AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE of INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING (AIIU)

CHILD SAFETY and the CHILD SAFE STANDARDS

INTRODUCTION

Australia's contemporary child safety framework was fundamentally shaped by the findings of the **Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2013–2017)**. The Royal Commission identified systemic failures across many sectors and recommended the establishment of nationally consistent child safe standards to better protect children in organisational settings.

In response, all Australian governments endorsed the **National Principles for Child Safe Organisations** in 2019. These Principles provide a nationally agreed benchmark for organisations that work with or provide services to children and young people.

Western Australia has adopted the National Principles as the overarching child safe framework. Rather than introducing a single standalone Child Safe Standards Act, WA implements the Principles through a combination of existing legislation, regulatory expectations and sector-specific requirements.

LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

Child safety obligations in Western Australia arise from multiple legislative sources, including:

- The **Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004**, which establishes mandatory screening for people engaged in child-related work.
- The **Children and Community Services Act 2004**, which provides the framework for child protection and mandatory reporting by certain professionals.
- The **School Education Act 1999**, which governs the operation of schools and student welfare obligations.
- The **National Guidelines for the Operation of International Secondary Student Exchange Programs in Australia**, which require Student Exchange Organisations (SEOs) to maintain robust child protection systems.

STUDENT EXCHANGE ORGANISATIONS (SEOS)

For SEOs operating in Western Australia, child safety expectations apply across:

- Governance and leadership
- Recruitment and screening
- Host family approval
- Student welfare monitoring
- Incident reporting
- Complaints handling
- Cultural and wellbeing support

PURPOSE

Child Safe Framework

The National Principles and WA child safety requirements aim to ensure that organisations working with children:

- Prevent harm before it occurs
- Detect risks early
- Respond effectively to concerns
- Embed a culture of child safety
- Empower children and young people
- Maintain strong governance oversight

For SEOs, the framework ensures international students are safe while living, studying and participating in Australian community life.

What the Standards Seek to Achieve

The child safe framework in Western Australia seeks to:

1. Shift from reactive to preventive safeguarding
Organisations must actively identify and mitigate risks rather than respond only after incidents occur.

2. Embed child safety in organisational culture
Child safety must be visible in leadership behaviour, decision-making and daily practice.

3. Strengthen screening and suitability checks
Robust WWCC and recruitment processes reduce the risk of unsuitable persons working with children.

4. Empower children and young people
Students must understand their rights and how to seek help.

5. Improve transparency and accountability
Organisations must maintain clear records, reporting pathways and review mechanisms.

6. Promote continuous improvement
Safeguarding systems must be reviewed and strengthened over time.

KEY FEATURES OF THE WA APPROACH

Western Australia's model emphasises:

- Risk-based child safety management
- Strong Working With Children screening
- Cross-agency child protection coordination
- Governance accountability
- Evidence-based compliance
- Cultural safety for diverse cohorts.

THE NATIONAL CHILD SAFE PRINCIPLES (WA)

Principle 1

Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.
Organisations must demonstrate visible leadership commitment and accountability for child safety at all levels.

Principle 2

Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.
Children must be empowered, listened to and supported to raise concerns safely.

Principle 3

Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.
Organisations must actively engage parents, carers and communities as partners in safeguarding.

Principle 4

Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.
Child safety approaches must recognise and respond to cultural, linguistic, disability and gender diversity.

Principle 5

People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.
Robust recruitment, screening, supervision and training must ensure only appropriate persons work with children.

Principle 6

Processes to respond to complaints and concerns are child focused.
Organisations must have clear, accessible and timely procedures for handling concerns and allegations.

Principle 7

Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.
Continuous training must build workforce capability to recognise and respond to risks.

Principle 8

Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.
Organisations must identify and mitigate environmental and digital risks.

Principle 9

Implementation of the national child safe principles is regularly reviewed and improved.
Safeguarding systems must be monitored, evaluated and strengthened over time.

Principle 10

Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people.
Clear, accessible and operational documentation must underpin child safe practice.

In Western Australia, Student Exchange Organisations must demonstrate comprehensive alignment with the National Principles and relevant state legislation. Effective child safety practice requires not only compliant policies but also strong governance, active monitoring, and a culture that prioritises the wellbeing of every child and young person.