEO, Heads of Schools. IHM Executive Management agendas, minutes, discussions in 'Teams'.	Dialogue and discourses regarding staffing issues. Management directives.
IHM School and Discipline based structures and processes— Resourcing	Emails to and from CEO, CFO, COO, HR, Librarian/e-Resources Coordinator, external resource providers, publishers, accreditation bodies. Informal discussions regarding resourcing, with and between Academic Dean, CEO, Heads of Schools. IHM Executive Management agendas, minutes, discussions in 'Teams'.	Dialogue and discourses regarding education resourcing. Management imperatives, negotiations, outcomes regarding resources for courses.
Australian Council of Heads of Schools of Social Work (ACHSSW)	Accreditation Standards Bodies for SW Education Internationally, 2021 SW Field Education Internationally, 2021 Simulation in Field Education, 2021	Dialogue, discussions, and discourses of national (Australia) social work as a profession. Discipline identity is contested and developing. Advocacy, policy, legal frameworks of accreditation and decision-making regarding professional social work education.
International Federation of Social Work (IFSW)	Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training, IFSW website, accessed from 6 May 2021.	Globalization of the social work profession, international versus national discipline discourses, discipline advocacy processes. Discipline based research, seminars, conferences.

3.1. Student evaluations (all international students)

Seven (7) BSW Units of study were delivered to international students during Semester 2, 2022, and Semester 1, 2023, and **Table 4** summarizes the student

evaluation items and responses, *n* = 32.

Table 4. Student evaluations.

Item	Strongly agreed	Agreed	Neutral	Disagreed	Strongly disagreed
The unit content and resources, textbooks, readings, videos, exercises, and guidelines were of a high standard	18	14	0	0	0
The content was clearly connected to and supported the development of the knowledge and skills detailed in the Unit Learning Outcomes (ULOs)	17	14	1	0	0
The content was easily accessible and appropriate in terms of level	16	15	1	0	0
The Canvas page for this unit was easy to use, set up in a logical manner, used accessible language, easy to navigate, with user-friendly guidelines and supports	19	13	0	0	0
The online delivery of tutorials worked well, absence of IT issues, adequate levels of peer interaction, and effective communication	10	19	3	0	0
The unit was organised in a manner which was logical, intuitive, and accessible, content and topics were covered in a timely manner which ensured students were adequately prepared for assessment tasks.	15	16	1	0	0
The workload was appropriate for the course level and manageable in the specified timeframes, readings, exercises, preparatory work was appropriate and able to be completed in the time given	11	20	1	0	0
The learning resources and support provided for assessments were relevant, adequate, and provided in a timely manner	17	14	1	0	0
The unit assessments were clearly linked to Unit Learning Outcomes (ULOs)	14	17	1	0	0
The assessments were appropriate to the level of study in terms of complexity, knowledge, and skills	18	14	0	0	0
The facilitator's teaching approach was engaging, clear and focused on the content	20	12	0	0	0
The facilitator was responsive to student need—providing feedback, answering questions, responding to queries in a timely manner	20	12	0	0	0

These quantitative responses to the student satisfaction survey resulted in a student satisfaction rating for the new course of 97.5%. The national average in Australian universities and higher education private providers for SES data in 2022 was 75.9, and prior to the pandemic, it was 78.5% [22]. The achievement of 97.5% of this academic team in the circumstances described here is impressive, even though the student cohort was low in number.

3.2. Student reflections

Twenty-four (*n* = 24) qualitative comments were entered by students into the student survey for the course in 2022 and 2023. The following ten student comments reflect all the issues raised by students.

Student 1: *overall everything was excellent and understandable.*

Student 2: *I'm so happy to say that I covered my 3 units in a very well manner as this was my first experience of virtual class, I want to express my gratitude to our course coordinator and unit in charge.*

Student 3: *Teacher A was always being there to assist us whether from an evaluation or learning viewpoint if I had if I had to suggest I believe the only issue I had was with the assessment submission process in certain cases I found it difficult to*

concentrate on one assignment when I had to submit another unit assignment on the same day.

Student 4: *it would be better if the units in all semesters are properly scheduled like right now, we did 3 units even though we must do 4 per semester and I do understand it was because we were studying online but it would be better if it's not like this in future other than that it was a good semester.*

Student 4: *more group discussion, it would be better if the units in all semesters are properly scheduled like right now, we did 3 units even though we have to do 4 per semester and I do understand it was because we were studying online but it would be better if it's not like this in future other than that it was a good semester.*

Student 5: *Thank you very much for everything. I enjoyed every lecture. Talking about assessment comments, I learned a lot from them. For Human rights, Chinese re-education centres for Uighurs would remain the favourite topic to question why and search more about. For social care, I would still compare different policies, countries and of course the people in power. Thank you IHM. Thanks for everything.*

Student 6: *Thank you all very much for your efforts in helping me. I learnt a lot but was also very busy and hard to juggle things. My advice for visa was not correct from agent but I maybe should have asked more.*

Student 7: *The studies were interesting and hard, but I enjoyed it and I will be back. Thank you.*

Student 8: *It will be better if more interactive sessions were provided in class and more easy communications were used in teaching, it will also be informative if good BSW articles were provided as it will be helpful to begin with.*

Student 9: *Provide some textbooks.*

Student 10: *Sometime assessments were not clear and its bit hard to understand them and make it. Please make them a little bit clearer. Thanks.*

In summary, the main issues raised by students here relate to: 1) textbooks and resources; 2) difficulties of assessment; 3) learning activities being more interactive and group-based; and 4) semester-based scheduling of units of study. The main issue impacting international students specifically, which influences this feedback, is their need to balance work and study.

3.3. Educator reflections

These reflections form the main basis of the ethnographic analysis [14,15] of the curriculum and course implementation process described here. The three educators were primarily responsible for writing the BSW course, managing its accreditation, developing the learning resources, and teaching the course to new cohorts of international students in the period 2021–2023. The educators met every two weeks as pairs or as a group to plan and reflect, taking into account the action learning cycle [23] of planning, action, reflection, documentation, and then planning again. Given this was a new course with a relatively new HEP, the cycle was repeated in a two-week cycle for over two years.

1)   Early-career lecturer and researcher

Things that worked well—A strength I believe I have brought to this role is my varied social work and program management roles over the last 25 years. I came into

the team feeling valued and supported. I am flexible and can move from one project to another reasonably quickly. I enjoy the ability to work both on site and at home; it gives the position a level of flexibility that is respectful to my circumstances, such as the distance required to travel. Things that need improvement—I have had regular IT issues that I feel have been a waste of my time. The IT department has been very quick to respond; however, the problem has not always been fixed on the first attempt. Having access to up-to-date, peer-reviewed journals and the latest edition of the relevant textbooks is vital, particularly when writing a new program from scratch. Overview of the BSW team: At present, there is a small team of staff in the BSW programme. I immediately felt welcomed and included in discussions and the development of the programme. I feel respected, and the environment is very inclusive. I enjoy having conversations with the team about the topics as well as how the BSW is going to move forward. There have been a lot of changes regarding student numbers and visa problems for students that have made planning challenging. Overview of the IHM experience: The IHM environment is fast-moving and ever-changing. Because I have come in at the ground level of the development of the BSW and MSW(Q) I feel like a valued member of the team. I am learning new systems, such as Canvas and the internal workings of IHM. There is a lot to learn. I feel like I am picking it up reasonably quickly; however, I still need to check in to make sure I am on the right track. I booked the librarian to run a library session with the students in week 3. Most of the students did not have library access at this time (me included). I would like to see students have access to the library upon enrolment, so they have access to resources right away.

2)   Head of school and professor of social work

After 2 years of preparing the BSW curriculum and course framework, uncertainty and chaos reigned, leading to students enrolling and commencing studies. We did not know how many students there were, where they were from, where they would be, etc. We had tried to plan for all possibilities, on-campus, online, off-shore but ended up on the eve of semester accepting all 3 options for student enrolment. My role was to instill confidence in the educators, take each week as it came and ensure that everyone was aware of the macro and micro issues, keep staff and students up to date, and roll with what we were served, organisationally. Remembering to stick to academic frameworks that I know work, ensuring quality in education provision, and remembering accreditation requirements. Outcomes and assessments happened in week 6, week 10, then final assessments were planned, and final weeks of teaching were taught! Students have produced quality participation, assessments, and attitudes = success. 5 students finished the semester, 5 had to defer, and 2 left late because of visa issues. Other educators across IHM in other disciplines were experiencing the same, but we did not have a forum for these conversations except in the kitchen or corridor, this is normal for a large university.

3)   Lecturer/BSW course coordinator, and early career researcher

Challenges: My time at IHM has been enjoyable but challenging at times. It has been characterised by a mixture of anxiety and excitement-anxiety around issues like student numbers/projections, visas, and, at times, the overall viability of the course. The excitement derived from being part of a team developing a bachelor's degree from the ground up. Planning for all possibilities—face-to-face teaching, hybrid models,

and online models—is not straightforward. Although I am accustomed to a changeable work environment, this has been challenging at times. However, I think we have done well in this regard. I have taken on the role of course coordinator for the BSW. Although I enjoy teaching, I think it is good to take on new roles, as it keeps the work interesting.

Students— I cannot imagine how difficult it must be to study in a 2nd or 3rd language while managing issues like culture shock, insecure employment, and a lack of networks. I try to always be mindful of these challenges when we are designing and delivering content, marking assessments, and communicating with students. The social aspect of study was one of the major appeals of tertiary education in the 1990s. I acknowledge that online learning is very convenient for students who may have issues with transportation, time poverty, and work commitments, but I also wonder what is being lost in terms of life experiences, networking, personal growth, and the formation of friendships.

4. Discussion

The themes that emerged from the research data collected and summarized here emanated from a thematic analysis conducted by the researchers as the teaching of the new course occurred across two semesters. The five (5) themes connected to new course development at IHM were as follows:

- Education is business-organizational strategic and operational management and planning.
- Discipline (social work) identity: academic processes that promote discipline-specific content and information.
- Quality assurance is subjective; people drive processes and documents; models of QA; outcome-driven; success versus improvement.
- Curriculum content is contested—discipline change, discipline cultures, intergenerational tensions, and organizational tensions.
- Measuring outcomes: regulatory and accreditation approvals, QA staff, academic staff, students, other staff, and the communities (local and overseas).

Education is a business due to several issues. Independent HEPs are often privately owned by individuals, families, or other corporate entities, and as such, these proprietors of education institutions want financial gain; they work toward profit-making or, at the very least, aim at breaking even. Public HEPs (universities/colleges) were once seen as not-for-profit providers of universal higher education courses based on the social and economic common good of a society, but in recent decades in Australia, higher education policies have shifted [23]. This change has been ideological, where universities are now expected to be financially 'responsible; 'live within specific budgets', budgets were directed by the public, and government-based funding of courses has declined over time and is now supplemented or displaced by fee-for-service courses for international students [24].

Most universities have increasingly relied on income from fee-paying international students and international partnerships with private enterprises and independent education providers to generate course fees and development funds. COVID- 19 restrictions and a globalized education market have impacted this reliance

in terms of reduced incomes from international students and from these partnerships. Recent commentary about the future of higher education in Australia laments this contraction of the sector and highlights the significant uncertainty around specific disciplines (humanities, IT, and business) and the outcomes of the higher education sector in terms of graduate and research outcomes [24,25].

Discipline identity, in this case social work professional identity within the higher education sector, is subject to organizational management processes for higher education curriculum and course development, often based in other disciplines such as health, law, and education, and includes an inherent tension between academic frameworks and quality assurance processes. The quality assurance frameworks of each organization manage the TEQSA regulatory processes and the discipline-specific accreditation processes.

There is co-existence between discipline academics and teams, accreditation bodies, regulatory bodies, and quality assurance divisions/departments within HEPs; however, it appears that the power and influence of quality assurance staff and processes are now driving academic processes. Yet, the outcomes of course and curriculum development are facilitated by academics and have significant academic impacts and outcomes. It is a tension of context versus content and a question of who manages the committees, the documents, the timelines, the resources, and therefore the outcomes.

The ACHSWE [26,27] has questioned the role of the AASW as an accreditation body regarding various aspects of the Australian Social Work Education Accreditation Standards, such as field education frameworks and processes, English language tests for students entering social work programs in Australia, and the power of the standards to set standards that are operational. The identity of the social work discipline is being contested, and the processes that drive accreditation are contested and complex, with so many private education providers now entering the market and potentially dominating professional social work education in the Asia-Pacific region into the future [28].

Quality assurance divisions and departments in HEPs manage processes and documents because TEQSA requires the higher education process of course production and delivery to be document-driven; however, the outcomes are content-based, with discipline-specific content, topics, assessments, learning resources, and graduate outcomes that make up courses and curriculum. What is 'quality' and 'what and how it assures' are subjective and contested concepts and become processes and frameworks designed by specific people for specific organizational purposes, not due to some generalized and well documented evidence base.

Curriculum design and content are contested [27,29]. There is limited agreement internationally and in Australia about the content, that is, the knowledge, evidence, research, and skills imparted to undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students. The ASWEAS has recently been reformed [30] and is now widely believed by HEPs and academics to be less prescriptive and directive in terms of required curriculum content than before this reform. The research outlined here demonstrated that adhering to the ASWEAS in creating a curriculum for international students is possible, but it is contested, and the standards and accreditation processes are clearly tailored for

university contexts and not private providers or HEPs with a sole focus on international social work education.

This research did not answer many of the questions that now exist in international education in Australia, specifically about designing professional social work courses with an international focus and for international students. Course development processes and outcomes ultimately ask the question of HEPs: were we successful? producing graduates, quality teaching or learning, or meeting accreditation standards? This then directs us to ask what the measures of higher education success should be: business and finance measures, education and graduate measures, and academic (research and reputational) measures.

IHM can easily produce data based on the past five years of course development, expansion, and delivery that indicate success; however, in terms of a new Bachelor of Social Work in the context of expansion and internationalization as a profession within an ever-expanding education sector, there is much work to be done and evaluation to be considered in the coming period of 2023–2025, as pandemic restrictions have lifted and the Australian higher education policy framework shifts under the new Australian Labor government. There is much further research and regulatory reform in Australia that acknowledges social work education as a business and social work practices as a business. Social work graduate outcomes must reflect the preparation of students for 'real world' professional practices that are local, regional, and global.

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