

Constructing Building Integrity: Raising Standards Through Professionalism

Industry Factsheet: Landscape Architects

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Overview

This fact sheet summarises the integrity system framework for landscape architects. Landscape Architecture is not a regulated profession in Australia and there are currently no profession-specific Acts, Regulations, or statutory authorities that monitor the ethical conduct and professional standards of landscape architects. The registration, accreditation and licencing of landscape architects is also not governed by legislation in any of the examined state jurisdictions (NSW, QLD, VIC and WA). To address the lack of statutory oversight, the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) and its state chapters fulfil an important self-regulatory function by setting ethical and professional standards for landscape architects (including detailed codes of conduct). The professional association provides robust governance via policies, guidelines and robust professional registration and accreditation processes, and advocates on behalf of their profession.

Alongside these strengths, the profession faces a range of ethical tensions that have the potential to negatively impact the industry. The landscape architects that were interviewed for this project expressed frustration with the peripheral role they are often accorded during a construction project, as well as the tenuous status of landscape architecture as a recognised profession because it is largely unregulated. While the AILA leadership has previously voiced their disapproval over being left out of the *National Registration Framework* (NRF), interviewees were uncertain whether more stringent statutory oversight would benefit or harm the profession.

Within this context, this fact sheet outlines the goals, values, and professional standards of landscape architects before summarising the various ethical challenges that the profession in Australia faces. It should be read in parallel with the industry report [Constructing Building Integrity: Raising Standards Through Professionalism](#), which describes the full scope of this work, methods used and recommendations, as well as the supplementary resource document that outlines the integrity system maps (high-level and detailed) for landscape architects.

Goals and values of peak Professional Bodies

The peak professional body for landscape architects is the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA).

AILA's **core values** are centred on:

- Climate-Positive Design
- Connection to Country
- Gender Equity

AILA's **strategic priorities** are outlined in its 10-year plan (AILA, 2021a) and include:

- regularly reviewing and improving its Governance framework
- developing a safe, supportive and growth-oriented culture
- understanding and being responsive to the needs of its members
- supporting student and academic communities via its landscape architecture programs
- meeting the needs of growing and increasingly complex profession via levels of Australian government
- ensuring that the role of landscape architecture is understood and respected by built environment professionals and communities.

Our research and interviews with numerous landscape architects found that AILA places a strong emphasis on **promoting ethical and professional standards** and aligning its policy platforms with the broader ethos that underpins its **organisational culture**. Interviewee 2 spoke of the importance of *'communicating them as strategic values and actually articulating them as underpinning everything we do'*, while interviewee 1 stated that *'culture eats strategy for breakfast'* when members are clearly apprised of *'what the [AILA] values are and that how that relates to their own personal values and approach to work'*.

AILA also has a **detailed Code of Conduct** (CoC) that covers most of the ethical values and professional standards that were identified in the research. It also plays a key role in developing accredited tertiary degrees, providing training, Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and various accreditation pathways, and promoting advocacy platforms that reflect its core values. As association membership is voluntary, AILA's capacity to self-regulate the industry is more limited than other construction professions.

Integrity System Analysis – landscape architects

As outlined above, the integrity system for landscape architects has various strengths and weaknesses that comprise the profession's identity. This section will outline the integrity enablers that promote high ethical and professional standards, and the various ethical tensions that negatively impact landscape architects in various aspects of their work.

Integrity enablers

Education and training: Qualification requirements for registered architects include AILA-accredited tertiary and/or postgraduate degrees, accreditation pathways for graduates and practitioners (with mandatory professional experience), and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements.



Professionalism: AILA's stated goals and values, mission statements and strategic goals emphasise the importance of maintaining high ethical and professional standards.



AILA governance: AILA has robust governance processes and policies in place that promote professionalism, equity and diversity, education and training and industry accreditation.



Practical code of conduct: The AILA Code of Conduct is detailed and has various sections on how to deal with ethical tensions pertaining to client interactions.



Robust organisational culture: Interviewees emphasised that a healthy, positive and robust organisational/workplace culture was a key driver of high ethical and professional standards for landscape architects.



Public interest focused: The client vs public tension is mitigated by a strong public interest focus that prioritises the public good over professional and client interests where appropriate.



Ethical tensions

Minimal statutory regulation of profession: There are no profession-specific Acts, Regulations, and statutory codes of conduct for landscape architects in Australia.



Lack of regulatory oversight: There is a lack of enforceable rules and penalties for professional misconduct and no profession-specific statutory authorities that monitor professional standards and compliance.



Status of profession: The minimal regulation of landscape architects and a lack of public visibility has raised questions about the professional status of the industry (see key findings).



Voluntary industry accreditation: There are no statutory registration, accreditation and licensing requirements for landscape architects in all examined jurisdictions (QLD, NSW, VIC, WA). AILA offers accreditation pathways, but the process is voluntary.



Collaboration challenges: Interviewees identified a range of collaboration challenges with other professions and noted that landscape architects were often marginalised during construction projects.



Key findings

The integrity system framework for landscape architects shows that while AILA's professional standards framework appears to be robust, the industry faces various ethical challenges arising from its status as a largely unregulated profession and peripheral position in the construction industry that is exacerbated by its poor public visibility.

Regulation of landscape architects

As stated above, **landscape architecture is not regulated in Australia** and the **accreditation process is voluntary**. While this status gives rise to various ethical tensions, the interviewees largely agreed that their ethical values and professional standards were commensurate with AILA's professional standards framework, both at a personal level and within their organisations. Interviewee 1 stated that their key goal as a landscape professional was to *'make a difference to people and the environment and make sure that these values are upheld in terms of what the profession is about'*, while interviewee 2 emphasised that landscape architects are intrinsically *'very interested in the benefits for the community, both for humans and what we can do for biodiversity'*.

Interviewees offered a range of different perspectives on whether enhanced regulatory monitoring and oversight would benefit the profession. While some noted that regulating the profession could potentially enhance the professional standing and relevance of landscape architects, interviewee 2 pointed out that it could also *"threaten the very existence of the profession"* by imposing more onerous responsibilities while providing fewer tangible benefits. Therefore,

'it's a double edged sword in terms of whether we need that or not' – Interviewee 2

Professional status of landscape architecture

Our research found that the lack of regulatory oversight has also **reduced the public visibility and professional standing** of landscape architects. According to Langley, Corry & Brown (2018, pp.21-22) a key issue for the industry is that the *'unique knowledge, processes, and capacities of landscape architects — central requirements of a recognizable profession — are currently broad and largely undefined'*. As a result, *'the*

social and political influence of landscape architecture remains marginal in most countries'. Interviewee 1 also stated that while landscape architects play a key role in the day-to-day operations of a construction project by coordinating designs and identifying potential issues, they *'quite often can't do anything about'* addressing ethical misconduct or building defects due to their **peripheral role on construction projects**.

Other ethical risk areas that were identified by the interviewees and the academic research include:

- professional decision-making when dealing with a company or organisation that has low and/or questionable moral standards
- **commercial drivers, pressures and incentives** driven by personal, organisational, and systemic factors (e.g. workforce/skills shortage, covid, sector-wide economic downturns)
- **pressure to cut corners/complete projects quickly** without due diligence and/or adequate stakeholder consultation
- temptation to engage in **'decorative ethics'** including greenwashing and token public consultation (Gill, 2017)
- **lack of ethics courses** in Australian landscape architecture tertiary degrees (Lawson & Roy, 2022)
- resistance from construction companies to implement sustainable building practices
- **lack of effective knowledge exchange** between construction professionals and professions
- failure of professionals, businesses and regulators to effectively address the climate/biodiversity crisis.

Despite these ethical challenges, the research largely supports AILA's finding in a recent discussion paper that *"the current self-regulated registration process meets the majority of the Australian Council of Professions' conditions"* (AILA 2021, p.16). As interviewee 1 noted,

'professional organisations like AILA are really important because they actually do for landscape architects what they themselves cannot easily do'

– Interviewee 1

This suggests that while the landscape architecture industry is grappling with various ethical challenges, enhanced statutory regulation would comprise a complementary, rather than essential component of the profession's overall integrity system.

Pathways to Action

The AILA strategic plan and governance framework already incorporate many of the recommendations in the following table. Therefore, the 'Recommended Pathways to Action' are focused on: 1) further strengthening and promoting the implementation of current activities; and 2) addressing and potentially resolving the tenuous professional status of landscape architects.

RECOMMENDED PATHWAYS TO ACTION

It is recommended that the following actions (which are derived from the main recommendations that are outlined in the *Final Industry Report* and profession-specific findings) are taken to address the ethical tensions and further strengthen the integrity enablers for landscape architects:

Education, Training & Accreditation (*Final Industry Report* Rec. 3)

- Encourage the implementation of mandatory courses on professional ethics in AILA-accredited and other tertiary degrees
- Continue efforts to increase the number of registered landscape architects and to graduate students entering the profession

Regulatory Framework (*Final Industry Report* Rec. 4)

- Continue to explore the potential benefits, drawbacks and practical implications of further professionalising the landscape architecture profession and regulating the industry

Professional Associations (*Final Industry Report* Rec. 5)

- Promote networking events and other outreach programs that focus on raising the public profile of the profession
- Strengthen collaborative relationships and mechanisms with other construction professions, professional associations regulators and academic institutions.

FURTHER READING:

Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (n.d), 'AILA's Values' <https://www.aila.org.au/Web/Web/Values/Our-Values.aspx?hkey=314cb044-e344-43f3-85f3-cc673a51b91c>

Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (2016), *Landscape Architects Code of Conduct* https://aila.org.au/common/Uploaded%20files/_AILA/Governance/Policies/AILA_Code%20of%20Conduct_2016.pdf

Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (2021a), *AILA Strategic Plan 2021* https://www.aila.org.au/common/Uploaded%20files/_AILA/Governance/AILA%20Strategic%20Plan.pdf

Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (2021b), *Registration, regulation and legal recognition of Landscape Architects in Australia – Discussion Paper* https://www.aila.org.au/common/Uploaded%20files/_AILA/Resource%20library/Registration%20Discussion%20Paper.pdf

Gill, Kamni (2017) An ethics of landscape architecture, *Journal of Landscape Architecture*, 12(3), 4-5. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18626033.2017.1425312>

Langley, W. N., Corry, R. C., & Brown, R. D. (2018). Core Knowledge Domains of Landscape Architecture. *Landscape Journal*, 37(1), 9–21. <https://doi-org.libraryproxy.griffith.edu.au/10.3368/lj.37.1.9>

Lawson, Gillian & Sudipto Roy (2022) Learning and teaching academic standards in landscape architecture, *Landscape Research*, 47(7), 936–958. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01426397.2022.2089640>

PROJECT RESEARCH

Additional research arising from the project including the Industry Report can be found at: <https://www.griffith.edu.au/law-futures-centre/institute-ethics-law-governance/our-research/construction-building-integrity>

CITATION

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