



# Define Interior Design Information Pack

Join the Fight

Interior Design  
Profession  
Under Threat

The interior design profession has changed. It's time we change how it is viewed, defined and regulated.

We need to:

- Define Interior Design
- Licence and regulate the industry
- Improve professional standards
- Improve education standards



## BACKGROUND

Our industry is strong, but misunderstood. Interior Design needs to be accurately & consistently defined with regulated professional standards to protect public safety & educate the public, industry & government about our role & value in the construction industry.

- 22,800 interior designers are currently employed in Australia, and it is predicted this will grow to over 27,200 in the next 3 years.
- This represents a 19.1% predicted growth or an extra 4,3000 jobs.
- 14.8 % of interior designers are working in Queensland.
- 63% of people employed as interior designers work full-time hours in all their jobs combined.
- 31% of interior designers are aged 25 to 34 years. Second to that is 35-44 years olds at 27%.
- Women are exiting the Australian construction industry 39% faster than men.
- 76% of interior designers in Australia are women, which is higher than the national average of 48%.

Source: Labour Market Insights  
<https://labourmarketinsights.gov.au/occupation-profile/interior-designers?occupationCode=2325>

The Interior Design profession is being disrupted across the global construction industry.

- Scarcity of skilled labour
- Global cost pressures
- Stricter WH&S compliance
- Carbon emission reduction targets
- Sophistication of customer/owners needs

In the coming years, due to fundamental changes, companies will continue to specialise in target niches (such as luxury single-family housing, multistorey residential buildings, hospitals) or in using different materials, or methods of construction through which they can build competitive advantage.

The upcoming Brisbane 2032 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games will generate considerable work for interior designers in the next 20 years. The Queensland Government have quantified the economic benefit to be upwards of \$8billion shared between tourism, trade and construction industries. Interior designers will benefit directly.

This has implications for our profession. More than a year ago now, it became apparent that a conversation about the future of our profession was surfacing, without the involvement of interior designers and our representative organisation, Whilst it might be easier to retain the status quo, successful business innovation requires strategies for both sustainable and disruptive innovation.

## How this is important to you?

Currently there are several issues affecting the industry:

### SOLE PRACTITIONER/BUSINESS OWNER

- Lack of clarity around regulations regarding scope of service and risk protection.

### EMPLOYEES

- Lack of understanding of role and value leading to inappropriate remuneration and career progression.

### SUPPLIERS

- Unqualified/inexperienced Interior Designers producing inappropriate/non-compliant specifications leading to increased risks.

### EDUCATORS

- Lack of clarity between vocational and university qualifications and inconsistency of course titles and content.

The DIA Queensland Interior Design Working Group is committed to building a platform which improves public and government recognition for the role and value of professional interior design, taking action to ensure the occupation endures. The Working Group is made up of a dynamic mix of professionals from both large and small practices and education institutions. Its next task is to complete a White Paper highlighting who interior designers are, what they do and the irrelevance in the Australian construction industry.

## DEFINE DESIGN

Interior Design needs to be accurately & consistently defined to strengthen the value of the specialisation.

Interior design is not consistently defined in Australian legislation or government systems.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Australia and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) are used in census data collection, publication and analysis of occupation statistics.

In 2006, the DIA lobbied for interior designers to be included under the 232 Architects, Designers, Planners and Surveyors Classification of Occupation with a Skill Level 1 equivalent to a Bachelor degree or higher. Unfortunately, the Skill Level of interior designers only was later downgraded to a Skill Level 2 (Associate Degree, Diploma, Advanced Diploma) for an unknown reason. This means our stated Skill Level is below that of a fashion designer, industrial designer, jewellery designer, graphic designer and illustrator.

### CURRENT ANZSCO DEFINITION

“2325 Interior Designers

Interior Designers plan, design, detail and supervise the construction of commercial, industrial, retail and residential building interiors to produce an environment tailored to a purpose, with particular emphasis on space creation, space planning, and factors that enhance living and working environments.

In Australia:

AQF5/6 Associate Degree, Advanced Diploma or Diploma, or at least three years of relevant experience (ANZSCO Skill Level 2)”

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/classifications/anzsco-australian-and-new-zealand-standard-classification-occupations/2022/browse-classification/2/23/232/2325>

The National Construction Code (NCC) and other formal sources all define interior design differently.

### CURRENT NCC DEFINITION

“Planning and execution of Architectural Interiors including layouts, decoration, furnishings, draperies, etc. in offices, other building spaces, or homes.”

<https://www.constructiondictionary.com.au/term/interior-design>

## The solutions

DIA has prepared a submission for Round 2 of the review of the current ABS ANZSCO Occupation Profile for Interior Designers requesting a change to the definition and for the reinstatement of a Skill Level 1 (Bachelor degree).

If adopted this means that Interior Designers will be aligned with the skill levels of the other design professions and our built environment colleagues

We have also proposed a change of definition of Interior Design to the NCC National Dictionary of Building and Plumbing Terms.

### PROPOSED NCC DEFINITION

“Interior Design is the planning, design, detailing, coordination and supervision of the construction of commercial, residential, institutional, recreational and temporary interiors within built environment enclosures to transform and improve their performance, experience, meaning and/or purpose in response to human needs”.

We need to define interior design consistently and maintain the title of our profession without creating further hierarchical marginalisation and confusion.

The interior design profession does not need to assert its legitimacy by making the case that it is equal to, or similar to, architecture. The title of Interior Design best describes the product (‘interior space’) and process (‘design’) reinforcing the discipline firmly within the field of design, independent of the essentialist definition of architecture.

Interior design practitioners need to protect the existing title, while celebrating the discipline’s specialist skills and body of knowledge.

Many Interior Designers use the title ‘Interior Architect’. However, the use of the words ‘architect’ and ‘architectural’ are protected under the *Architects Act 2002* with fines up to \$154,000 enforceable to both the individual and to the company.

<https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-2002-053>

Breach notices are being issued by The Board of Architects QLD to interior designers using these terms on their websites, business cards, linkedin endorsements or marketing articles etc. Educational institutions are also not immune.

In Queensland under the Architects Regulation 2019 Schedule 1, additional terms are also protected.

If you are not a registered architect in Australia, you cannot call yourself an interior architect regardless of your university qualification from anywhere in the world.

<https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/si-2019-0131>

## LICENSING / REGISTRATION AND REGULATION OF THE PROFESSION

We need to align licensing and/or registration for Interior Designers in each state building authority across Australia, to regulate the profession and ensure public safety.

Designers are currently listed as a combined category with Draftspersons in Australian Building Codes Board (ACBC) National Registration Framework for Building Practitioners (2021).

<https://www.abcb.gov.au/sites/default/files/resources/2022/BCR-rec1-2-National-registration-framework.pdf>

In NSW, recent legislation changes require building work to be completed by a registered design/building practitioner for Class 2 building projects (multi res) Design and Building Practitioners ACT 2020 NSW. Interior designers have been left off the list of design practitioners eligible to be registered.

<https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-2020-007>

in VIC, Interior designers must have registration with the Victorian Building Authority (VBA) to work as a draftsperson under the Building Design (Interior) registration (min requirement 7 units of competency Advanced Diploma of ID).

<https://www.vba.vic.gov.au/registration-and-licensing/building-practitioner-registration/draftsperson>

In QLD, we need to get ahead of these issues before we are caught unprepared or other design practitioners usurp our projects.

The definition of interior design work is not clear in the Queensland Building and Construction Commission (QBCC) Regulation 2018 and our work falls between the gaps of suitable existing licence classes.

<https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/pdf/inforce/current/sl-2018-0138>

Schedule 1 Item 41, states that Interior design work is not considered building work because it is not perceived to require structural advice. Further, this could be interpreted to mean that work requiring structural advice may also require a Building Design licence where the work is valued over \$3000 +GST.

However, the National Construction Code was tightened in 2019 and again in 2023, requiring further structural certification on a broader range of applications. For example, partitions, ceilings and even joinery are required to be certified in installations where they were previously not required.

Designers are receiving inconsistent advice from the QBCC regarding the definitions. This leaves us uncertain regarding our liabilities and responsibilities.

As regulations change across Australia we may require additional licences/and or registrations to work on projects in different states of Australia, due to differing requirements in each State Building Authority.

VIC – Building Design (Interior) Registration  
NSW – Under Review  
TAS – Building Designer (Architectural Restricted)  
QLD – Currently not required

## Our solutions

We believe that a licencing and/or registration process is crucial to regulate the profession and ensure consumer safety.

DIA will pursue the alignment of licencing and/or registration in each state building authority in Australia.

## IMPROVE PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Issues of pay equity and professional standards need to be addressed to protect the value the profession.

For many decades professions have determined their own fees. The Fair Work Award system provides minimum payments benchmarks and sets out entitlements for employees and obligations for employers. In 2020, a Professional Employment Award (PEA) was introduced signaling a change. The Fair Work Ombudsman specifies that interior designers with a Bachelor degree are not covered by an award wage. Contrary to this, the Association of Consulting Architects (ACA) has recommended to their members that interior designers may be paid under the Miscellaneous Award which is also consistent with the legal advice provided to the DIA by its employment specialists. This means that Interior Designers are paid well under the same level for Architectural Graduates often performing similar tasks.

<https://aca.org.au/2020-rates-of-pay/>

Graduates should be remunerated at least at Level 4, which is described as sub-professional and pays \$28.57/hour.

- National Minimum Wage is \$23.23/hour or \$882.00/week before tax for a 38hr week.
- An honours degree graduate may earn approx. \$5.00/hr or \$200.00/week more for gaining a 4-year degree.
- The difference between the Miscellaneous Award and the Architects Award Level 1 first pay point is \$138.00/week or \$7000.00/year.
- The median weekly earnings for interior designers in Australia is only \$1586.00/week or \$82,000.00/year.

<https://www.fairwork.gov.au/>

## How is this important to you?

To work towards this, the Working Group is currently supporting the DIA's application to the Professional

Standards Council Scheme, which will allow interior designers nationally to sit on par with other professionals in law and accounting for example, and legally obliges the professional association to monitor, enforce and improve the professional standards of their members, thereby protecting consumers.

The Scheme caps the civil liability/damages that can be paid by member professionals. This is increasingly important for Interior Designers as building regulations in Australia are tightened.

The scheme will benefit the DIA and interior designers by increasing consumer confidence in the profession. It involves a national approach to:

- Code of Conduct
- Review of DIA's existing Accredited Designer program
- CPD requirements
- Minimum standard for professional education
- Governance.

Once this scheme is in place, this will enable DIA to work towards a professional employment award for Interior Designers.

## IMPROVE EDUCATION STANDARDS

The naming of qualifications across all university and vocational educators in Australia needs to be aligned and core competencies agreed upon to improve standards of Interior Design Education.

Interior design education is offered in 38 degrees across 20 universities and 49 vocational courses across 24 institutions. Currently the naming of these courses is not consistent and the content varies in quality and relevance to the Australian Construction Industry. There is also little understanding of the difference between a AQF5 (Diploma) and AQF8 (Bachelor Honours Degree).

Queensland Tertiary education offerings for Interior Design are relatively new, and hence historically there have been various pathways into the profession. In order to regulate our industry we require an understanding of pathways into the profession to better structure accreditation for licencing and/or registration.

## Our solutions

In order to address the confusion within the sector, the DIA is mapping offerings of all Australian Interior Design Education providers to work towards consistent education standards, naming conventions, and inclusions to ensure interior design education is relevant and monitored.

DIA to review Degree programs to ensure they demonstrate competencies beyond just compliance with building regulations and standards and provide minimum provisions for curriculum to equip graduates with competencies of human-centred design and professional practice in the areas of: project management, risk management & consumer safety, ethics, indigenous perspectives & inclusion, sustainability, well being & the circular economy, and Intellectual Property.

The DIA is surveying Interior Designers to understand the current education and experience levels of practicing Interior Designers.

The DIA Accredited Designer™ program currently maintains professional standards and, requires designers to:

- demonstrate core competencies of a professional designer (Degree or above)
- commit to a designer code of conduct
- agree to abide by a set of guidelines for the discipline in which they practice
- participate in an annual Continuous Professional Development (CPD) program
- have a minimum of 5 years of experience

Participants in the DIA Accredited Designer™ program are expected to accrue 50 CPD points per annum. CPD points can be earned by participating in courses, site tours, conferences, seminars, workshops and authoring and teaching.



## WHAT NEXT?

This is an ambitious campaign, there is much coordination, development and advocacy work to do, to ensure a rigorous and robust outcome for the profession.

Your help and support is needed now and ongoing.

## How you can help

- Become a member of the DIA. The DIA exists to advocate for design professionals and cannot do so without support.
- Tell people what we are doing and why it is important.
- Complete the survey so we can gather as much data as possible to understand pathways to our profession.
- Support and endorse our upcoming White Paper to be released early 2024. Company logos and quotes will be collected at the end of 2023 to be included on the document.
- Spread the word on your social media to promote the Interior Design profession and why it is important.
- Help us recruit suppliers, sponsors, clients to support our campaign which will fund lawyers, marketing and human resources.
- Talk about the issues with your colleagues and suppliers and help raise awareness of the issues currently facing our profession.

We believe these are our next steps:

1. Inclusion of interior designers as part of the Design & Building Practitioners Act 2020 in NSW. This will set a precedent for other states to include interior designers as design practitioners eligible for licensing.
2. Revise the NCC Dictionary definition of interior design ABS ANZSCO profile for interior designers to better describe our scope of service and reinstate the current Skill Level 2 to a Skill Level 1 Bachelor degree or above. Realignment of other definitions to ensure consistency and accuracy.
3. Alignment of licencing and/or registration in each state building authority across Australia, to better protect Australian citizens.
4. Alignment of naming and competencies of qualifications across all Australian university and vocational education institutions.
5. Professional Standards Scheme submission including national review of governance, Code of Conduct, refinement of Accredited Designer program and standards for professional education and pathways.

To achieve licencing and/or registration as well as our Professional Standards Scheme, there is much coordination, development and advocacy work to do.

While other design and building practitioners might propose that they are representative of interior designers, unless this advocacy work is run for, by and with our profession our unique education, experience and value will be exploited and undervalued.

This is a long game. It requires a consistent and concerted effort to ensure the profession is preserved and can flourish in a rapidly changing legislative and technological environment.

After decades of working under architects, developers, builders and building designers, isn't it time we do it for ourselves?

## FIND OUT MORE

Join the Interior Design working group or contact the DIA national office on 1300 888 056 or [admin@design.org.au](mailto:admin@design.org.au)

## Glossary of terms

**AACA (Architects Accreditation Council of Australia)** – The national voice for architect registration boards around Australia. AACA owns the National Standard of Competency for Architects. The National Standard underpins all assessment processes including the accreditation of architecture programs leading to registration as an architect in Australia.

**ABCB (Australian Building Codes Board)** - The national body responsible for overseeing the development of building codes and regulations in Australia, including the National Construction Code (NCC).

**ABS ANZSCO (Australian Bureau of Statistics Australia and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupation)** - an integrated framework for storing, organising and reporting occupation-related information in both statistical and client-oriented applications, such as matching job seekers to job vacancies and providing career information. ANZSCO codes are referenced in courses and used in ABS censuses and surveys. The ANZSCO code for interior designers is 232511.

**ACA (Association of Consulting Architects Australia)** - Leads the discussion on business and employment matters in Australian architecture. It provides timely advice, information and resources, promotes debate, and advocates for better business practices and legislative frameworks.

**Accredited Course** - A course that has been approved by a governing body, such as AACA or DIA, for training in interior design.

**ACIF (Australian Construction Industry Forum)** - Facilitates and supports an active dialogue between the key players in residential and non-residential building, and engineering construction, other industry groups, and government agencies across the entire asset creation process from feasibility through design, cost planning, construction and building and management.

**AIA (Australian Institute of Architects)** - The peak membership body for architecture dedicated to raising the quality of the built environment for all and to the advancement of architecture.

**BOAQ (Board of Architects Queensland)** - The Board of Architects of Queensland (the Board) is a statutory authority established under the Architects Act 2002, responsible for protecting the public and upholding the architectural profession in Queensland.

**Competencies** - A set of defined behaviours, skills, knowledge, and abilities that provide a framework for effective performance within a particular role or job. In the context of interior design, competencies could range from technical skills like CAD design and project management to softer skills like client communication and creative problem-solving.

**CPD (Continuing Professional Development)** - Ongoing activities required for maintaining professional skills for accreditation and licensing and/or registration.

**DIA Accredited Designer™ Program** - A program managed by the Design Institute of Australia that certifies interior designers who have met certain professional standards and qualifications.

**Legislation** - Laws that have been formally enacted by a legislative body such as the Commonwealth Parliament or state parliaments. Legislation can include acts and statutes and provides the legal framework within which a society operates. Both Commonwealth and state governments can enact legislation, although the scope may differ based on constitutional authority.

**Licensing** - The granting of legal permission to practice interior design in specific classes of buildings as defined by that jurisdiction.

**NAWIC (National Association of Women in Construction)** - An Australian, not-for-profit organisation formed to drive changes that will aid in the increased recruitment, retention and further vocational development of women within all facets of the construction industry.

**NCC (National Construction Code)** - A unified set of technical provisions for the design, construction, and performance of buildings throughout Australia, overseen by the ABCB.

**Professional Indemnity (PI) Insurance** - A policy of insurance taken out in relation to loss or damage caused by a person or persons acting in breach of its duty to act in a professional capacity.

**PL Insurance (Public Liability Insurance)** - Third party liability insurance that generally covers bodily injury or death of persons and/or property damage.

**Practitioner** - A professional engaged in the practice of interior design.

**PSC (Professional Standards Councils)** - Independent statutory bodies established by the Australian state and territory governments to promote professional standards and consumer protection through thought leadership and education, and the approval, monitoring and enforcing of Professional Standards Schemes.

**QBCC (Queensland Building & Construction Commission)** - A statutory body established under the Queensland Building and Construction Commission Act 1991 (QBCC Act) to regulate the building industry.

**Regulation** - A rule or directive made and maintained by an authority, which helps to implement or administer laws enacted by the legislative body. Typically, state and territory governments are responsible for regulations that pertain to professions such as interior design, although Commonwealth regulations can also exist where constitutional authority permits.

**Registration as a Design Practitioner with State Regulators** - The act of registering with a state's governing body as a certified design practitioner, usually a prerequisite for applying for a license to practice.

**VBA (Victorian Building Authority)** - Regulates building and plumbing practitioners to ensure the achievement of efficient and competitive building and plumbing industries in Victoria.