the social work & human services workforce:

REPORT FROM A NATIONAL STUDY OF **EDUCATION, TRAINING AND WORKFORCE NEEDS**

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Promoting excellence in higher education

THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND
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PROJECT REFERENCE GROUP MEMBERS:
Professor Margaret Alston, Monash University;
Lyndsey Fitzgerald, President - Australian Institute of Welfare and Community Workers;
Associate Professor Margarita Frederico, La Trobe University;
Associate Professor Jude Irwin, The University of Sydney;
Professor Catherine McDonald, RMIT University;
Ian Murray, Australian Institute of Welfare and Community Workers;
Professor Elizabeth Ozanne, The University of Melbourne;
Dr Jane Thomson, Emmanuel College, University of Queensland;
Associate Professor Deborah West, Charles Darwin University.

Tables and Figures

Glossary

AASW: Australian Association of Social Workers

AASWWE: Australian Association of Social Work and Welfare Educators

ABS: Australian Bureau of Statistics

AIHW: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

AIWCW: Australian Institute of Welfare and Community Workers

AQTF: Australian Quality Training Framework. The AQTF is responsible for defining and setting the standards for the education and training within the VET sector

COAG: Council of Australian Governments. COAG is the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia, comprising the Prime Minister, State Premiers, Territory Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) (see www.coag.gov.au)

CS & HIC: Community Services and Health Industry Council

CSDMAC: Community Services and Disability Ministers Advisory Committee

DEEWR: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

HECS Higher Education Contribution Scheme

RTO: Registered Training Organisation

TAFE: Technical and Further Education

VET: Vocational Educational and Employment sector (includes TAFE and RTOs). This sector delivers a range of vocational educational training programs including certificate and diploma level qualifications.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyses the national curriculum and workforce needs of the social work and human services workforce.

Australia's community and health services are among the fastest growing sectors of employment in the nation but the sustainability of an appropriately qualified workforce is threatened. Yet there is little integration of education and workforce planning for the community services sector. This contrasts markedly with the health services sector, where key stakeholders are collaboratively addressing workforce challenges.

Our research confirmed rapid growth in the social work and human services workforce and it also identified:

- an undersupply of professionally qualified social work and human service practitioners to meet workforce demand;
- the rapid ageing of the workforce with many workers approaching retirement;
- limited career and salary structures creating disincentives to retention;
- a highly diverse qualification base across the workforce. This diversity is inconsistent with the specialist knowledge and skills required of practitioners in many domains of community service provision.

Our study revealed a lack of co-ordination across VET and higher education to meet the educational needs of the social work and human services workforce. Our analysis identified:

- strong representation of equity groups in social work and related human service programs, although further participation of these groups is still needed;
- the absence of clear articulation pathways between VET and higher education programs due the absence of co-ordination and planning between these sectors;
- substantial variation in the content of the diverse range of social work and human service programs, with accredited programs conforming to national standards and some others in social and behavioural sciences lacking any external validation;
- financial obstacles and disincentives to social work and human service practitioners in achieving postgraduate level qualifications.

We recommend that:

- DEEWR identify accredited social work and human services courses as a national education priority (similar to education and nursing). This will help ensure the supply of professional workers to this sector;
- VET and higher education providers are encouraged to collaboratively develop clear and accessible educational pathways across the educational sectors;
- DEEWR undertake a national workforce analysis and planning processes in collaboration with CSDMAC, and all social and community services stakeholders, to ensure workforce sustainability; and
- COAG develop a national regulation framework for the social and community services workforce. This would provide sound accountability systems, and rigorous practice and educational standards necessary for quality service provision. It will also ensure much needed public confidence in this workforce.

One:
An Overview of The Study

INTRODUCTION

In November 2007, the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (formerly the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education) funded this study into the curriculum content and workforce needs of social work and human service workers in Australia.

The project was intended to be a catalyst for the development of a national workforce plan for this sector, including an integrated curriculum. The project was led by Professor Bob Lonne, Queensland University of Technology and Professor Karen Healy, The University of Queensland and involved research on the range and content of social welfare curriculum offered in the Australian higher education and vocational education and training (VET) sectors, changes in demand for social welfare educational programs, and workforce trends.

In this report we present the findings of our study into the educational preparation of the social work and human services workforce and current and emerging workforce needs. We use the term social work and human services workforce to describe a diverse group of workers employed in government and non-government agencies to deliver a wide range of human services to vulnerable and disadvantaged people. The key sectors of employment for this workforce are the community services and health sectors. These sectors have for some time experienced considerable expansion and this is expected to continue for the foreseeable future (AIHW, 2009; Karmel and Blomberg, 2009). Indeed, between 2001 and 2006 the community services workforce grew by 35.6%; this makes it one of the fastest growing sectors of employment in the country (AIHW, 2009, p.vii).

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SOCIAL WORK AND HUMAN SERVICES SECTOR

Drawing on the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations, we refer to social work and human service workers as those involved in practice with individuals, groups and communities to assess social needs and to intervene to promote quality of life through improving access to resources and services, or through the provision of social support or personal care services. This definition includes social welfare professionals, such as professionally qualified social workers, paraprofessionals, such as family support workers or youth workers, and intermediate support workers, such as workers providing personal care services to support people with disabilities to remain in their homes.

The demands on social work and human service workers are immense. These workers are required to respond to diverse and complex situations often with limited support. Increasingly, too, governments, as the key funders of this workforce, expect social work and human service workers to assume responsibility for assessment and intervention activities with complex situations involving people who are disadvantaged and, at times, highly vulnerable. In this context, it is important that workers are appropriately qualified, trained and supported to respond to the increasing responsibility and complexity of their roles.

Despite its importance to the broad society and relative size within the Australian economy, comparatively little is known of the social work and human services workforce and the preparation and training it receives for the complex social care tasks and programs that it undertakes, nor the issues, trends and challenges it faces looking forward. The community services sector, a key site for the employment of social work and human services workers is

a large and growing sector. In 2006, the total number of workers in the community services sector exceeded 297 000 people (AIHW, 2009). The sector is facing a number of significant challenges including:

- an ageing workforce, with substantial growth in the proportion of workers in the 56-64 age bracket;
- high rates of workforce turnover relative to other Australian industries; and
- growing demand for services, particularly community-based non-residential care and support services in family support, disability support and community aged care support.

Social work and the human services workforce, particularly in the community services sector, has had a lower proportion of workers with post-school qualifications compared to other workforce sectors, such as education and allied health professionals (see Meagher and Healy, 2006, p. 39). Moreover, Meagher and Healy (2006, p. 51) found that while overall qualification levels have increased in the community services sector, there has been limited growth in the proportion of workers with qualifications working in non-residential care services, that is in the community services industry in which employment growth is strongest.

Substantial gaps in knowledge exist about the scope of social work and human services educational curriculum and there is a lack of a coherent national strategy for building a sustainable social work and human services workforce, despite efforts at workforce planning by the Community Services and Disability Ministers Advisory Committee (CSDMAC). This contrasts with the health sector, where considerable national attention has focused on analyzing and responding to emerging workforce needs for doctors, nurses and allied health professionals (Australian Health Ministers' Conference, 2004; National Health Workforce Taskforce, 2009). Yet, without a well-trained and highly skilled workforce the delivery of social welfare and other human services to Australian citizens will be significantly affected to the considerable detriment of the social fabric and functioning of our society, not to mention the negative impacts upon vulnerable or disadvantaged individuals, families, groups and communities who are service users.

The diversity of the social work and human services workforce contributes to difficulty in developing a shared understanding of the scope of the workforce and for future planning. Definitions of the human services are difficult and contested because this workforce has responsibility for a broad variety of functions and tasks, with roles performed by a diverse array of people from different disciplines, with various qualifications, and with a variety of knowledge bases and approaches. Social work and human service workers hold a wide range of qualifications including certificate, diploma, degree and postgraduate qualifications in a wide variety of fields. Apart from inconsistent, and sometimes incongruent, curriculum there is a lack of integration and limited articulation between these educational sectors, institutions and programs. This results in difficulties for many students and practitioners when trying to find a clear pathway for their professional and career development.

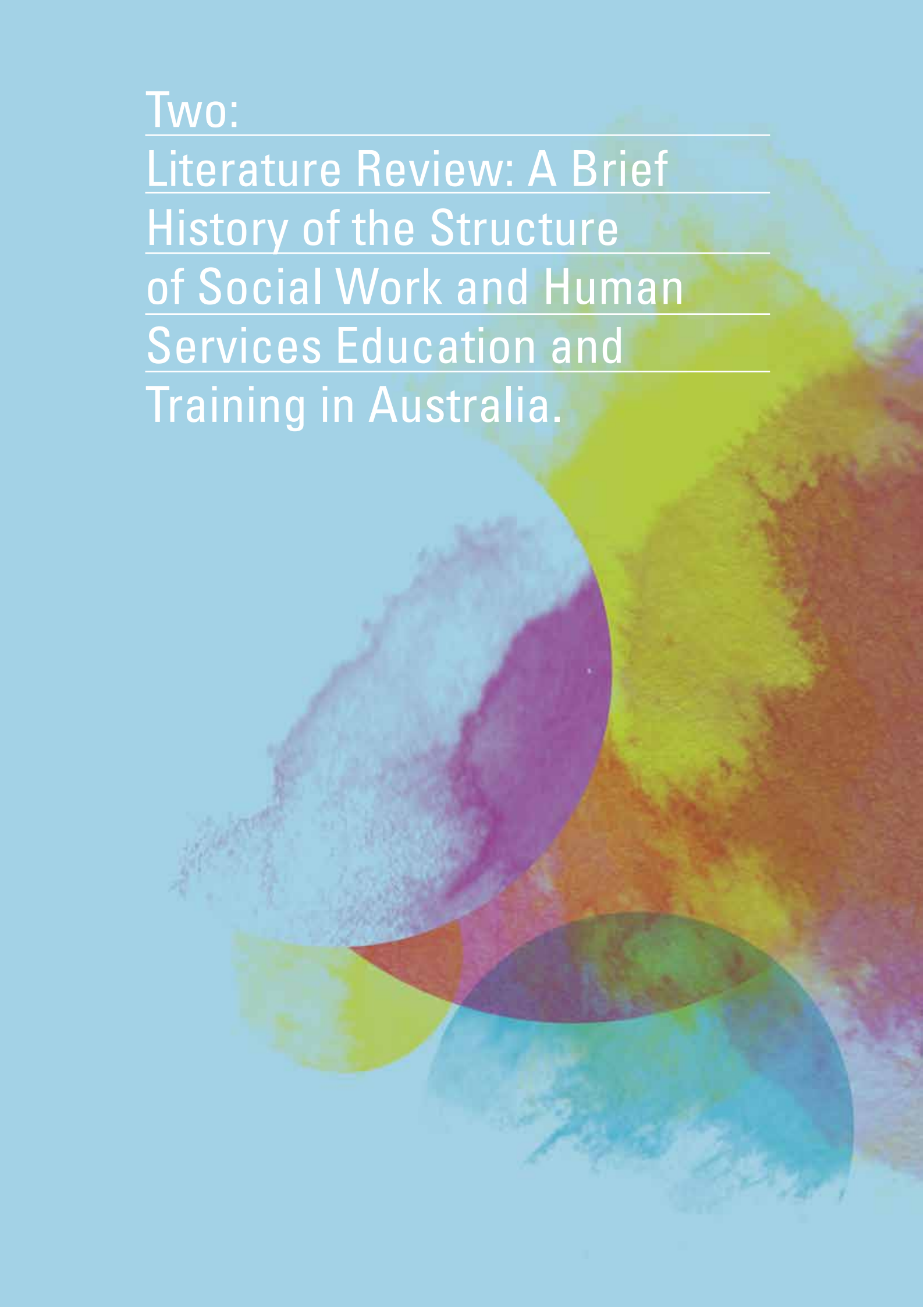
In contrast to the United Kingdom, the USA and New Zealand, where social work is a registered occupation, in Australia, social work and related social welfare occupations, such as human services, are not subject to government regulation in any jurisdiction (Lonne and Duke, 2008). The lack of registration of social welfare workers in Australia reflects the highly unregulated environment in which this workforce has developed and the continuing debates within social welfare occupations and amongst employers and commentators about the merits of occupational registration (see Healy, 2009; Karmel and Blomberg, 2009; Lonne and Duke, 2008; McDonald, 2006). Social work and human services practitioners deliver a multitude of services, interventions and programs to address a vast array of social problems and conditions affecting the broad diversity of individuals, families, groups and communities found within our society. The sector also lacks coherent human resource strategies for matching worker capacity and qualifications with tasks. In the child protection industry,

for example, it is repeatedly noted that the least experienced workers hold responsibility for many of the most difficult and demanding front-line tasks, such as assessment of, and intervention with, child abuse risk (Healy, Meagher and Cullin, 2009).

In this report, we aim to:

- provide an overview of the changing higher education and vocational training policy context and analyse the implications for social work and human services education in the higher education and VET sector;
- analyse the structure and curriculum content of social work and human services curriculum across Australia;
- outline workforce outcomes and trends relevant to the social work and human services workforce;
- identify the key curriculum and workforce issues facing the sector; and
- present recommendations for addressing these issues, including recommendations for improving the integration of curriculum and national workforce planning in the rapidly expanding social work and human services workforce.

Two: Literature Review: A Brief History of the Structure of Social Work and Human Services Education and Training in Australia.



Social work and human services education has expanded substantially over the past four decades.

Currently, tertiary education for the social work and human services workforce is offered through two sectors: the higher education sector (that is, universities), and the vocational education and training (VET) sector. In this chapter, we provide an overview of tertiary education in social work and human services and discuss how changes in the range and types of social welfare programs offered reflect broader trends within the Australian higher education context.

TERTIARY EDUCATION IN SOCIAL WORK AND THE HUMAN SERVICES

In 1929, the first training course for hospital almoners, the precursor of professional social work, was established in New South Wales. In 1939, the first degree-level social work program, a three-year course, was offered at The University of Sydney. Social work degree-level programs expanded rapidly in the post-World War II period leading to approximately 20 degree-level social work programs being offered through Australian universities by 1980. In the post-War period the length of education in social work program was extended to four years full-time equivalent study and, for the bachelor degree, remains so today. Initially, social work programs were primarily offered in the universities, rather than colleges of advanced education or institutes of technology. The number of degree-level social work programs has continued to slowly expand with 26 degree programs now being offered across Australia, although one university, the Australian Catholic University operates its program from three capital cities.

Social work degrees are subject to accreditation by the Australian Association of Social Work (AASW). Until recently, only the four-year accredited Bachelor of Social Work program, and its equivalent two-year advanced standing and graduate entry programs, led to eligibility for membership of the AASW. In 2008, the AASW also accredited Master of Social Work programs that met the requirements for eligibility for membership of the AASW. While, increasingly, social work programs offer students with the opportunity for specialisation in key practice fields, the accredited social work degree is a generic and generalist practice degree intended to prepare students for practice across a wide variety of social work and human services roles.

Since the 1980s, the range of human service, social welfare and applied social and behavioural science programs have grown. Originally emerging in the colleges of advanced education and the institutes of technology, a wide variety of accredited welfare and community work programs exist. More than 30 degree-level accredited programs are offered at fourteen (14) Australian higher education institutions. Human service, community welfare, and related applied social science degrees, are three years in length. To be eligible for accreditation by the Australian Institute of Welfare and Community Workers (AIWCW) these degrees must meet certain curriculum specifications and include at least 400 hours of supervised field education (see Chapter 3).

Beyond accredited programs, graduates of a wide variety of social and behavioural sciences programs are also employed in the social work and human services workforce. Furthermore, many universities actively promote these programs as providing a career pathway into the social work and human services fields; these assertions may be present even where these programs lack formal accreditation, work placement or specific skill development courses for the social work and human services workforce. As we will discuss further in Chapter 5,

significant employment growth in the sector has created many opportunities for graduates of more generic programs to be employed in social work and human services fields.

The market for postgraduate education amongst the social work and human services workforce is limited. A number of factors contribute to this including the lack of market advantage for workers with postgraduate qualifications and the limited capacity of employers, especially within the non-government sector, to support workers to undertake postgraduate study. Given that social workers and human services workers have lower salaries and poor working conditions than in many other industries, it is likely that many of these workers do not have the financial capacity to afford full-fee postgraduate education.

THE VET SECTOR

The Vocational Education and Training Sector is an important provider of educational and training for the social work and human services workforce. The VET sector incorporates a wide variety of educational institutions including Technical and Further Education colleges (TAFE) and private Registered Training Organisations (RTO). The Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) is responsible for defining and setting the standards for the education and training within the VET sector while the Australian Qualifications Framework operates under the auspice of the Australian Qualifications Framework Council and provides a national unified system of qualifications available in schools, VET and higher education (see Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2009; also DEEWR, 2007). VET qualifications are subject to accreditation and monitoring by National Councils within specific industries (such as the National Council for Community Services and Health) and State and Territory government training authorities, and in some instances by the AIWCW (for example, TAFE Community Services Diploma programs).

The number and range of social work and human services qualifications offered in the higher education and the VET sector has grown dramatically over the past three decades. The extent and nature of this expansion reflects broader trends within tertiary training and education. We turn now to discuss these trends.

WHITLAM, DAWKINS AND BEYOND

In 1974, the Whitlam government abolished tuition fees for tertiary education for students and increased funding to tertiary education institutions. The expansion of tertiary education that followed included growth in the number and range of social welfare programs. In addition to the four-year social work program, a range of human service and community welfare programs that emerged in the post-Whitlam era were offered primarily within regional universities, institutes of technology and colleges of advanced education.

In 1986, the "Review of the Efficiency and Effectiveness in Higher Education",commonly known as the Dawkins Report, (see Dawkins, 1987; 1988) resulted in the abolition of "the binary distinction between universities and colleges of higher education and created the unified national system that would contain a much smaller number of significantly larger institutions" (Meek, 2002, p. 254). In effect, this led to a two-tiered system of tertiary education with universities responsible for higher education and the technical and further education colleges (TAFE) filling the role of providing non-degree training, as well as vocational training, apprenticeships and skills upgrading. The consequences of this change included that a broad range of social welfare and human services programs were subsequently offered across the higher education sector.

While the reforms had far reaching implications for the higher education system (see Meek, 2002, p. 260), a number had specific implications for social work and human services education. First, the Dawkins reforms included the reintroduction of student fees through the "Higher Education Contribution Scheme" (HECS) in 1989. As social work and human service courses have traditionally attracted a larger cohort of mature-age students, and students from lower income backgrounds than other higher education programs, the increased costs appeared more likely to have an impact on this student cohort than on many others. According to the Review of Higher Education Report (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent and Scales, 2008, p. 27) known as the Bradley Report, the participation rate of low-income students in higher education is substantially lower than their representation in the general population and has remained static since 2002.

Second, the Dawkins reforms led to an increased deregulation of the higher education sector and the increased reliance by universities on sources of funding other than the Commonwealth (Meek, 2002, p. 260). The Howard Government (1996-2007) continued the process of market reform of the higher education system, albeit within a period where higher accountability requirements and closer government monitoring were also instituted (Cain and Hewitt, 2004; Coaldrake and Steadman, 1998).

Deregulation has led to increased competition amongst higher education institutions for students and other income sources. As universities seek to demonstrate value for money to students enrolling in higher education programs, there has been an increased emphasis on curricula with vocational outcomes.

Current suggestions for reform in the higher education sector propose further integration between higher education and VET sector institutions is needed (Karmel and Blomberg, 2009). Bradley et al (2008, p. xvi) state that:

> *Tertiary qualifications are offered in two sectors with what have been, historically, very different roles and approaches to educational provision. But the move to a mass higher education system together with the growth of a credentials-driven employment environment has seen a blurring of the boundaries between the two sectors. However, each still has a critical role to play in meeting Australia's future skills needs. While it is important to maintain the integrity of the VET system and its provision of distinct qualifications in which the content is strongly driven by the advice of industry, the time has come for a more coherent approach to tertiary educational provision.*

Thus, in the current higher education environment in Australia there is a sense of a more cooperative relationship between higher education and the VET sector, and this, according to the Bradley Report, may be the face of the educational industry in the future.

MARKETISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION: AN INTERNATIONAL TREND

Market reforms of the tertiary education sector have occurred alongside the reforms to institutional structures within the sector and a propensity by the Federal Government to closely scrutinise sector outcomes. The marketisation of tertiary education has involved an increased emphasis on the user-pays principle with the opening up of full-fee student places in tertiary institutions, and increased competition amongst tertiary service providers (Cain and Hewitt, 2004; Coaldrake and Steadman, 1998). Marketisation has a range of effects on the delivery of educational services. As Mok (1999, p. 118) asserts:

> *The strong market forces have caused institutions of higher learning to re-orient themselves to be more sensitive to market needs; universities now are more*

concerned with employable graduates to suit the employers' demands. Courses and curricula are "market-driven", stressing their practical and applied value. When measuring results, we no longer look for educated graduates, but in fact, more attention is given to performance indicators and efficiency. With more importance attached to the "extrinsic" value of education, people now search for academic profiles and research output instead of how far students and staff have benefited from the educational process.

The marketisation of education is shaping the delivery of educational services across the Anglophone world and beyond, including Europe (see Lynch, 2006), China (Qping and White, 1994) and Africa (Wangenge-Ouma, 2008).

In Australia, the impact of market reforms of the higher education sector has been significant (Meek, 2000, 2002; Slaughter and Larry, 1997). Meek argues that marketisation has shifted education from being understood as a public good, to a private good across the nation. Marketisation has contributed to changes in higher education by shaping the types of programs taught and leading to increased emphasis on the economic allure of a program to students and the society. A degree or diploma, then, can now be read as a tool for employment. In this way Duke (2004) and Meek (2000, 2002; see also Meek and Wood, 1997) have argued that one of the most important changes that have resulted from the marketisation of higher education in Australia is the increased focus on the vocational orientation of tertiary qualifications.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SOCIAL WORK AND HUMAN SERVICES EDUCATION

Over the past two decades the higher education sector has been subject to substantial reforms. Amongst the most significant of these reforms are: changes to the institutional structures of tertiary education; higher accountability requirements; and market forms of the sector. We turn now to the analysis of the implications of these reforms for the delivery of social work and human services education.

Since 1986, there has been rapid growth in student numbers in tertiary institutions, increased deregulation of the sector alongside more stringent accountability requirements, and growing competition amongst universities for students (see Wood and Meek, 2002). This period has coincided with a expansion in the number and range of social welfare programs offered in tertiary institutions. Prior to the 1980s, the Bachelor of Social Work was the primary degree-level program for students seeking to enter the human services workforce. While the number of social work programs has expanded over the last three decades, major growth has also occurred in the number and range of human service, community welfare and applied social and behavioural science degrees.

The expansion of social work and human services programs has also coincided with substantial growth in the health and community services workforce. There are substantial workforce shortages in these fields and other caring occupations (Meagher and Healy, 2005). For example, Bradley et al., (2008, p. 166) note that Australia continues to face a shortage of qualified workers in nursing and education sectors and recommends that students should continue to be encouraged and supported to enter educational programs in these fields.

The nature and extent of expansion of tertiary education, particularly higher education, amongst the social work and human services workforce has attracted considerable debate amongst researchers and employers. The debates we will cover in this chapter are tensions around: curriculum content; occupational regulation of graduates of various social welfare educational programs; and the delivery of social welfare curriculum content in an increasingly market driven educational environment. We now turn to a discussion of these concerns.

1. Debate about curriculum content

In the context of substantial employment growth in the social work and human services workforce, debate reigns about the level and nature of qualifications required in this sector. Debate about the relevance of tertiary qualifications to social work and human services occupations is especially strong within the community services sector, which traditionally has relied heavily on volunteers and workers with lower levels of formal qualifications than in comparative workforce sectors, such as the health sector (for discussion see Briggs, Meagher and Healy, 2007; MacDonald, 2007).

One area of tension concerns the relevance of generic versus specialist qualifications in social work and human services. Research by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) (2002) suggests that employers prefer graduates with specialist qualifications within specific employment fields, such as youth work, or child protection work (see also Bessant, 2005; Healy and Meagher, 2007). Yet, even though many social work and human services programs offer specialist study streams in areas of high employment, specialist educational curriculum in these areas is not a requirement for accreditation with either the AASW or the AIWCW. Nonetheless, the AASW has recently introduced minimum curriculum standards in child protection, practice with Indigenous people, cross-cultural practice, and mental health social work for accredited social work education programs. Furthermore, most of the AIWCW accredited degree programs include options for specialist study pathways, usually in key fields of human service employment (see Chapter 3).

An important aspect of the debate about curriculum concerns tensions about who should determine curriculum content. In Australian higher education institutions, accredited social work, welfare and community work qualifications are shaped by academics and professional bodies, including senior practitioners. By contrast, in the VET sector, industry stakeholders, including employers and funders, have a much greater role in shaping curriculum content. Differences in this stakeholder input is reflected in the outcome that accredited programs within higher education institutions tend to incorporate substantial material on students capacity for critical analysis of the context and content of practice, whilst VET sector programs in community services are structured around the attainment and demonstration of workplace competencies.

The more critical and theoretical focus of university-based social welfare programs has attracted considerable criticism from employers in Australia and in comparable Anglophone countries (Green, 2006; Healy, 2009). For example, in the United Kingdom in 2002, Jacqui Smith, the then Minister of State, asserted that "Social work is a very practical job… [it is] not about being fluent in a theoretical explanation of why they [service users] got into difficulties in the first place" (cited in Green, 2006, p. 251). Many commentators have noted that a significant gap has emerged between the systemic and professional frameworks that underpin social welfare education and the increasingly narrow focus on risk management in many fields of social work and human services practice (Green, 2006, p. 259; Humphrey, 2006, p. 372).

In Australia, the role of governments and employers as stakeholders in shaping curriculum in higher education is limited. The AASW requires that accredited social work programs have feedback mechanisms to incorporate the views of various stakeholders, including employers, in curriculum development. Furthermore, many social work and human services schools have developed industry reference groups. Yet, beyond this, there are two significant challenges to the achievement of industry involvement in higher education institutions to the extent found in the VET sector. The first challenge is that the substantially longer time frames of bachelor level programs coupled with professional accreditation requirements limits the capacity of higher education institutions to respond quickly to changing industry expectations. Further challenges can be encountered where the employer expectations appear inconsistent with the knowledge or value base of social work and human service professions (see Healy, 2009).

Undoubtedly, tensions exist between some higher education providers and employers in the social welfare and human services sector and these tensions have their genesis, in part, in the lack of institutional structures for ensuring mutual accountability and consistency between educators and employers. In Australia, curriculum content in accredited social work and human service programs is primarily determined by professional associations which include senior professionals. In the USA social work education standards are developed and monitored by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) rather than the professional association, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). This is in contrast to the United Kingdom, where government plays a central role in shaping curriculum and, in turn, is also the major employer of human service workers. Yet, despite these institutional structures, some tensions exist in these countries between employers' and educators' expectations of professional social welfare education and employment (see Green, 2006; Healy, 2009; McDonald, 2006).

The debate about the adequacy of preparation of social work and human service workers for practice has occurred in the context of a dearth of research on this topic (Mendes, 2005). There is only a small body of literature examining graduates' and employers' perceptions of the adequacy of social worker's and human services worker's preparation for practice and most of this research is focused on graduates of social work programs. There is an absence of independent studies of the adequacy of the broader range of human service, applied social and behavioural science and VET sector qualifications in providing educational and training preparation for the social work and human services workforce. Even so, the small body of literature examining graduates' and employers' perceptions of the adequacy of the educational preparation of social work and human service graduate reflects a diversity of viewpoints and tensions within this sector about the benefits and limitations of tertiary social welfare educational programs (see Cameron, 2003; Dhooper, Royse and Wolfe, 1990, p57; Healy and Meagher, 2007)

Despite the diversity of viewpoints about the impact of tertiary education in social work and human services field, there is substantial evidence that field placements, a substantial feature of all accredited social work and human services programs and many VET programs, provide an important bridge between academic and practical knowledge and, further, facilitate preparation for employment. While field education placements provide some opportunity for students to gain generic knowledge and skills, their advantage as workforce preparation appears to be strongest when graduates are employed within the specific field in which they have substantial placement experience (see Cameron, 2003; Hawkins, Ryan, Murray, Grace, Hawkins, Mendes and Chatley, 2000; Patford, 2001). For example, Healy and Meagher's (2007) study of child protection workers found that workers who had completed a substantial placement, of at least 250 hours, in this field of practice during their study program rated themselves as well prepared for child protection practice, whereas workers with the same qualifications but who had not undertaken placement in this field, rated themselves as relatively poorly prepared for this type of work. However, given the considerable diversity of work undertaken by social work and human service workers it is unlikely that all graduates could gain pre-service work experience in the field in which they intend to practice.

2. Resistance to Occupational Regulation

The role of occupational regulation, particularly in the form of occupational registration is heavily contested in the social work and human services workforce (Lonne and Duke, 2008). Given the variety of career pathways into the workforce, many commentators question the extent to which occupational regulation will act as a barrier to capable workers assuming roles within the industry (see McDonald, 2006). There is also significant concern that mandatory qualification requirements place serious constraints on the ways employers can address the significant skills shortages facing the industry in the context of exceptional employment growth and elevated workforce turnover (Department of Child Safety, 2007; Karmel and Blomberg, 2009, p. 9). However, beyond problems of supply of a qualified workforce lies a further concern about the relevance of higher education qualifications to facilitating the development of capacities and skills required by professional practitioners in these fields. Karmel and Blomberg (2009, p. 33), researchers from the NCVER caution that "higher levels of qualifications come at a cost, and the challenge is to ensure that those qualifications lead to higher skill levels rather than just better credentialed workers." In other words, commentators and employers in the sector question whether occupational regulation will enhance workforce capacity or whether it will provide a barrier to workforce development.

Yet, in the absence of regulation it is difficult for employers or service users to determine the qualification base of the service provider they employ. This can lead to problems in assessing or improving the quality of educational input or in understanding educational needs of workers. For example, the support needs of a newly qualified worker with an accredited social welfare degree, which involves between 400 and 980 hours of supervised field placement, are likely to be different to those of workers without this educational experience. Certainly, the available research evidence indicates that workers with placement experience fare better than those without this educational input (see Healy and Meagher, 2007). Moreover, the absence of an equally shared language around terms such as "social worker" or "welfare worker" can create confusion for educators and employers about the ongoing educational and training needs of the workforce. Similarly, it is difficult for social work and human service educators to determine whether industry commentary on the adequacy of workforce preparation is an accurate reflection of the capacities of social work and human services graduates or whether employers are, in fact, referring to graduates of other educational programs.

3. Tensions between market reforms and human services education

The marketisation of higher education has contributed to increasing tensions between social work and human services programs and the educational context in which these programs are delivered. Although there have been very few studies into the impact of neo-liberal policies on social work and human services education, training and skills in Australia, the few that explore this relationship (Baines, 2006; Crimeen and Wilson, 1997; Gray and Crofts, 2008) point to shifts in the delivery and content of social work and community services education and training. Focusing specifically on the social work sector, Crimeen and Wilson (1997, p. 47) have argued that:

> *The economic rationalist inspired marketisation of human services in Australia has increasingly compromised the professional values of social work… as the profession seeks to protect itself in an era of declining welfare resources.*

A number of commentators suggest that values underpinning the market reforms of higher education, generally, and social welfare programs, stand in direct contradiction to the values of social welfare and human services occupations (see Baines, 2006; Crimeen and Wilson, 1997). Baines (2006, p. 29) argues that:

> *Under new private sector-like models of work organisation, skills are no longer recognised as a complex synergy of formal, informal, individual and collective knowledge that develop incrementally through social interactions (citing Manwearing and Wood, 1984; Darrah, 1997). Rather, skills are recast as "competencies" or "human capital" that individual workers own or should obtain (citing Jackson, 1997)... rather than defining core skills within the broader context of what social service workers should and could be doing to expand equity and social justice.*

The marketisation of human services education, when coupled with the marketisation of community service delivery, is likely to threaten the humanist orientation that has traditionally underpinned social work and human services education (see Green, 2006).

Summary

Social work and human services education has expanded substantially over the past three decades. This expansion has occurred during a period of substantial structural reform to the higher education and VET sectors. The deregulation, increased accountability and marketisation of higher education and VET sectors has contributed to the expansion of these programs, but also to substantial tensions within them. Educational commentators, employers and graduates have raised a variety of concerns about the delivery of social work and human services education.

Three:
Social Work and Human Services Curriculum

Over the past decade, the proportion of workers in the social work and human services workforce with tertiary qualifications has grown (Blomberg and Karmel, 2009; Meagher and Healy 2006).

Consequently, the higher education and vocational education sectors have become increasingly important contributors to the preparation of this workforce. This chapter will outline the range of tertiary programs offered in the higher education and VET sectors aimed at preparing individuals to enter the social work and human services workforce. We will outline the curriculum content in accredited programs offered in both higher education and VET sectors.

THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

Currently, 29 of Australia's 39 universities offer degree level qualifications accredited by the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) or the Australian Institute for Welfare and Community Workers (AIWCW). The accredited social work degree (at Bachelor and Masters levels) is offered by 27 institutions. No private higher education or Registered Training Organisations offer the accredited social work qualification. Twelve public universities and two private Registered Training Organisations offer Bachelor degree level qualifications accredited by the AIWCW. Eleven public institutions offer both qualifications accredited by the AASW and AIWCW. Only two Group of Eight universities, Monash University and The University of Queensland, offer both sets of qualifications.

Beyond degree level qualifications accredited by the AASW or the AIWCW, all Australian universities offer qualifications in fields such as social science and psychology that can also provide a pathway into the social work and human services workforce. In their advertising material to prospective students, and employers, many institutions offering social and behavioural science programs assert that these programs prepare graduates for careers in community services and other fields; some claims are made without any external validation of them. The number and range of these programs is extensive and beyond the scope of this report. Our focus in this analysis is on accredited social work and welfare programs because these programs are intended to prepare students specifically for the social work and human services workforce.

SOCIAL WORK EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS IN AUSTRALIA

The pathway to eligibility for membership of the AASW, the professional association for social workers, is through the accredited social work degree. The AASW is responsible for accrediting the professional social work curriculum and has approved two educational pathways towards this qualification. One educational pathway is the Bachelor of Social Work degree, which involves four years of full-time equivalent study. Many universities offer this program in what is known as a "2+2" combination, wherein students complete two years of social and behavioural studies followed by two years of intensive social work study, or alternatively, complete a Bachelors Degree followed by a two-year graduate entry program. The second pathway is the accredited qualifying Master of Social Work programs; these programs were formally recognised by the AASW in 2008 as providing an alternative to the four-year undergraduate program.

Many higher education institutions offering an accredited social work degree offer it as a stand-alone degree or in combination with another degree. The most common combination is the Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Social Work combination; this combination is available in most universities offering the Bachelor of Social Work degree. Two universities offer a Bachelor of Social Work and Bachelor of Social Science combination whilst another two offer the combined Bachelor of Social Work and Bachelor of Laws qualifications. The range of combinations offered with the accredited social work degree is far fewer than is offered with the community welfare and human services degrees and probably reflects the comparatively lengthy nature of the accredited social work degree and the extensive field education requirements in that degree. These requirements make other degree combinations difficult to achieve in a timely manner.

In its education and accreditation standards document, the AASW (2008) asserts that social work education must engage students in the development of a conceptual framework and skill acquisition that is consistent with the purpose of social work practice. The AASW defines the purpose of social work as follows:

> *The social work profession is committed to the pursuit of social justice, the enhancement of the quality of life and the development of the full potential of each individual, group and community in society. Social workers work at the interface between people and their environments, utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems (AASW, 2008, p. 5).*

The AASW position on social work as a profession concerned with both individual and social systems and commitment to the pursuit of social justice stands in tension with the stated expectations of some employers that social work education should promote practical skills and job focused competencies (for discussion see Green, 2006; Healy, 2009; MacDonald, 2007). Indeed, while the AASW (2008, p. 6) asserts that the social work curriculum should facilitate "a broad range of skills in direct practice", the association requires that these skills are taught in ways that promote: "Reflective and reflexive practice; structural analysis; critical thinking; ethical and professional behaviour." The AASW accreditation standards requires that students are provided with opportunities to achieve practical competencies but that they are also enabled to critically reflect on their skills and the contexts in which social work practices occur.

Our review of the content of the curriculum of accredited social work programs revealed substantial commonalities in the content of these programs nationwide. These commonalities included:

- Foundational units in social and behavioural sciences, either as pre-requisites to entry into social work programs or as part of the study program, in all accredited social work programs. These units tended to be taken in the first two years of study;
- Required courses of study in social policy, with many programs incorporating required units of study in political science, are present in all accredited social work programs;
- All programs included study in social work theory, social work skills and research. Programs varied in the number of courses taken in each of these curriculum areas;
- The majority of courses offered in the accredited degree are social work coded courses. This means that in accredited social work degrees, more than 50% of program content is tailored for students enrolled in social work programs rather than for students enrolled in more generic social and behavioural studies programs; and
- A minimum of 980 hours of field education is taken over at least two placements with each placement being a minimum of 290 hours (40 days) duration and typically, the placement requirements were split relatively evenly between two placements.

AASW stipulations for curriculum content contributes to limited regional variation in the curriculum content amongst the 27 accredited social work programs offered nationwide. Our curriculum review indicated that many educators providing social work programs endorse adult learning principles, however, there was institutional variation in how these principles were interpreted with some programs emphasising problem-based learning approaches.

Accredited social work degrees are generic in that these programs are intended to prepare students for practice in a wide variety of social work fields. Consequently, there is no requirement for accredited social work programs to offer specialist study pathways and, unlike many of the AIWCW accredited degrees, accredited social work programs (the Bachelor and Masters qualifying degrees) rarely designate a specialist field to the title of the social work degree. The lack of requirement for specialised study pathways has attracted some criticism from scholars and from employers on the basis that key fields of practice, such as child protection and mental health, often require specialist knowledge (see Healy and Meagher, 2007). Whilst maintaining a commitment to generic social work qualifications, in 2008 the AASW introduced professional standards requirements into foundational social work curriculum in relation to key areas of practice, specifically mental health and child protection, and also into work with particular populations, specifically in relation to cross cultural practice and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (AASW, 2008).

COMMUNITY WELFARE AND HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS

Fourteen public higher educational institutions and two private RTOs offer degree level social welfare qualifications accredited by the AIWCW. The AIWCW has the capacity to accredit those programs that meet their guidelines concerning preparing graduates for roles as community and welfare workers. In contrast to accredited social work programs where the qualification title is standardised to incorporate the term "social work", a broad range of nomenclature is used amongst the programs accredited by the AIWCW, including:. community welfare, human services, social science and applied social science. Furthermore, considerable regional variation exists in the terminology used in naming degrees in this area. For example, four universities in south east Queensland offer accredited degrees under the title Bachelor of Human Services, however, this terminology is rarely used in AIWCW accredited degrees elsewhere in Australia. In other states and territories, the nomenclature of social science and applied social science is more commonly used amongst AIWCW accredited programs degrees with designated fields being incorporated into the title, such as Bachelor of Social Science (Community Work).

The curriculum content in all AIWCW accredited programs is much more varied between institutions than is the case for social work programs. Even so, all AIWCW include study units in:

- Human behaviour, particularly studies in psychology;
- Studies of society, particularly studies in social sciences;
- Fields of welfare practice, with many degree programs offering specialist study pathways in specified practice fields. The specialisations vary between institutions with the most common specialisations including child and family studies, youth studies, or disability studies;
- Practice methods including individual, group and community practice, though the proportion of content on practice methods vary markedly between institutions; and
- Field education (a minimum of 400 hours across at least two practice fields).

In contrast to the social work programs where the majority of courses were designed primarily for social work students, significant variation exists in the proportion of courses within the AIWCW accredited degrees designed specifically for social welfare practice. This variation is considerable with the study sequences in some programs being primarily focused on students of welfare and community work studies, while other programs had more than 65% of the study sequences located in cognate fields such as sociology, criminology or psychology. Generally, those programs with titles such as Bachelor of Human Services or Community Welfare incorporated a greater proportion of curriculum content on welfare and community work, whilst Bachelor of Social Science or Applied Social Science degrees, tended to incorporate a substantially lower proportion of professional practice content specific to practice in welfare or community work roles.

In contrast to the accredited social work degree, which is a generic qualification, most social welfare and human services degrees incorporate specified study pathways leading to fields of practice designated within the degree title. For example, degree titles include: Bachelor of Arts (Welfare Studies), Bachelor of Social Science (Community Work), Bachelor of Applied Science (Disability Studies). Common specialisation pathways offered within the AIWCW accredited programs include: community work; child and family studies; disabilities; and youth work. At least two universities offer four or more specialist study pathways within the AIWCW accredited degree. The specialist pathways offered in the majority of AIWCW accredited programs is likely to be attractive to both students seeking work in specific domains of practice, and employers offering employment in those domains. However, the driver for study specialisations is unclear as the AIWCW program accreditation guidelines do not require employers to be consulted in program development. Even so, the dominant study specialisations offered within these degrees, including community work, child and family studies and disability studies, appear to concur with fields of significant employment growth within the community services sector (see AIHW, 2009).

The majority of universities delivering AIWCW accredited degrees offer a range of combined degree options for students enrolling in community welfare and human service degrees. Like the accredited social work program, the Bachelor of Arts was the most frequently offered in combination with the AIWCW accredited program, though five universities also offer other combined degrees linking the AIWCW accredited degree with degrees in a range of fields including: business, creative industries, education, journalism, justice studies, law, psychology and science. The broad range of study combinations offered by some universities suggests that AIWCW degrees might be seen to offer a vocational component to a less vocationally oriented program such as creative arts. The degree combinations also allowed students enrolled in other vocational qualifications such as teaching to gain a double vocational qualification which graduates might view as increasing their competitiveness and improving their career options. The more flexible accreditation requirements of the AIWCW accredited degrees, compared to the extensive curriculum and field education requirements of the AASW, also appear to provide substantial scope for combined degrees.

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES ACROSS PROGRAM TYPES

We turn now to a discussion and summary of the key difference between AASW and AIWCW accredited programs. These key similarities include that:

- Curriculum content in social and behavioural sciences, and a broad range of practice methods including practice with individuals, groups and families, and research and evaluation;
- Curriculum content reflects the intention of the AASW and AIWCW to ensure that students develop practical capacities and the capacity to critically analyse their practice contexts, the circumstances of service users, and their own practice;
- Students have substantial field education experience, with students being required to undertake at least two field placements both of which must involve development of professional skills;
- A significant proportion of teaching staff involved in the programs have qualifications commensurate with accreditation by either the AASW or AIWCW;
- The field education is supervised by practitioners who meet the eligibility requirements of either the AASW or the AIWCW; and
- Limited involvement of human service provider and employers exists in determining curriculum content. One paragraph of the AASW accreditation document notes the need for feedback mechanisms between human service providers and the higher education institution and there is no mention of this requirement in the AIWCW documentation. However, both associations have senior and experienced service professionals involved in the monitoring and review of curriculum.

The key differences between the programs accredited by the AASW and the AIWCW are:

- There is greater regional and institutional variation in the curriculum content of the AIWCW programs compared to the AASW programs. This difference is because the AASW has more extensive curriculum requirements for accredited programs. The AASW has also recently introduced practice standards in relation to core fields of practice and service user populations that will place further demands on the social work curriculum;
- There are substantially more named study specialisations in AIWCW accredited degrees. The majority of accredited programs include named fields of specialisation within the degree title. By contrast, accredited social work degrees rarely incorporate a named study specialisation in the degree title and appear to be intended to offer generic entry to a range of fields of practice;
- There is substantial variation in the proportion of curriculum content focused on the field of social work or welfare and community work. The curriculum content in AASW accredited programs includes, as a minimum, at least 50% of courses within the field of social work, including courses such as applied social policy and social work research, specifically tailored for social work students. By contrast, the AIWCW accredited programs demonstrated considerable variation in the proportion of study focused on community and welfare work, with substantial study sequences in some programs undertaken in cognate fields such as psychology or sociology. This variation is likely to contribute to substantial differences in the extent to which graduates of these various programs are prepared for welfare and community work; and
- There is a much greater variety of degree combinations offered with the AIWCW accredited programs than the AASW accredited programs. This reflects the more flexible accreditation requirements and shorter length of the AIWCW programs compared to AASW programs.

Postgraduate Qualifications

Before moving to a discussion of the VET sector, we will turn briefly to postgraduate curriculum in social work and human services programs. Aside from the qualifying Masters programs endorsed by the AASW, neither the AASW nor AIWCW is involved in the accreditation of the advanced postgraduate qualifications.

The standard qualification for social work and human services roles are tertiary qualifications at degree or diploma level (Karmel and Blomberg, 2009). While there has been an increased proportion of the workforce with tertiary qualifications, an advanced postgraduate qualification is rarely required for social work and human service positions. Nonetheless, a very large range of postgraduate qualifications are available within this field including Graduate Certificates, Diplomas, and Masters Degrees. For example, in Queensland, in addition to the Master of Social Work and higher degree research programs offered by most universities offering accredited social work and human services programs, there were an additional 50 postgraduate qualification options available in social welfare and cognate fields. The postgraduate qualifications included Graduate Certificates, Diplomas, and Masters Degrees in diverse fields including: child protection, mental health, and human services management. While many of these qualifications are offered by social work and human services schools, other disciplines, such as psychiatry and criminology also offer postgraduate programs with a vocational orientation for practitioners in the social work and human services workforce, as well as for graduates of other disciplines such as nursing and medicine. The range of qualifications is notable given the relatively small numbers of postgraduate students in social work and human services fields and suggests that these courses are probably attracting graduates from other disciplines, possibly those seeking a vocationally-oriented postgraduate qualification.

The Vocational and Educational Training Sector

The VET sector plays a critical role in pre-service and in-service education and training for this workforce primarily through the delivery of the Community Services Training Package (Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, 2009) . We begin with a general overview of the VET sector and then we will focus on the VET sector's role in the delivery of community services training.

Overview of VET Qualifications in Australia

The VET sector offers a broad range of community service qualifications relevant to the social work and human services workforce. The structure and content of these programs is determined by the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) which is a national set of standards intended to assure "nationally consistent, high-quality training and assessment services for the clients of Australia's vocational education and training system" (Department of Education, Training and Science, 2007, p.1). Essentially the framework provides for a nationally recognised system of qualifications in schools, VET institutions and the higher education sector. This framework is designed and monitored by the National Quality Council comprised of government bodies, industry and employer groups.

Our focus in this section of the report is on the VET sector which includes both public providers (such as TAFE colleges) and private Registered Training Organisations (RTO). An organisation wishing to become an RTO must comply with the standards for registering, as set by individual state registration and training bodies. The public and private VET providers must be approved to provide training and education via the relevant state or territory government authority. State and Territory registering bodies are responsible for registering training organisations and for quality assuring the training and assessment services they provide, in accordance with the AQTF 2007 and relevant legislation within each jurisdiction (Department of Education, Training and Science, 2007).

VET qualifications can be undertaken after completing the required practical and theoretical syllabus at a VET school or campus, online, by distance education or in a combination of modes. Under the AQTF, qualifications issued in the VET sector must reflect the achievement of a package of practice competencies. The focus on learned "competencies" is one of the key features of education and training in the VET sector.

VET Sector Role in Community Services Education and Training

Within specific industries, the Commonwealth government funds the development of industry relevant training packages. In the community services sector, the Commonwealth has funded The Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council to develop, monitor and maintain the Community Services Training Package. The training packages created for the community services sector are reviewed every few years and these newly updated training packages are available for purchase and delivery by TAFE and RTOs.

The Community Services Training Package offers 61 qualifications in a wide range of community services fields including: child protection; children's services; general community services work; specialist community services work in fields such as alcohol and other drugs, mental health, lifestyle and leisure services; aged care and disability; community development; employment services; management; social housing; youth work and juvenile justice. Within the community services package, VET sector education and training organisations are able to provide community service organisations with the following levels of qualifications: Certificate I-IV; Diploma; Advanced Diploma; Vocational Graduate Certificate; and Vocational Graduate Diploma. The Certificate I-IV and Vocational Certificates and Diplomas take the equivalent of 6 to 12 months of full time study, while the Diploma and Advanced Diploma programs take between 1-2 years full-time equivalent study. The AIWCW has accredited many of the diploma-level programs offered by VET and higher education providers across Australia.

Each qualification in the community services training package aligns to a job role in the industry. Each of the qualifications within the Community Services Package is structured around units of competency. Students who can demonstrate the attainment of a specific competency can gain recognition for that unit of study without undertaking formal study. Certificate 1 qualifications involve approximately 3 units of study while Advanced Diplomas can involve up to 14 units of study. Each unit of study identifies a discrete workplace requirement, such as communication skills or knowledge of occupational health and safety requirements within a specific role. Education providers in the VET and higher education sector are allowed to contextualise the curriculum to adapt to particular educational delivery methods (such as on-line delivery of content), learner profiles and specific local industry needs, however, the integrity of the intended learning outcomes of the units of competency must be maintained. Similarly, while VET organisations are eligible to offer all 61 qualifications within the Community Services Training Package, is it unlikely that any do so, with most TAFEs and RTOs specialising within specified fields of service delivery. In our discussion with educational providers, they indicated that the primary factors determining qualifications offered by specific VET providers were student demand and local employer needs. Qualifications in the package are delivered in classroom settings and on-line. Because of the national standardisation of the qualification framework, it is possible for students to undertake units of study towards their qualification at different VET institutions.

Articulation between VET and Higher Education Institutions

Articulation arrangements exist between higher education and VET sectors to allow students to gain credit for study in VET towards higher education qualifications. Students who hold a completed VET qualification and who seek to enrol in social welfare programs in higher education institutions can gain substantial credit towards their degrees. For example, candidates with completed diplomas can gain up to one year of credit towards their study in a higher education institution (AASW, 2008, p. 20). Students may also gain some credit for work experience, provided that experience was not used to gain entry to the program.

There is some transition of VET qualification students into the higher education sector into health and community services field. Karmel and Blomberg (2009, p. 30) found that some 7% of students enrolled in higher education degree programs in selected health and allied health fields of education cite study in VET Community and Health Services qualifications as the basis of university admission. This percentage varies between the source VET programs and has been estimated by Karmel and Blomberg (2009) to be in the order of 20% for some social welfare fields. The transition of students with a bachelor-level qualification into the VET sector is also strong, particularly within the welfare field. In 2007, 7875 students enrolled in community services and health courses held a bachelor degree prior to enrolment in the VET program. Of this group, 1778 students (or 22.5% of the cohort) were working as welfare support workers at the time of their enrolment in VET (Karmel and Blomberg, 2009, p. 32). According to Karmel and Blomberg (2009, p. 32) the likely reasons for the strong representation of degree qualified graduates in VET programs are possible mismatches between the student's qualifications and regional needs and, second, that "the person has a degree which is not very useful in the labour market because of its nature (creative arts degrees come to mind) or because it is of a very ordinary quality." In essence, university graduates may be motivated to enrol in VET programs to gain locally relevant vocational training that was not available in their degree level programs and, in so doing, improve their employment prospects.

Summary of the Curriculum Issues

Our review of the curriculum offered by higher education and VET institutions to provide education and training for students seeking to enter the social work and human services workforce suggests the following:

- Students seeking to enter the social work and human services workforce have a wide, and possibly bewildering, range of educational options;
- The majority of Australian universities offer degree-level qualifications accredited by either the AASW or AIWCW, with eleven universities offering courses accredited by both Associations;
- The AASW accredited courses offer a significant level of social work specific curriculum input with more than the majority of the curriculum focused on social work-specific education. By contrast, AIWCW accredited courses are more varied in the proportion of welfare and community work curriculum delivered in approved programs;
- AASW accredited courses tend to offer generic social work education, whilst AIWCW accredited courses are often focused within specific fields of study, such as child and family studies or disability studies;
- Beyond the AASW and AIWCW accredited programs, all Australian universities offer programs in social and behavioural sciences and many institutions claim that these programs prepare students for careers in social and community services fields, often with little external validation of these claims;
- Employers and industry have a limited role in the development of curriculum in university social work and human service programs with academics and professional associations having a significant role in determination of curriculum content. These professional associations involve senior and experienced service providers in the review of curriculum

content. By contrast, employers and other industry stakeholders, such as unions, play a significant role in the determination of curriculum offered in the VET sector;

- Programs offered in the VET sector are substantially shorter in duration and significantly more focused on development of specific skill competencies than higher education programs. By contrast, accredited social welfare programs within universities emphasise the development of a sense of professional purpose, critical analysis of welfare institutions and professional practice alongside practical skill development; and
- There is some exchange of students between VET and higher education students within the human welfare field. Approximately 20% of students enrolled in degree programs in social welfare fields hold VET qualifications prior to entry to these programs, and a similar proportion of students enrolled in human welfare programs in VET hold degree level qualifications prior to enrolling in VET programs.

Four: Methodology for Gathering and Analysing Education and Workforce Data

In this chapter we outline the framework we used for identification and analysis of the emerging trends regarding social work and human services workforce characteristics and associated education and training responses.

This analysis in turn informs identification of associated educational and training needs and priorities. Ultimately this information plays a role in the development of an educational plan that secures the long-term sustainable development of the industry through clear educational and career enhancement 'pathways' for those in, or entering, the social work and human services workforce.

OUR APPROACH

To achieve this aim, the project, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, initially mapped the VET and higher education sector human services curriculum. This process involved extensive investigation of documentation and consultation with registering bodies. As alluded to previously, this process had to remain within a fairly defined scope to be meaningful.

In parallel, an initial survey of relevant industry and educational/ training stakeholders was conducted in mid-2008 to begin to identify human services educational and training priorities. To support the assembly of quantitative data, relevant qualitative data was researched and trends were established.

While some of the feedback from this survey was helpful, the overall response was disappointing. This result indicated that worthwhile input would be better obtained through a structured forum where the initial findings from the literature review, data analysis and curriculum mapping could be workshopped against a context provided by the quantitative information.

A national roundtable forum of approximately 40 stakeholders from industry and the education and training sector was held in late 2008 (see Appendix 1). The forum was structured around presentations where delegates discussed the initial findings of the project. This iterative process teased out the issues and trends and education and training responses. Our quantitative analysis was subsequently better focused upon the issues highlighted by forum participants. After the forum we continued to analyse the data in consultation with a range of education and industry representatives, including heads of school and professional associations.

QUANTITATIVE DATA

We turn now to analysis of data on the social work and human services workforce. There are a variety of challenges to developing a coherent overview of the Australian social work and human services workforce. These challenges include, but are not limited to, the variety of data sources and collection methodologies, and the lack of consistency in different data sets use of occupational definitions particularly with variations in the use of terms such as "social work", "human services" and "community and welfare work".

We recognised that there is no one source of data that could fit the needs of the study. Rather, there were several main sources of data of varying relevance, each with varying degrees of reliability and exhibiting a range of definitions that did not necessarily align between datasets. An outline of issues surrounding the data is contained in Appendix 2.

Given the above, we focused not on the strengths and limitations of the data but on the data as one component supporting or challenging the many forms of qualitative information received over the course of the research and consultations. Using the various sets of data collectively, we created views of education and industry sectors and built quantifiable "pictures" of people who engage and find pathways into and through the "helping professions" and associated paraprofessional workforces. Through this "pathway" approach, we adopted a method of defining what constitutes the social work and human services group in the education and training system and in the workforce.

We then examined the dynamics of those industries and occupations that are major employers of this group. The next step was to develop a picture of current education and training reactions to these dynamics. These reactions were gauged firstly in terms of the number of those undertaking and graduating from education and training, through to developing profiles of these groups as they move through the system, their likely education and training needs, and the type of experience they had while undertaking that education and training.

We believed that the next step was to examine the immediate postgraduate training outcomes of these individuals as indicators of the relevance of their education and training to the labour market and as a bridge to greater skill acquisition. From profiling labour market data, we drew inferences regarding graduates longer term prospects including mobility in the workforce, remuneration and further education. In addition, we examined various pieces of data that provided a longer term view of workforce trends and job prospects.

Definitions

We began by defining what is meant by "Social Work" and "Human Services" in the context of education and training for the workforce. This was the best definitional starting point for addressing the study's primary aim to outline the issues in developing an integrated national curriculum for the education of the social work and human services workforce. As such, we primarily focused upon relevant university degree awards and higher level vocational education and training qualifications. At the university level, the core of these awards was identified as lying within the 90500 series or the 90700 series Fields or Education (Australian Standard Classification of Education Definitions). These Fields of Education collectively termed the 'helping professions' for the purposes of this study, are contained within the 90000 'Society and Culture' ASCED grouping (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Fields of Education Relevant to the Social Work and Human Services Workforce.

ASCED CODE	ASCED DESCRIPTOR	HELPING PROFESSION GROUPING
90500	Human Welfare Studies and Services	'Other Helping Profession'
90501	Social Work	'Other Helping Profession'
90503	Children's Services	'Other Helping Profession'
90505	Youth Work	'Other Helping Profession'
90507	Care for the Aged	'Other Helping Profession'
90509	Care for the Disabled	'Other Helping Profession'
90511	Residential Client Care	'Other Helping Profession'
90513	Counselling	'Other Helping Profession'

90515	Welfare Studies	'Other Helping Profession'
90599	Human Welfare Studies and Services not elsewhere classified	'Other Helping Profession'
90700	Behavioural Science	'Other Helping Profession'
90701	Psychology	Psychology
90799	Behavioural Science not elsewhere classified	'Other Helping Profession'

Within these 'Helping Professions', Fields of Education were grouped into Social Workers (90501), Psychologists (90701) and 'Other Helping' Professions' (90500, 90503, 90505, 90507, 90509, 90511, 90513, 90515, 90599, 90700 and 90799) to support the analysis.

We note that this approach does not quantify attributes and trends surrounding the numbers of graduates of social and behavioural sciences programs who have included some human service training in their degree and are finding work in social work and human services type occupations. As the data collection does not contain this information, the extent to which graduates are taking this pathway to entering the social work and human services workforce is inferred from a variety of other sources.

At the vocational education and training level, particularly at paraprofessional Diploma and Advanced Diploma level, we focused on those undertaking the Community Services Training Package. The ASCED code attached to the courses within this package is the general Society and Culture identifier (90500).

Labour Force Features and Movements
In following the pathways approach, we wished to establish in which industries and occupations graduates of this education and training were likely to find employment and the dynamics of those industries and occupations. Here we were heavily reliant upon Australian Bureau of Statistics data, particularly from the 2006 Census of Population and Housing.

The dynamics of the likely employing occupations were determined thorough use of ABS Labour Force Survey data which runs quarterly from 1996 and the Census snapshots for 1996, 2001 and 2006.

Paraprofessional Enrolment and Completion Data
We recognise that paraprofessional training is one pathway into the professional level training streams or into employment areas that intersect with destinations of 'Helping Profession' graduates. As such, attributes and outcomes of students training in the Community Services training package were gauged. However, as annual training data captured by the NCVER only relates to the publicly funded VET system, a material component of this education and training may be left undescribed.

Paraprofessional Student Outcomes
Graduate outcome data for the paraprofessionals associated with the Community Services training package is sourced from NCVER survey data. This data provided indications of post-training success in the labour market of those with vocational qualifications, and of their undertaking of further education, particularly at the university undergraduate level. In particular, we were able to establish some indications of the degree of articulation between the vocational education and training and university sectors.

University Data related to Undergraduate Programs
Taking this next step up the qualification ladder, we found that the attributes, educational outcomes and changes in numbers of 'helping profession' students studying in the Australian universities are included in the university data collection managed by DEEWR. This data provided indications of the long-term trends of overall undergraduate student enrolments and completions, and also of those of the 'Helping Profession' groupings.

While, in general, we found the use of this data fairly straightforward, the major issue affecting the trend data was a "series break" in 2001 where the system of course classifications and the measurement of enrolment numbers changed. Student profile data were assembled and compared with that of the profiles of those undertaking the Community Services Training Package, and of the workforce to inform analysis of the pathways from education and training to employment.

Tertiary Entrance Scores
We believe that an important feature of the profile of those undertaking 'helping profession' education is the relative academic proficiency of those students who are accepted into the various programs. This academic standard, reflected through tertiary entrance score cut-offs, indicates the academic achievement of students prior to entry to specific programs of tertiary study. It also reflects the degree of attractiveness of the education to prospective students in terms of factors such as congruence with desired occupational identity, values, prestige and likely economic rewards

Universities Australia, in publishing a calculation of "unmet demand" for education places at the broad fields of study, provides a context to examine changes in tertiary entrance cut-offs. Initial work undertaken by Moodie (personal communication, April 2008) in establishing aggregate cut-off scores nationally by education program was enhanced through averaging and weighting techniques.

Graduate Outcomes
We identified post-education outcomes for graduates of 'Helping Profession' university programs via accessing publicly available data and purchased data from Graduate Careers Australia (GCA). This data primarily provided an insight into the satisfaction of bachelor-level graduates with their education and their perceptions of the relevance of their education to their employment prospects, soon after completion of their studies. The data also provided an insight into the economic utility of their education, primarily through rates of remuneration.

Postgraduate Outcomes
One possible pathway for entrance to the social work and human services workforce is postgraduate study. Hence, we examined trends in participation in postgraduate education. At this point, we again relied upon DEEWR-consolidated university data collection.

Longer Term Employment Prospects
We recognise that graduate outcome surveys are focused on the five- to six-month period after graduation, and that data for longer term labour market outcomes need to be collected from a range of sources. To examine the longer term labour market trends impacting on social work graduates relative to the economic advantage in terms of other graduates, we again relied upon relevant ABS 2006 Census data. Through use of this data, a comparison of derived weekly earnings by age was made for both Social Work Bachelor degree holders and Bachelor graduates in general.

We also derived notional levels of remuneration for comparison of social work with occupational and industry averages to indicate the relative economic benefits for the various components of the social work and human services sector in undertaking education above bachelor level.

Occupational projections, and subsequently a forecast of opportunities for 'Helping Profession' and associated paraprofessional graduates, were made through use of the DEEWR "Jobprospects" analysis. Indicative levels of 'Helping Profession' and associated paraprofessional graduates required to meet the emerging needs of the labour force were determined through incorporating the "Jobprospects" analysis with ABS labour force survey data. In particular, we recognised the pitfalls of using models to forecast occupational demand in detail or for periods into the future, as outlined by Richardson and Yan (2007). As such, the forecasts calculated are purely indicative of skills that are being readily absorbed in the workforce or are growing in demand rather than of absolute numbers required.

Summary

In our analysis of workforce trends in the social work and human services workforce and education and training responses, we have drawn on a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data sources. Quantitative sources have included data from the Census, national workforce surveys, education and training sector enrolment and completion data, and graduate outcome surveys. We encountered a number of issues in data comparison in part due to changes in classification codes and methods of data collection over the past decade. Another significant issue is the reliance on workers' self-reports of occupational role and qualification levels, which are problematic in the community services sector. The lack of shared understanding of different occupational roles within the industry, such as lack of shared reference for terms such as "social worker", "welfare worker" and "community worker", contributes to challenges to data validity and reliability. We have attempted to address these problems by relying on, and constantly comparing, the wide range of quantitative and qualitative data sources.

Five: The Social Work and Human Services Workforce and Its Educational Preparation

This chapter will examine the outcomes of the educational preparation of the social work and human services workforce at both the VET and higher education levels, explore the key characteristics of the workforce, and identify important trends that are evident.

We will first scan the overall size and growth of the community services and health sector and investigate how it is altering within our broader economy and social system, which has also experienced profound changes. The purpose of analysing workforce trends is to gain a broad yet detailed understanding of sector, how it is functioning within the tight labour market experienced up until very recently, and to identify potential future opportunities for these 'helping professions'. A better understanding of the VET and higher education sector preparation of this workforce will provide increased opportunities to properly plan and ensure that the workforce, and thereby the sector, has a sustainable future.

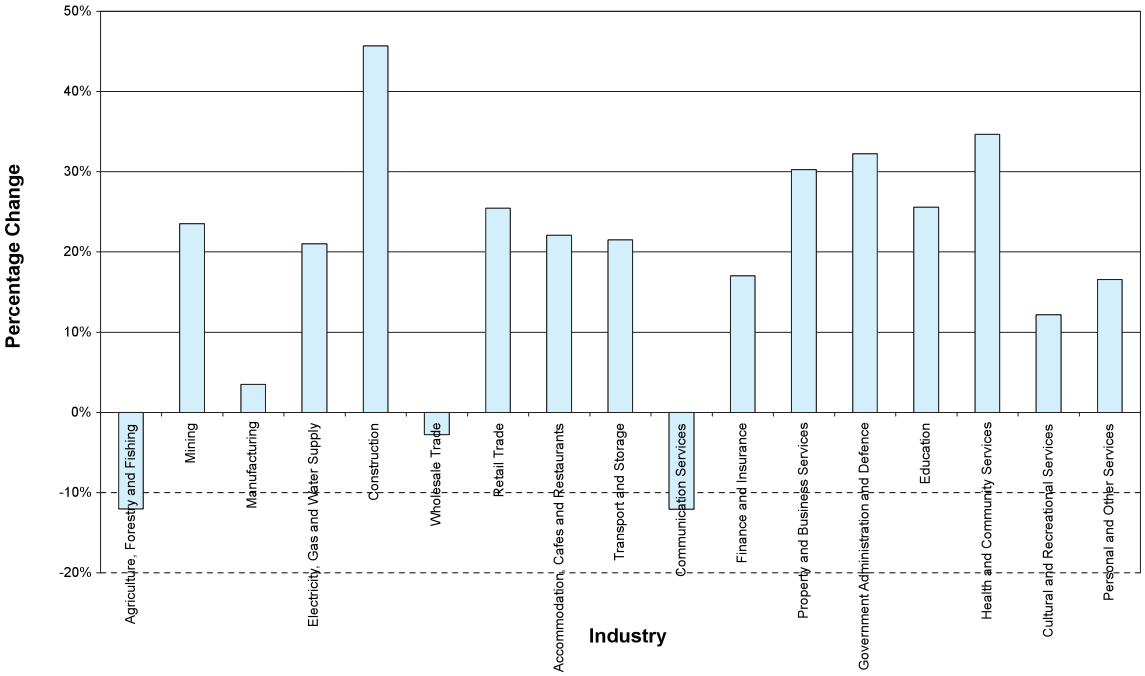
In undertaking our analysis we have drawn upon previous work (see, for example, Meagher and Healy, 2005, 2006) and a broad range of data so that we could employ a triangulation approach and accurately and reliably determine the inter-related trends and issues affecting both the workforce and the training and educational system that prepares 'job ready' staff. Significant work has been done to ensure that comparisons across data sets and sources are able to be reasonably equated with reliable inferences made. In order to keep the report to a manageable size we have only reported here on the key findings of our data analysis.

THE SOCIAL WORK AND HUMAN SERVICES WORKFORCE PAST AND PRESENT

The community services and health sector has experienced profound expansion over the past decade as evidenced by the growth from 725 178 employees at the 1996 Census to 976 498 in the 2006 Census, an increase of 251 320 or 34.7%, which made it the fourth largest sector in our economy. This growth was the second biggest percentage increase behind the construction industry as outlined in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 Percentage increases in Industry Sector Workforce 1996 to 2006

Percentage Change in Number of Persons Employed Identified Industries 1996 to 2006 (ABS Census of Population and Housing 1996 and 2006)

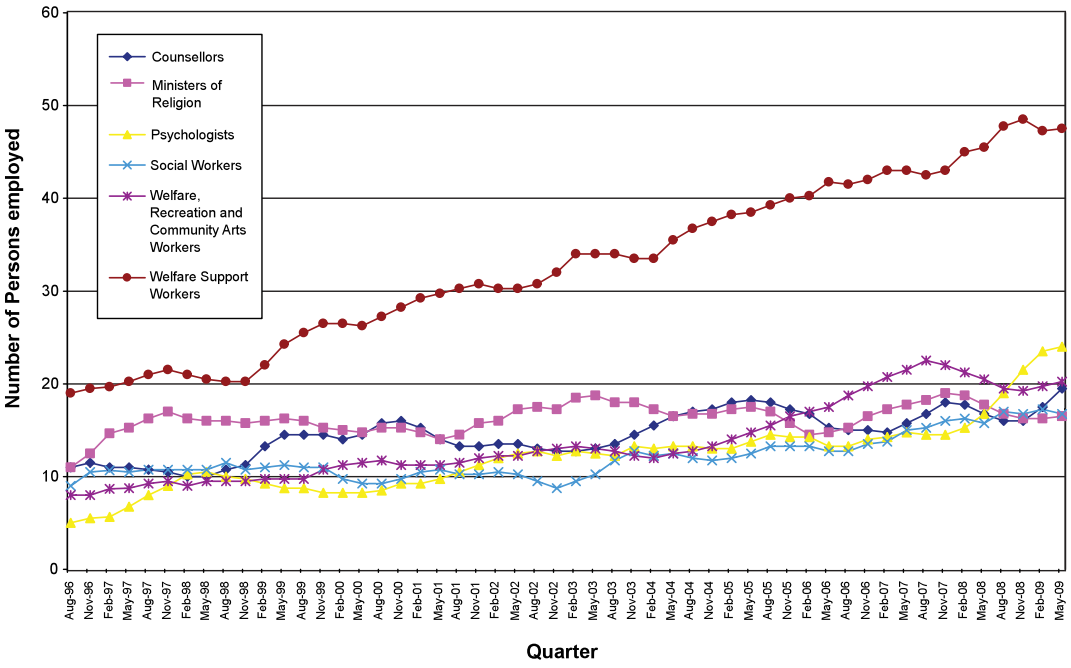


Moreover, the industry sectors employing those qualified in social work and human services areas, taken here as those as identifying as holding a diploma or higher in a social welfare or behavioural sciences field as their highest qualification, also grew quite strongly over the 1996 to 2006 period. The health and community services industry sector containing 43.5% of these individuals grew by over 30% in the period. Government Administration and Defence (with almost 14% of the group) grew by over 30% as well.

Looking more closely at the social work and human services sector, which is a subset of the health and community services workforce, we find that similar growth has also been experienced for them as determined by the quarterly ABS workforce surveys. High rates of growth were also reflected in the occupations that employ many of the graduates from the 'Helping Professions', those employees who make up the social work and human services, namely, Social Workers, Welfare, Community and Arts Workers, Welfare Support Workers, Counsellors, Psychologists and Ministers of Religion. Figure 5.2 shows the numbers of people employed in these "Helping Professions" between August 1996 and November 2008 (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2 Growth in the Social Work and Human Services Helping Professions

Number of persons employed in 'Helping Professions' and Welfare Support Workers (ANZSCO)
November 2008 Quarter data - ABS surveys



The number of persons within the category of helping professions and associate professions (outlined in figure 5.2) grew from an estimated 63 000 persons employed in 1996 to over 140 000 persons employed (128% growth) towards the beginning of 2009. The major contributor to this growth was the combination of Welfare, Recreation and Community Arts Workers and Welfare Support Workers, which grew from an estimated 27 000 persons employed in 1996 to almost an estimated 68 000 persons employed by 2009. On their own, Welfare Support Worker numbers (top line) grew over 2.5 times from an estimated 19 000 in 1996 to 48 000 towards the beginning of 2009 Psychologist numbers also grew very strongly from 5 000 in 1996 to 22 000 in the same period. Growth in Social Worker numbers was also substantial (88%) from an estimated 9 000 in 1996 to an estimated 17 000 at the beginning of 2009. It is important to note that employment trends outlined in Figure 5.2 refer to the type of employment identified by individuals not their qualification type. So, for example, a person with a social work qualification working at a youth worker may be included in the welfare and community work category. Similarly a person with a degree majoring in psychology and who states their occupation as "social worker" may be included in that category.

Notably, there are significant differences amongst disciplines in the extent to which graduates tend to work within a specific industry. Or to put it differently, some degrees appear to lead to more mobile and diverse career outcomes for graduates while other degrees appear to lead to graduates being employed within specific industries. For example, drawing on the 2006 census we find that 64% of those who identify that they hold a social work degree, at bachelor level or higher as their highest qualification are employed in the social work and human services workforce. By contrast, approximately 39% of those that identify as holding an 'Other Helping Profession' degree at bachelor level or higher as their highest qualification and 25% of those who stated that their highest qualification was a diploma or an advanced diploma in social welfare or behavioural studies are employed in these occupations in this sector. For psychology degree holders at bachelor level and above, 36% are employed within social work and human service occupations. However, only 9% of those who stated that their highest qualification was a certificate in social welfare or behavioural studies were employed in these occupations.

But what of those people who hold no post school-qualifications? Through the 2006 Census, almost 3 830 000 people (42%) indicated that they did not hold a post-school qualification. Among the various industries, this percentage varies, for example with the retail industry recording a high percentage of 62%. In the Health and Community Services sector 27% of all employees indicated that they did not have a recognised post-school qualification. Breaking this down into its component parts, 22% of the 648 000 occupied in the Health Services, and a much higher 35% of the 288 000 individuals occupied in the Community Services component of the sector indicated that they did not hold a post-school qualification. This means that there is relatively high level of post-school qualifications amongst some sectors of the health and community services industries. Despite high levels of tertiary qualifications in some sections of health and community services sector, in some occupational groups there is a decline in the proportion with post-school qualifications.

As an example, in terms of the paraprofessions of interest that operate within the sector, there was a relatively high 17.4% of Welfare, Recreation and Community Arts Workers and 23% of Welfare Support Workers who did not have post-school qualifications. However, these percentages have been reducing from 30+% to their present levels over the 1996 to 2006 period. Currently about 1 in 5 in the paraprofessional areas involved in direct care do not have at least certificate level qualifications The substantial proportion of workers without formal qualifications could adversely affect service quality in fields of service where an advanced level of formal knowledge and skill is required. It also suggests scope for increasing workers' access to formal education.

The relative growth rates of these groups have important implications for the social work and human services workforce and sector over time. Historically, the discipline of social work has had a leadership role within the sector, providing the necessary theoretical, ethical, values and skill development through academic and research endeavours. However, in a more diversified environment, other disciplinary groups can be expected to share this role, and thereby alter the ways in which workers undertake social welfare practice.

The ABS 2006 Census data indicates that the five core occupational groups in the category of social welfare professionals and support workers are dispersed differently across various fields of service (Table 5.1). It appears that specific occupational groups are concentrated within domains of practice. For example, while social workers are employed in substantial numbers across a range of domains, psychologists tend to congregate in health and education employment rather than community services, counsellors tend to be in the community services and education, and the welfare-related occupations dominate in community services and government administration and, to a lesser degree, in health.

Table 5.1 Industry Employment of 'Helping Professions'

2006 Selected Social and Welfare Professionals and Welfare Support Workers (ANZSCO) by Industry of Employment (ANZSIC93) - Some Categories Grouped

INDUSTRY OF EMPLOYMENT	COUNSELLORS	PSYCHOLOGISTS	SOCIAL WORKERS	WELFARE, RECREATION AND COMMUNITY ARTS WORKERS	WELFARE SUPPORT WORKERS	TOTAL
Community Care Services	4,269	1,568	3,474	4,016	17,047	**30,374**
Child Care Services	19	17	78	146	779	**1,039**
Hospitals and Nursing Homes	703	1,986	3,351	1,008	1,368	**8,416**
Medical and Dental Services	113	690	277	271	121	**1,472**
Other or Undefined Health and Community Services	1,939	4,338	1,568	1,226	4,516	**13,587**
Pre School, School, Post School or Other Education	3,515	2,063	247	378	1,441	**7,644**
Government Administration, Justice and Defence	1,501	1,342	2,564	4,809	7,658	**17,874**
Other Industry Components	2,591	1,435	881	2,072	7,368	**14,347**
Total	**14,650**	**13,439**	**12,440**	**13,926**	**40,298**	**94,753**

The qualification diversity found within the social work and human services workforce is a strength for the workforce as a whole as it allows employer organisations to 'mix and match' the education and skills sets with their program and service user needs. However, as we will see later, this diversity also partially reflects salary differentials with those employers that are resource-poor being in a worse position to afford the more highly skilled and more expensive staff. Additionally, the overall workforce shortage environment means that some employers are not able to staff their programs with the sort of employee skills sets that they require and desire.

We will return later to undertake a much closer examination of this workforce and the specific demographic and other characteristics. We will also undertake some extrapolations based on historical data in order to identify the likely future growth in the workforce and explore the implications for their educational preparation. It is to this latter aspect that we will now turn our attention, in order to identify their pathways through the educational system and the nature of their training and educational preparation, and how well this, in systemic terms, meets the current and emerging needs of the sector.

THE EDUCATIONAL PREPARATION OF THE SOCIAL WORK AND HUMAN SERVICES WORKFORCE

The rapid significant growth in the social work and human services workforce has posed particular problems for the VET and higher education providers, particularly in light of the significant structural and other changes the education sector has undergone. In both university and VET sectors, there is a proliferation of qualification types with variable degrees of planning across the sectors to create educational pathways for the social work and human services workforce. There is a great deal of competition amongst education service providers with little motivation for collaboration within and across sectors. Furthermore, the limited career structures for direct service practitioners in the sector means that there is little rationale for service providers to gain or to upgrade formal qualifications once employed within the sector.

THE VET SYSTEM CHANGE

National Training Packages were gradually introduced into the VET system during the early 2000s. The rationale behind their introduction was to create a common national system of vocational education and training curricula, and to offer prospective students options within disciplines where they could effectively focus training effort to meet personal and employer needs. These training packages have gradually been replacing state-based curricula.

From 2003 to 2007 the number of students enrolled in them increased 25% from 790 700 to 985 700. However, in the same period the numbers in the Community Services and Health training package increased 42% from 78 300 to 111 300. The Community Services component of the training package grew 34% over the same period from 72 700 to 97 300. By 2007, the Community Services component of the training package constituted almost 10% of the training package-based training delivered to students nationally.

The number of students and qualification completions in the higher level qualification component (i.e. Certificate IV and higher) of the Community Services Training Package has grown substantially over the last five years, with student numbers growing by about 30% (Table 5.2). Numbers of completed qualifications also increased about 37% from 2003 to 2006 and, allowing for under-reporting in 2007 due to lags in obtaining final calendar year figures through the vocational education and training data collection system, at least a similar level to that reported for 2006 is expected for 2007.

These higher level qualifications have specialisations with most enrolled (listed in descending order) in Children's Services, Community Services General, Aged Care and Disability, Youth Work and Justice, and Child Protection. The lower level qualifications (Cert I – III) focus, in order, upon Aged Care and Disability, Children's Services and General Community Services Work. In Table 5.2 we outline statistics on students and course numbers and outcomes for the Community Services package offered through VET.

Table 5.2 Growth in the Community Services Training Package

Vocational Students, Course Enrolments and Course Completions in the Community Services training package (CHC) Certificate IV Level and Above 2003-2007

YEAR	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Number of Students	30,334	33,494	35,891	37,339	39,610
Number of Course Enrolments	33,630	37,713	40,137	41,273	43,850
Number of Course Completions	7,912	8,287	8,907	10,866	7,526

Source : NCVER Australian vocational education and training statistics: Students and Courses 2007

However, while approximately 10 000 individuals annually are coming out of the VET system with higher level Community Services qualifications, many individuals undertook a vocational course only to acquire skill sets. For example, the acquisition of these skill sets may have been to meet immediate needs such as employer and legislative requirements. The context of high workforce demand contributes to the low completion rates relative to course enrolments.

Importantly, graduates of qualifications within the Community Services training package are highly employable within the sector, and have training and post-training outcomes which are marginally higher than the experiences and outcomes of all VET graduates. Table 5.3 provides an outline for student outcomes for all VET graduates and for graduates of the Community Services Package

Table 5.3 VET Student Outcomes

VET Student Outcome Survey Indicators - Percentage of 2007 Graduate Respondents

SCOPE	SUBDIVISION	EMPLOYED AFTER TRAINING	DIFFERENCE IN PROPORTION EMPLOYED FROM BEFORE TRAINING TO AFTER	EMPLOYED OR IN FURTHER STUDY AFTER TRAINING	FULLY OR PARTLY ACHIEVED THEIR MAIN REASON FOR DOING THE TRAINING	SATISFIED WITH THE OVERALL QUALITY OF TRAINING
All VET	All AQF Levels	81.1	7.0	89.2	86.7	88.8
	Certificate IV	85.1	2.7	92.8	85.4	87.3
	Diploma	84.9	5.3	92.3	83.1	87.6
Community Services training package	All AQF Levels	83.9	11.3	89.8	87.9	90.6
	Certificate IV +	87.2	6.3	93.3	87.4	89.8

Source: NCVER, Student Outcomes Surveys, 2003-2007

Table 5.3 demonstrates that the majority of graduates of the community services training package are employed after graduation. Alongside these strong outcomes, there are apparently reasonable levels of articulation for these students into higher education. However, the precise extent to which these VET graduates have entered into further study in 'helping profession' university level courses is unclear because of methodological and definitional issues. VET student outcomes surveys indicate that while over a third of Community Services training package graduates are in further study after completing their course (slightly higher than VET graduates overall), just 6.6% of them go on to university compared with the 12.1% of the Certificate IV and above graduates who do so.

Information sourced from DEEWR university statistics and statements contained in the university Graduate Outcomes Survey regarding the pathways into university-level 'helping professions' study suggests that about 11% of commencing 'helping professions' bachelor-level students are VET graduates (i.e. with a VET Certificate as their highest qualification), compared to 9.3% for all commencing bachelor-level graduates. However, some helping profession courses appear to attract higher proportions of VET graduates than others. For example, 16% of social work students are VET graduates, while 11% of other helping profession students (such as those enrolled in human service degree programs) and 7% of psychology students are VET graduates.

Within 'Other Helping' degrees, the extent of apparent articulation is even more varied ranging from 8% in Disability studies to some 27% in Children's Services qualifications identifying a VET qualification as their highest qualification prior to entry to the university study. Using another approach, Karmel and Blomberg (2009, p. 30) identified similar levels of variability of VET pathways into health and community services higher education programs.

Further, the Graduate Careers Australia survey data indicates that 50%+ of those with a VET qualification that undertook social work were from a Community Services training package course. About 40% of those with a VET qualification that undertook other helping profession courses were graduates of the Community Services training package. While the data demonstrates that there are students who make the transition from a community services qualification through VET to a social work and human services qualification in higher education, it is clear that the routes they take are diverse and often the result of their own initiative rather than a planned pathway between institutions. The Industry Forum and Project Reference Group participants also reinforced this point about the *ad hoc* nature of VET-higher education pathways.

The Higher Education System

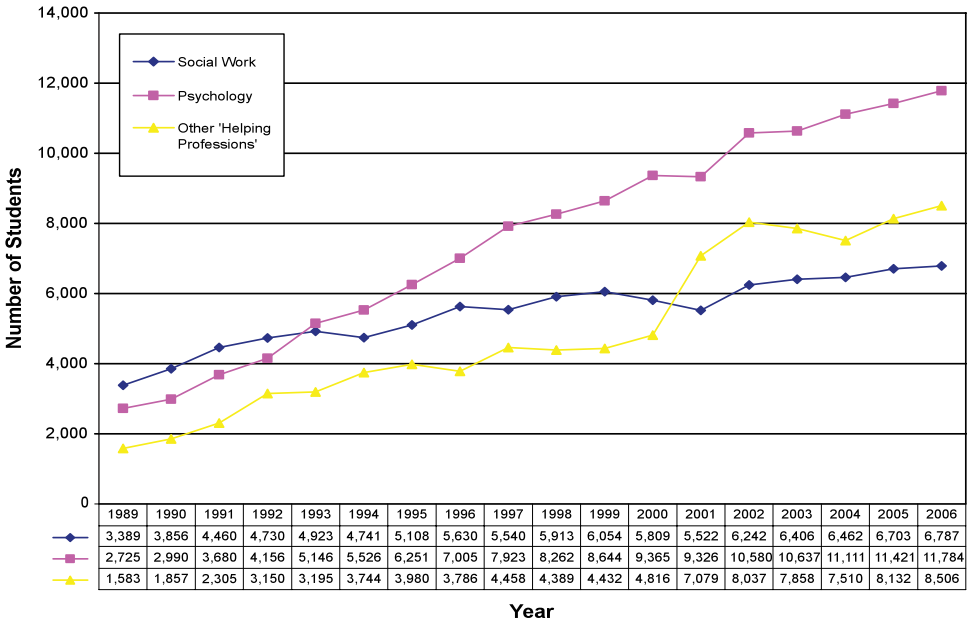
As outlined in Chapter 3, apart from accredited social work programs and some accredited human services programs, there is a great deal of variability in the content of programs marketed by universities as educational preparation for the social work and human services workforce. This variation is the result of aggressive competition amongst universities and the unplanned way social work and human services education has developed in Australia. Over the 1989 to 2006 period social work bachelor-level students doubled from 3 389 to 6 787, and Psychology bachelor-level students grew over 400% from 2 725 to 11 784 (Figure 5.3). Understanding the growth in 'Other Helping' Professions is more problematic considering the effects of the changing from Field of Study to Field of Education descriptors in 2001. However considering that this group of students grew about 20% from 7 079 in 2001 to 8 506 in 2006 compared to 9% growth in social work and 26% in psychology for the same period, we concluded that 'Other Helping Profession' student numbers were likely to have also grown over the full period at similar rates to Psychology student numbers.

Regarding Bachelor Degree graduates, across the nation in 2006 there was approximately 2,300 graduates with double majors in psychology, 1 500 'Other Helping Professionals' and 1 300 Social Workers. Overall, we found that some of these rates were of growth are quite considerable when compared to the growth in domestic bachelor level students. These growth trends, outlined in figure 5.3, are also similar to the overall workforce increases outlined earlier.

Figure 5.3 Bachelor Degree Students in the 'Helping Professions'

Bachelor Level Students - 'Helping Professions' - 1989 - 2006

Source DEEWR Higher Education Collections



	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Social Work	3,389	3,856	4,460	4,730	4,923	4,741	5,108	5,630	5,540	5,913	6,054	5,809	5,522	6,242	6,406	6,462	6,703	6,787
Psychology	2,725	2,990	3,680	4,156	5,146	5,526	6,251	7,005	7,923	8,262	8,644	9,365	9,326	10,580	10,637	11,111	11,421	11,784
Other 'Helping Professions'	1,583	1,857	2,305	3,150	3,195	3,744	3,980	3,786	4,458	4,389	4,432	4,816	7,079	8,037	7,858	7,510	8,132	8,506

Year

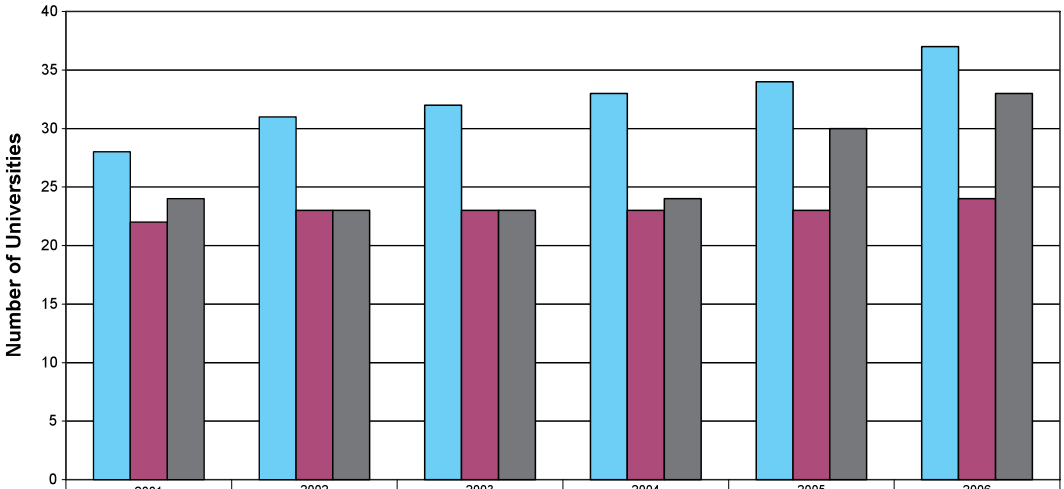
The trend of 'diversification' in 'Helping Profession' education is also reflected in the increase in numbers of tertiary institutions offering these programs, as shown in Figure 5.4Figure 5.4 illustrates that in 2001, 24 universities were offering 'Other Helping' profession type degrees and by 2006, this has grown to 33 universities offering these degrees. Examples of these degrees include human services, applied social science and community welfare degrees. Similarly, institutions offering Psychology bachelor-level degrees had grown from 28 to 37 while social work bachelor-level degree offerings only grew from 22 to 24 over the same period (though at the time of writing 26 universities were offering social work programs).

We turn now to consider the demographic characteristics and educational backgrounds of students enrolled in social work, psychology and other helping profession programs at Universities and students enrolled in VET programs.

Figure 5.4 Australian University 'Helping Profession' Programs

Number of Australian Universities Offering Bachelor Level Courses in Psychology, Social Work and Other Helping Professions 2001 - 2006

Data Source: DEEWR Higher Education Statistics



	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Psychology	28	31	32	33	34	37
Social Work	22	23	23	23	23	24
Other Helping	24	23	23	24	30	33

Year

Table 5.4 Student Demographic Profile
Profile of Bachelor Level Students -Social Work, Psychology and 'Other Helping Professions' and of Vocational Education and Training Students undertaking training in the Community Services Training Package

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENT BODY 2006	SOCIAL WORK BACHELOR LEVEL	OTHER HELPING BACHELOR LEVEL	PSYCHOLOGY BACHELOR LEVEL	COMMUNITY SERVICES TRAINING PACKAGE
Women	86.0%	80.0%	78.0%	85.0%
Indigenous	3.4%	1.9%	0.8%	4.0%
Non English Speaking Background	6.7%	9.5%	7.9%	10.9%
Disability	6.3%	5.8%	3.7%	7.8%
15-19 yo	13.5%	26.0%	33.1%	12.6%
20-24 yo	41.0%	28.1%	36.7%	18.3%
25-39 yo	29.0%	27.3%	21.0%	32.9%
40-64 yo	16.6%	18.4%	8.7%	36.2%
Highest Prior Education - High School	30.0%	49.0%	50.0%	NA
Highest Prior Education - TAFE Level	21.0%	16.0%	10.0%	NA
Highest Prior Education - Bachelor	16.0%	4.0%	7.0%	NA
Highest Prior Education - Uncompleted Bachelor	21.0%	21.0%	14.0%	NA
Average Age	29.3	28.3	24.7	37.7
Calculated Average 'National' Tertiary Cut Off (2008)	68.3	76.5	68.4	NA

Sources: DEEWR 2006 Higher Education Collection, NCVER Students and Courses 2006 Collection, Graduate Careers Australia Outcome Surveys and National Tertiary Cutoff Scores synthesised from published Tertiary Admission Centre documents of States and Territories

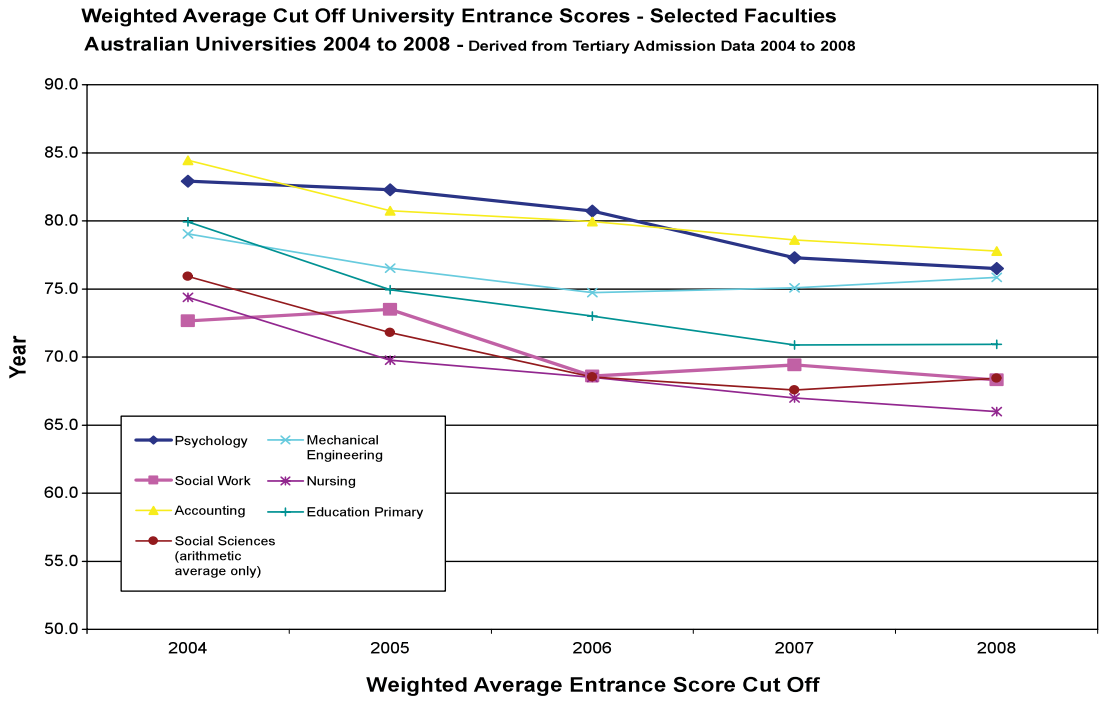
An analysis of the respective student cohorts reveals some important points of commonality and diversity (Table 5.4). First, the majority of students in social work, psychology, and other helping professions programs are female. Second, while students in social work and 'other helping' programs, and in VET Community Services training packages, are significantly older than the overall comparable student cohort, those enrolled in psychology programs are not. There is a lower proportion of school leavers in social work compared to other bachelor training. Third, there are higher proportions of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and students with disabilities in social work than most other educational programs. This diversity is important if the social work and the human services workforce is to provide effective services to equity groups.

For example, while over 2.0% of the population identified as being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the 2006 Census, these peoples experience longstanding and profound economic and social disadvantage when compared to other Australians. Increased numbers and proportions of Indigenous staff in the social and community services workforce would

significantly enhance delivery of services to Indigenous Australians, who are over represented in a range of systems including child protection and corrections.

We turn now to consider demand for social work and human services programs amongst students. Measures of unmet demand provide one insight into the students' perception of the desirability of a particular course of study and career outcome. Unmet demand data provided by Universities Australia indicates that while high-earning and prestigious professional disciplines like medicine have high levels of people who unsuccessfully apply to them (80%+), there was a significant drop from 2004 to 2008 (25% down to 10%) in applications to the Society, Culture and Creative Arts category where most of the helping professions are located. This falling demand is confirmed by an examination of tertiary entrance data that provides evidence of a steady decline in the entrance scores for social work and other caring such as nursing and teaching disciplines and for the social sciences generally (Figure 5.5). The 25% increase in HECS that universities were allowed to impose, as well as the generally strong labour market may be important factors in falling demand for these programs. Those disciplines that were sensitive to the relative presence of labour market alternatives fell.

Figure 5.5 National Weighted Average University Entrance Score Cut Offs



The data presented in figure 5.5 shows that weighted average entry scores for social work, nursing and social sciences were substantially lower than degrees in a variety of fields. However, a review of entry scores amongst a diverse group of university programs shows an overall decline in entry scores across all disciplines in the period considered (2004-2008). This probably reflects the increasing numbers of student places and reduced student demand for higher education places across a broad range of courses. The problem in declining entry scores seems particularly acute in caring occupations, such as education and nursing, both of which recorded larger relative declines in scores than those in social work. In 2008, social work entry was ranked equal with the social sciences and above that of nursing and marginally lower than primary education. However, social work takes in a relatively smaller proportion (approx 35-40%) of school leavers than nearly all other disciplines, with most being mature age entrants and, hence, the average age of social work graduates is approximately two years older than the average for all other Bachelor-level graduates.

Even with this far smaller and more competitive field, the attractiveness of social work for school leavers appears to be low. The decline in entry scores for social work means that this occupation, like other caring and social science occupations is experiencing difficulty in attracting academically high-achieving students.

Course experience

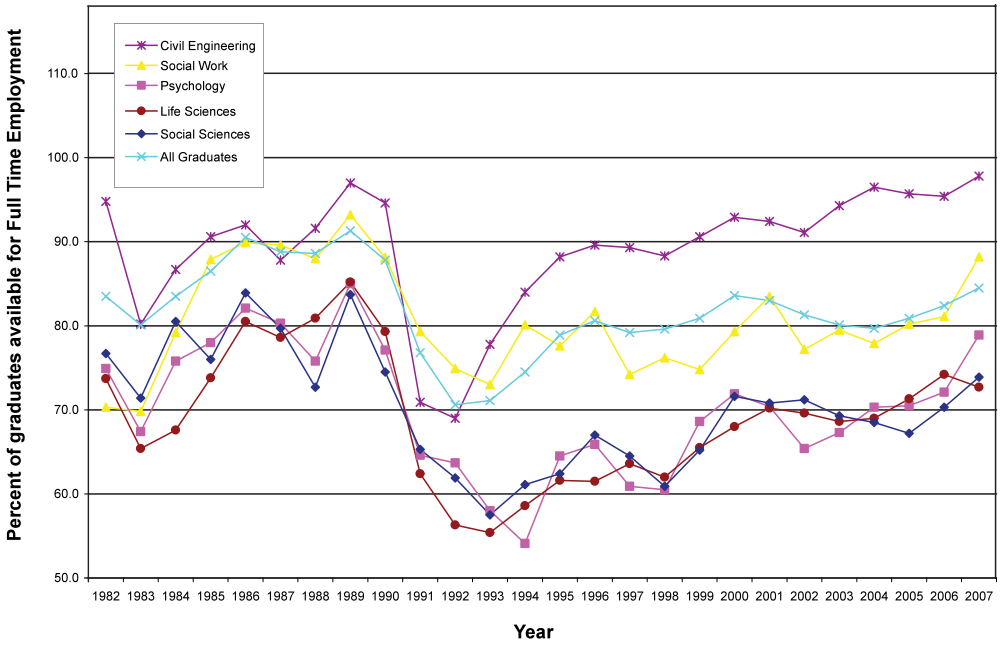
The experience of bachelor-level graduates of the higher education system is gauged through the Course Experience Questionnaire that is conducted by Graduate Careers Australia in conjunction with the Graduate Destination Survey. The analysis of this reveals that, in general, the experience of social work and other helping profession graduates is impressive as they rank in the top 10 of the 30 disciplines in 9 out of the 11 parameters measured. Compared with all other disciplines, they rank third and psychology bachelor graduates rank tenth for overall graduate satisfaction. The 'Helping Professions' graduates scored most positively in terms of the generic skills acquired through education, and given the debate surrounding the provision of generic versus specialised skills, graduates at least feel generic skill acquisition meets their expectations. We turn now to examination of post-course experience of graduates

Post Course Experience

In figure 5.6 we present information about employment levels amongst graduates of various programs. The figure shows the proportion of graduates within specific disciplines available for work compared to those actually employed.

Figure 5.6 Rates of Bachelor Degree Graduates in Full Time Work

Bachelor Degree Graduates (selected disciplines and all disciplines) working full time as a proportion of those available for full time employment (1982 -2007)
(Source - Graduate Destinations 2007 Graduate Careers Australia)



The data presented in figure 5.6 shows that social work graduates perform well in finding employment compared to the average graduate experience for Australia, with 89% of social work graduates who are available for work being employed. Further, employment outcomes for social work graduates are superior to graduates with comparable degree qualifications, such as psychology graduates. In is unsurprising that, in a period of significant workforce shortage, after graduation a high proportion of social work and 'Other Helping Profession' bachelor-level graduates find work in this sector. It should be noted that graduates

of social work and human service degree programs have long experienced high employment outcomes (Figure 5.6). Graduates have high levels of employment in both part and full-time work, regardless of age.

Postgraduate Study

There are significant disparities with regard to the take up of postgraduate education by social workers and human service practitioners, compared with other helping professionals, notably psychologists, and other Bachelor Degree graduates. Census data from 2006 indicates that apart from psychologists (55%), most other professional practitioners within the human services do not undertake postgraduate education (Figure 5.7). Outcomes surveys suggest that social work and 'Other helping professions' have among the lowest uptake of the professions of further study with fewer than 10 percent of graduates in these fields undertaking further full-time study after graduation. Analysis of higher education data also supports this conclusion. The most popular postgraduate qualifications are Masters Degrees and Graduate Diplomas, both of which are steadily growing in their student intake.

The data presented in Figure 5.8 shows the low levels of enrolment in advanced postgraduate level of study. Indeed, between 2001 and 2006, only 10% of social workers had undertaken higher level programs. Given that there are approximately 17 000 social workers nationally, it is remarkable that on average under 200 FTE students undertaking advanced postgraduate study in the field of social work (Figure 5.8). While many social workers are probably included in the roughly 600 who were undertaking postgraduate counselling and other related degrees, these data demonstrate a significant problem exists for social workers, in particular, regarding upgrading their knowledge and skills in formal continuing professional education.The low level of enrolments in advanced postgraduate study can be attributed to a range of factors including: the high cost of study; the limited career or financial advantage in undertaking study; the later stage in life in which many social work and human services students undertake study meaning that, compared to younger students, there are likely to be competing demands on their time and finances.

In 2008-2009, there has been a substantial increase in the number of students undertaking the masters qualifying program in social work. Indeed, across Australia, approximately 680 students have enrolled in these programs since the programs were recognised by the AASW in 2008. However, these are qualifying programs for students holding a degree in a discipline other than social work and, the programs are aimed to offer an entry level qualification to the social work field rather than a program of advanced study for qualified social welfare professionals.

Figure 5.7 Education Levels of Human Services Practitioners

Identified Level of Education of Selected Legal, Social and Welfare Professionals and Welfare Support Workers (ANZSCO) (Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing)

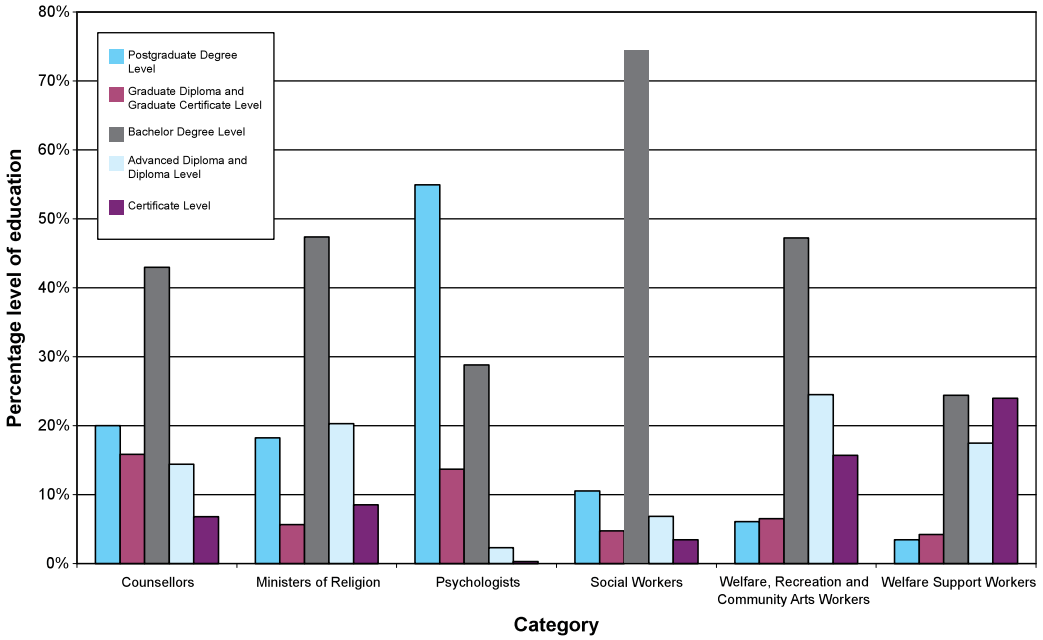
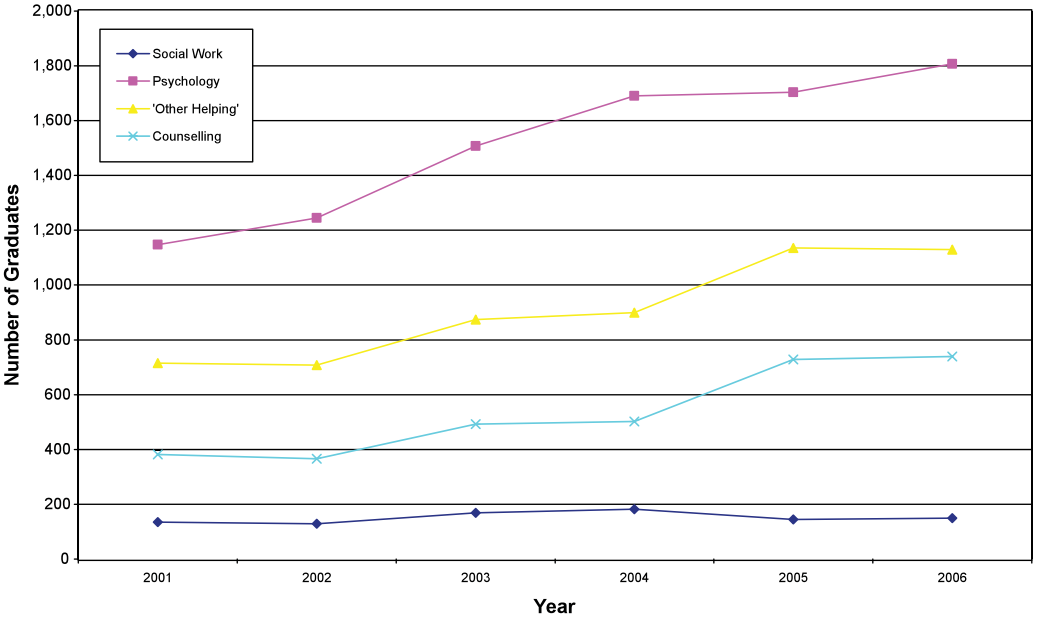


Figure 5.8 Numbers of 'Helping Professional' Post Graduates

Numbers of 'Helping Profession' Domestic Post Graduates by Grouping
Australian Universities 2001 - 2006
Source: DEEWR University Statistics Collection



Notwithstanding the recent accreditation of postgraduate qualifying masters of social work programs, there are relatively low numbers and proportion of the social work and human services workforce undertaking postgraduate education. This may have implications for the capacity of the workforce to develop, and demonstrate, advanced and specialist service delivery capacities beyond those acquired in their foundational education. Furthermore, it may reflect the lack of salary incentives for advanced study in the social work and human services field. As we will see shortly, in the Australian workforce generally, there is a positive relationship between qualification levels and higher salaries, however, this does not appear to be the case for social workers. The numbers of social welfare professionals

undertaking postgraduate qualifications appears insufficient to meet sector requirements for practitioners with high-level expertise and this reflects the lack of career structures and incentives for keeping expert workers in frontline practice (Healy, Meagher and Cullin, 2009).

Workforce Characteristics

The social work and human services workforce has a number of distinguishing characteristics. This workforce is older than that found in other sectors of the economy and is rapidly ageing (see Figure 5.9). These features are likely to further exacerbate the workforce shortages already facing key fields such as community services. Women are numerically dominant in this sector; the 2006 Census reveals that 70% of all social work and human service workers are female, and more than 80% of social work professionals are female.This workforce has a good representation from equity groups including people from Indigenous and CALD communities and people with disability. Nonetheless, given the high proportion of service use among these communities, further representation of these equity groups within the workforce is warranted. There is a strong case for using measures such as scholarships and other incentives to actively encourage people from these groups into educational programs that provide pathways into this workforce in order to improve service delivery effectiveness. The age distribution of the workforce is substantially older than the Australian average workforce age.

Figure 5. 9 Comparative Age Distributions of Professional Groups

Age Curve - ANZSCO Professional Groups and Social Workers
Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

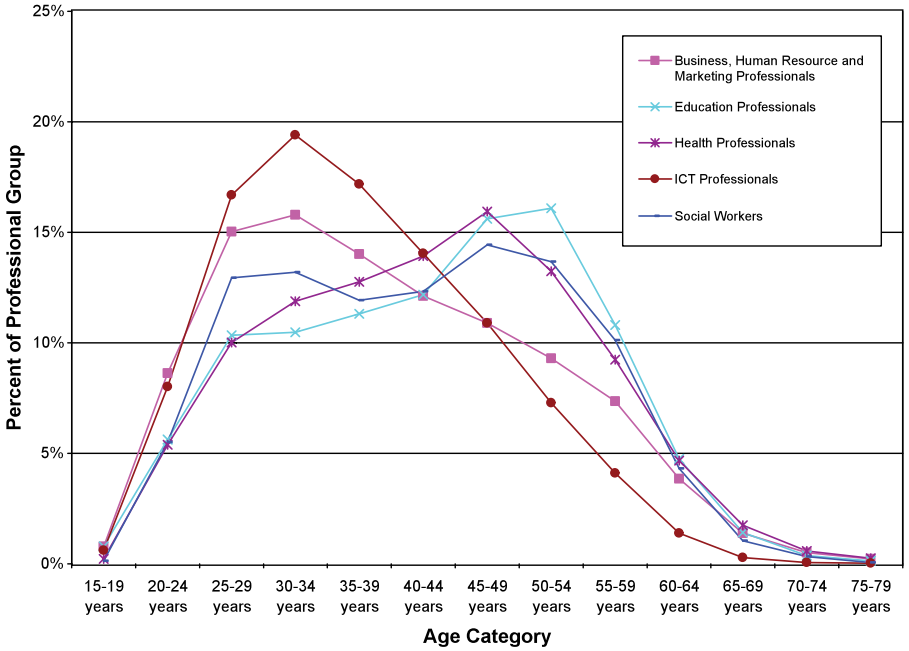


Figure 5.9 shows the age distribution amongst social workers is, like teachers, concentrated between 25 and 60 years, with a substantial proportion of the occupational group between 55-64 years. This distribution indicates possible emerging problems for the generational renewal of social work as a substantial proportion of this occupational group retires over the next ten years. The age distribution also has implications for expectations regarding remuneration that we will discuss later in this chapter. The majority of the workforce is employed by the non-government sector agencies, particularly not-for-profits, with 23% of psychologists and 12% of counsellors being self-employed. There is a huge diversity amongst practitioners regarding the practice fields where they work (e.g. disability, aged care, corrections, family support, child welfare, residential care etc) and roles that they hold. Furthermore, as illustrated in Table 5.5, which draws on Census data, social workers have a broad array of occupational titles including, manager, community worker, educator and counsellor.

Table 5.5 Top 10 Social Work Stated Occupations
10 Most Common Stated Occupations of those who stated that they held a bachelor level + Degree in Social Work. ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

OCCUPATION (ANZSCO)	NUMBER THAT IDENTIFIED	CUMULATIVE TOTAL OF ALL THOSE THAT STATED THAT THEY HELD A BACHELOR LEVEL + DEGREE IN SOCIAL WORK (IDENTIFIED AS IN THE WORKFORCE)
Social Workers	7,942	41.3%
Welfare, Recreation and Community Arts Workers	1,746	50.4%
Welfare Support Workers	1,389	57.6%
Counsellors	1,052	63.0%
Health and Welfare Services Managers	413	65.2%
Contract, Program and Project Administrators	392	67.2%
Aged and Disabled Carers	224	68.4%
Intelligence and Policy Analysts	209	69.5%
University Lecturers and Tutors	203	70.5%
Policy and Planning Managers	186	71.5%

The figures in Table 5.5 suggests a low level of occupational mobility among social work graduates in that the majority of those who state they hold bachelor level qualifications in social work are working in a social welfare occupation either as a direct service provider or as a manager in the health and welfare sector.

Graduate Outcome surveys demonstrate that immediately after graduation, the remuneration social work/other helping professions is reasonable (about mid rank or higher) compared to other disciplines, and the pay is generally higher than that for psychology graduates. However, while apparently reasonable for younger graduates these relative rates of pay may not be as reasonable for the older individuals that tend to make up many Social Work and 'Other Helping' profession graduates especially in the longer term (as shown below). Contrary to popular mythology, social work graduates (30 years) are on average, two years older than graduates from all other disciplines.

While immediate salary prospects appear good, those in the longer term suggest that social work and other helping graduates have limited capacity to increase their income whilst remaining in direct service work. This lack of financial recognition for more qualified workers may contribute to limited incentive for practitioners to undertake advanced study in social work or to advance their career in direct practice. Figures 5.10 and 5.11 illustrate data derived from the 2006 Census and demonstrate the poorer relativities of economic benefit of social work bachelor level and postgraduate degrees compared to those holding bachelor level and postgraduate degrees within the Health and Community Services workforce, and the workforce as a whole. It is clear that employees in caring professions do not, on average, get the financial returns of their counterparts in other parts of the economy.

This pattern suggests that while initial salaries for social work graduates are good, opportunities for advancement in pay and conditions are not commensurate with experience or achievement of advanced qualifications, as they are in much of the rest of the Australian workforce.

Figure 5.10 Bachelor Degree Graduates' Incomes

Average Weekly Earnings (35-39 Hours per Week Worked) - Those in Workforce holding a Bachelor Degree (Whole Workforce, Health and Community Services Workforce, Community Services Workforce, Social Work Education only) - ABS 2006 Census

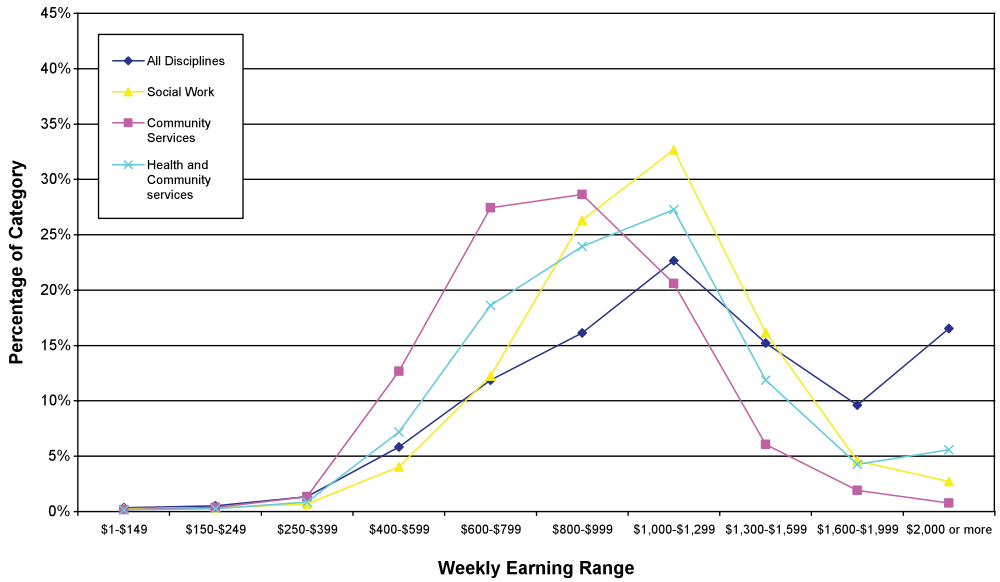
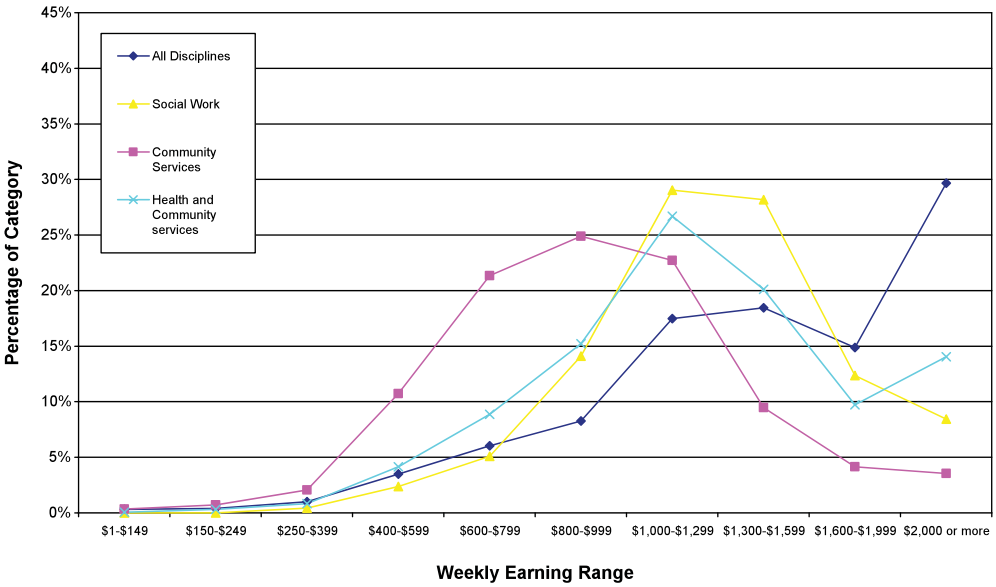


Figure 5.11 Postgraduate Degree Graduates' Incomes

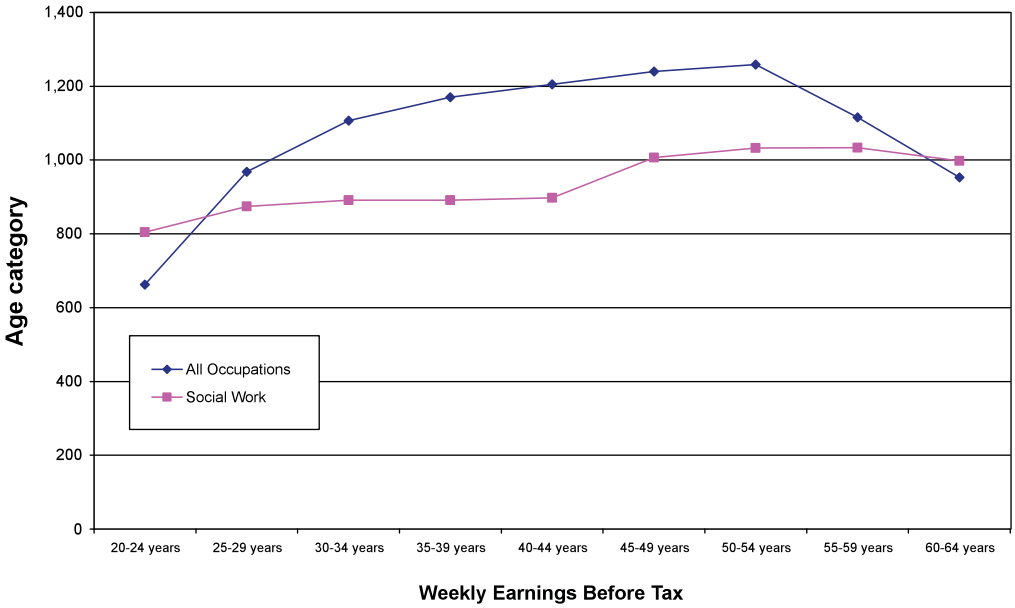
Average Weekly Earnings (35-39 Hours per Week Worked) - Those in Workforce holding a Post Graduate Degree (Whole Workforce, Health and Community Services Workforce, Community Services Workforce, Social Work Education only) - ABS 2006 Census



This is unsurprising considering the numbers that are employed by the not-for-profit, non-government organisations and with government agencies where the professional career pathways is much more limited than the administrative career pathway. For social welfare professionals, there are limited opportunities to move into the higher paid 'professional practice' type areas even for those who hold postgraduate qualifications. In many cases, the main economic advantage to obtaining a higher level qualification in social work is that the pay rate moves up a 'notch' particularly from the $1,000-$1,299 weekly salary range to the $1,300-$1,599 weekly salary range. Further analysis of DEEWR indicates that there is little turnover in the main occupation grouping of social work demonstrating the comparative lack of occupational mobility of social welfare professionals into other occupations or sectors. It appears that social welfare professionals who chose to remain in direct practice face significant economic penalties for doing so and due to the lack of career structures for advanced professional practice in this field.

Figure 5.12 Social Work and All Other Bachelor Degree Graduates' Incomes

Synthesised Average Weekly Income by Age Group (Those with Bachelor Level degree working as Social Workers vs Bachelor Level Degree All Occupations)



Our analysis of the relative incomes of the social work and human services workforce reveals that those holding a social work bachelor degree are economically better off than most holding a bachelor degree in in other fields of study. However, this relative advantage diminishes when they are compared to the Health and Community Services sectors combined, presumably from higher salaries commanded by health professionals.Those holding a bachelor of social work degree have lower incomes than the average income for people with bachelor degrees across the entire Australian workforce (Figure 5.12). Moreover, there are limited economic gains for those holding a social work bachelor degree when greater than 40 hours per week are worked compared to the greater Health and Community Services and general workforce, which have many staff moving into the $2,000 per week remuneration range.

Other evidence suggests that social work degree holders are confined to 'niches' of the workforce, which may factor in the attractiveness, or lack thereof, of the discipline. Over time (age of employee) analysis with 'derived rates of pay' (Figure 5.12) suggests that the initial advantages with higher pay compared to others in the workforce (with bachelor degrees) disappears as perhaps social worker/other helping bachelor degree holders are confined to a 'pay scale' position with little opportunity for advancement. Considering that the average social work graduates enter the system at 30 years of age, they are already at an apparent disadvantage. The arguments presented here have some relationship with the uptake of higher level 'Helping Profession' degrees, and perhaps portend to a comparative unattractiveness of the sector for many young people.

Workforce Future Prospects

We recognise that accurate forecasting for specific occupations is a difficult exercise given the complexities of a modern economy with its dynamics in labour mobility, use of technologies and consumer preferences. Forecasting is also seen to be increasingly difficult as the forecast time period is extended, the skill sets are more specific, and the geographic area is more localised. However we also recognise that any meaningful changes in education and training resulting from workforce expansion needs close attention if education providers are to move to a more planned and systematic approach to the preparation of a skilled workforce.

In light of this, we approached the labour market forecasting component of the analysis in terms of key recommendations of Richardson and Tan (2007) paraphrased below:

1. Only look forward a few years ahead as the system is far too complex to go any further;
2. Look at how various skills are coming to the workplace, not just through the formal qualification process and determine how to recognise or capture these skills;
3. Focus on skills required and not required and how to adjust for these skills in the workplace; and
4. Anticipate areas where there will be large replacement demand.

In examining the prospects for social work education, in particular, we, similarly to Richardson and Tan, recognise the limitations of relying alone upon sophisticated Australian labour force predictive models such as the Monash model (Richardson and Tan, 2007). In this difficult task of forecasting labour market demand and 'matching' graduate supply, we agree with Richardson and Tan (2007) that planners should be prepared to look beyond models and to validate them with on the ground forms of market intelligence. We believe that this validation could involve gaining greater utility from all data sources including graduate outcomes surveys. With this in mind, we have preferred to consult 'off the shelf' type analysis such as the 'job prospects' type scoring system developed by DEEWR, which itself incorporates the Monash Model. This system scores some 11 factors to produce a job prospects rating and a five year growth projection for various occupations. This set of information is validated against themes that we have intuitively picked up through the data and consultations.

Table 5.6 is reproduced from DEEWR 2008 workforce data on the social work and the human services workforce. While this data cannot incorporate the 'unknowns' that will arise from the impacts of the global financial crisis, we believe that the tables represent underlying good long-term job prospects for these occupations given that the sector will continue to grow.

Table 5.6 DEEWR Job Prospects Data and Projections 2008 (Selected Occupations)
Note that the quoted DEEWR JobProspects summaries are based upon ANZSCO classifications and revised 2008 Quarterly Labour Force Survey estimates. Ooccupational numbers may differ slightly from those quoted elsewhere,

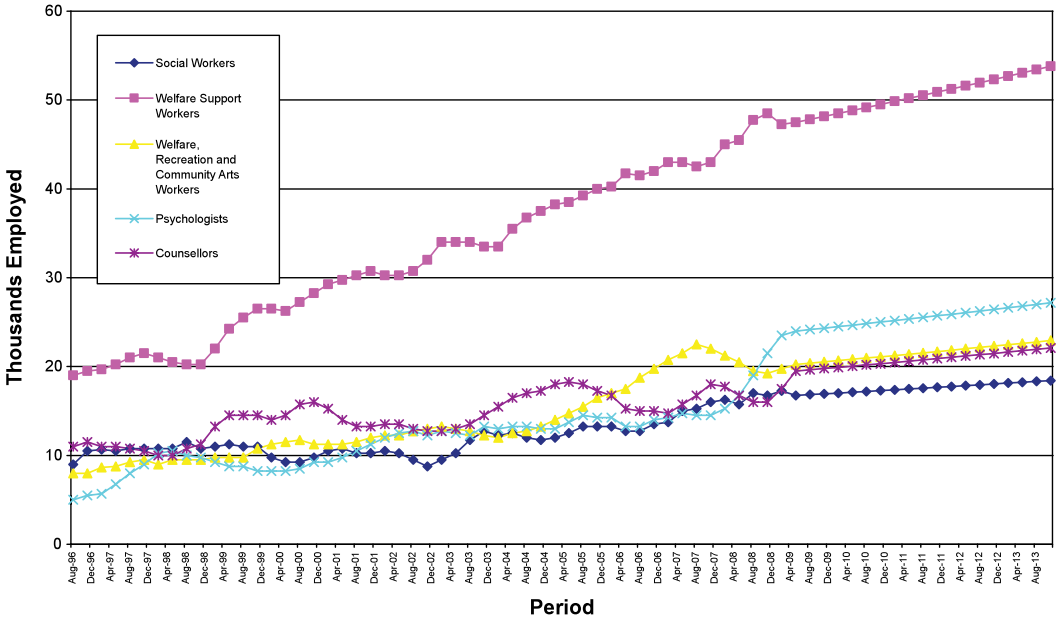
ANZSCO MAIN GROUP	LEGAL, SOCIAL AND WELFARE PROFESSIONALS	HEALTH AND WELFARE SUPPORT WORKERS	LEGAL, SOCIAL AND WELFARE PROFESSIONALS	LEGAL, SOCIAL AND WELFARE PROFESSIONALS	LEGAL, SOCIAL AND WELFARE PROFESSIONALS	LEGAL, SOCIAL AND WELFARE PROFESSIONALS
Indicator	**Social Workers**	**Welfare Support Workers**	**Welfare, Recreation and Community Arts Workers**	**Psychologists**	**Counsellors**	**Social Professionals**
How many are employed in this occupation?	19,300	48,500	19,700	22,300	14,500	9,300
How many work full-time (% share)?	71.7	67	68.4	62.3	53.2	46.4

What are the weekly earnings for full-time workers ($ before tax)?	$1,081	$922	$850	$1,190	$1,115	$1,506
How does unemployment compare with other occupations?	below average	above average	below average	low	average	high
What is the long-term employment growth - 10 years (%)?	81.9	133	83.6	141.9	15.6	24.8
What is the medium-term employment growth - 5 years (%)?	48.5	49	47.8	77.4	-2.8	66.1
What is the short-term employment growth - 2 years (%)?	41.9	17	5.2	54.9	-1	39.8
What is the likely future employment growth for the next five years?	moderate growth ++	strong growth	strong growth	strong growth	strong growth	slight fall
Is the mix of industries favourable for employment growth?	very favourable	very favourable	very favourable	very favourable	very favourable	very favourable
Job openings from turnover – how many (%) leave the occupation each year?	1.4	12	12	19.9	13.7	14.6
What is the vacancy level for this occupation?	low	average	average	very high	average	very high
What are the job prospects?	good	good	good	good	good	average

Table 5.6 shows that professional occupations within the social work and human services fields, such as social workers, counselors and psychologists have higher weekly incomes than paraprofessionals such as welfare support workers. Several occupational groups within this workforce, particularly social workers and welfare recreational workers experience below average levels of unemployment, while at least one group, welfare support workers experience above average levels of unemployment. The data indicates that employment growth over the next decade for several professional and paraprofessional occupational groups within this sector will be substantial with several occupational groups doubling in size. Interestingly, in contrast to public perceptions of high turnover amongst social work professionals, this occupational group has very low turnover with less than 2% leaving each year, this is much lower than the other occupational groups considered. Overall, the data indicates that employment growth will be driven by increased demand rather than workforce turnover. The Social Welfare Professionals and Associate Professionals categories have grown strongly over the last 10 years. Some of them have grown particularly strongly over the last 2 years (up to late 2008). Projections of the numbers employed full time in these occupations using the DEEWR growth forecasts are shown in Figure 5.12. These occupations are major employers of the 'helping profession' educated – particularly social work. Projecting these occupations using the DEEWR growth rates provides an estimate of the total jobs/ employment opportunities that will be conceivably be available in each occupation.

Figure 5.13 DEEWR Projections for Social Work and the Human Services Workforce.

Employment Growth August 1996 to November 2008 and Forecast Employment Growth to November 2013 - Selected Helping Professions and Welfare Support Workers (ANZSCO) - Derived from ABS Labour Force Surveys and JobProspects Forecast Annual Rates of Growth



A percentage of each Social Welfare Professional and Associate Professional occupation that is a holder of a bachelor degree and above in each 'helping profession' is determined from 2006 Census data. A quite high percentage (65+%) of those holding a Social Work Bachelor-level + degree are employed in these occupations. Using this approach (at the level of each Social Welfare Professional and Welfare Associate Professional occupation) an additional 2 030 full time employment opportunities (above November 2008 levels) is forecast for those social work qualified practitioners over the next five years in the Social Welfare Profession and Welfare Associate Professionals groupings. An additional 1 000 employment opportunities are forecast for those social work qualified over the five years (from November 2008) in the variety of other occupations.

Considering that the university system has been generating about 1,300+ Bachelor Degree Social Work graduates per annum, and that a quite high proportion of these graduates already placed in positions within a relatively short time frame, the trends confirm observations that the system has, over recent periods, been adequately absorbing graduates and probably will have a greater capacity in future to absorb more.

Again, Richardson and Tan's (2007) point about looking at how various skills are coming to the workplace, not just through the traditional qualification process and determining how to recognise/ capture these skills is brought to mind. In addition to bachelor level graduates, the recent advent of entry-level Master of Social Work programs should provide 300-400 graduates per year. Taken into the calculation, there are approximately 400 overseas social workers migrating annually to Australia and around 300 emigrating.

In total, this adds an additional 500 qualified social workers annually to the 1,300 Bachelor Degree graduates. This may, over time, increase the number and proportion of social workers in the sector's workforce, but it will not alter the overall trend of the workforce expansion being largely met by the Welfare, Recreation and Community Arts Workers, Welfare Support Workers, and probably increasing numbers of psychology graduates. Given the longstanding role of social work being the basis of the theoretical, ethical, values, and skills development in this sector, continuing workforce growth may lead to a dilution of its traditional approaches to working with disadvantaged and traumatised groups within our society. There is a strong argument for producing a lot more social work graduates, particularly given that their employment is spread so evenly across the whole sector, whereas other occupations tend to be more concentrated into particular industry components.

The data we have analysed indicate that there has been profound growth in the sector and that this is likely to continue into the foreseeable future. However, the training and education system that prepares practitioners has also grown in an unplanned and, to an extent haphazard way. Hence, the workforce needs have been met by graduates from an increasing range of qualifications, most of which have curriculum that has not been consistent or developed with close industry support or cognizant with theory and research on social welfare practice. The resultant diversification of the workforce has created problems, including a dilution of required characteristics such as high-level practice skills and values of staff. These problems are compounded by deficiencies in postgraduate offerings, which have generally low uptake by practitioners, possibly due to the lower incomes earned in the sector compared to other industries. There are clear problems in the attractiveness of educational courses in social work and the human services. What exactly might be done about these issues is explored in the following chapter.

Six: Discussion and Recommendations

STUDY BACKGROUND

In 2007 this project, 'Developing an Integrated National Curriculum for the Education of the Social Work and Human Services Workforce' was funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (formerly the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education) with the aim to be a catalyst for the development of a national workforce plan for this sector, including an integrated curriculum.

To achieve this, the project team researched and scoped the workforce issues and trends that were evident and mapped the VET and higher education sector curriculum. In addition, the educational and training needs and priorities were identified through survey responses from relevant industry and educational/ training stakeholders, and a national roundtable forum of 40 stakeholder delegates where the issues and trends were dialogued, and responses explored.

The project had its genesis in the profound and rapid structural and other changes to the social and community services sector experienced during the latter part of the 20th Century and into this current decade, both here and overseas (McDonald, 2006). These sector-wide reforms in the social and community services sector, driven in part by by neo-liberal policy agendas, included:

- Market driven expansion of VET and higher education sectors;
- The marketisation of service delivery structures and processes;
- Altered social mandates for its traditional social welfare services;
- The introduction of New Public Management (NPM) and its attendant managerialist practices such as strategic planning and review, and organizational restructuring to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness into both social work and human services education and practice; and
- The rapid and unregulated expansion of the workforce with the employment of practitioners holding a broader diversity of VET and professional qualifications that led to a blurring of disciplinary boundaries.

The structural alterations within the sector and the resultant diversification and expansion of the workforce was accompanied by significant changes in the VET and higher education sectors, including the abolition of the binary system and the marketisation and deregulation of that system. Tensions existed around these market-based reforms, with concerns raised about:

- The purported adequacy of the educational preparation of graduates to meet changing sector needs;
- The effects on social work and human service education generally including a lowering of hitherto high academic standards; and
- The apparent lack of standardisation across the rapidly growing social welfare and human services programs, particularly the advent of a broad range of applied social and behavioural science programs.

Taken overall, workforce shortages have occurred across a range of social work and human services fields as result of rapid employment growth in these fields. It appears that much of the employment growth has been unplanned and reactive to pressing service needs. Indeed, our study identified that the previous national workforce plan for the sector occurred over 25

years earlier (Learner, 1989). Nonetheless, the changing characteristics and contours of the social work and human services sector has been the subject of substantial investigation over the past five years. Meagher and Healy (2005, 2006) undertook a detailed study of the 1996 and 2001 Census data and related data sets, with a particular focus on the caring workforce in the community services sector. Among other things, they found that the workforce was rapidly ageing and more so than other occupations (Meagher and Healy, 2005) and there was "evidence of de-institutionalisation, de-professionalisation, functional under-employment and relatively poor pay" (Meagher and Healy, 2006, p. 9). There has also been work undertaken by the Community Services and Disability Ministers Advisory Council (CSDMAC) and relevant State Government and non-government agencies in relation to workforce analysis, but this has tended to be quite limited in its scope and detail, and has not led to a national plan for the whole sector's future workforce needs.

The present project utilized this existing work as a basis for a broader and more comprehensive examination of a range of data pertaining to the workforce and the VET and higher education curriculum. As outlined in Chapter 4, the inherent difficulty in analyzing the data available in relation to the social and human services workforce and curriculum is that there is a diverse range of methodologies used to collect and collate it, with the further complication that definitions are also quite varied and change over time making precise comparisons difficult. Data sources accessed included:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics;
- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR);
- Graduate Careers Australia;
- National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER);
- Universities Australia;
- University web sites; and
- VET sector education provider web sites.

Importantly, given these methodological and definitional variations among the various data sources, the examination we undertook incorporated the approach of identifying the broad trends and issues, and cross checking these with data from different sources in order to determine the overall consistency in findings and to highlight any anomalies identified. It is unsurprising that the key findings and trends were in fact consistent across the different data sources and sets. We believe that this strengthens their validity and reliability. It also assists in the identification of the issues which stem from these findings, and the subsequent recommendations we have made.

KEY FINDINGS

Curriculum

This study has identified a continuing and rapid expansion in the numbers of tertiary education programs, particularly those which provide the higher-level skilled workforce in the community services. There has been an expansion in both the VET and higher education sector. In the former this has accompanied a broadening in the range of programs.
A common theme voiced by the national forum participants was that despite a national accreditation and curriculum process, many of the VET programs have nevertheless been operationalised in ways that increase diversity of the training but decrease the consistency. This is, however, a disputed assertion as the VET sector claims its packages are consistent across the nation. In either event, high growth rates have been experienced within these VET programs and graduates have been readily employed by the sector, particularly by community-based agencies. These graduates have tended to obtain jobs that provide direct care to service users such as people with a disability, stressed families who require social support, and the elderly.

Our study has identified a consistent trend toward paraprofessionalisation of the community services workforce largely through the increased numbers of VET-trained employees. However, we found that VET-trained staff filled only a moderate proportion of the direct care positions. Indeed, because of the workforce shortages, many direct care positions have been filled by people with no formal qualifications, a feature that raises concerns about the knowledge and skill levels of these practitioners, as well as questions about the ethical and values base from which they practice. This is an important issue because many of the people who are assisted by direct care staff have significant and complex needs and are highly vulnerable. The disaggregated nature of much of the workforce poses particular problems for ongoing quality assurance measures as well as placing a significant impost upon organisations, many of which (particularly the not-for-profit community-based ones) do not have the funding budgets or independent resources to invest into comprehensive staff training and development processes.

A particularly striking finding in relation to the VET graduates was their variability in pathways and low rates of articulation into higher education courses. For this group, pathways to higher education and therefore career progression remain unclear. Many people commence the Diploma of Community Services (or similar) course and leave with a Graduate Certificate III or IV, often because they can quickly acquire paid employment within the sector. However, our findings reveal that this can consequently mean that they tend to stay in the more direct care jobs with little prospect of career advancement. In many respects, they are an under-developed human resource that offers a potentially large source of skilled labour, if the pathways to higher education can be made clearer and easier to traverse. Overall, the pathways for VET graduates to higher education were found to be unclear, inconsistent and ad hoc, with great variability in the recognition of prior learning, the granting of credit for existing training, and the accessibility nationwide. While there are notable exceptions to this, the general pathways environment is a significant impediment to workforce development.

The poor pathways from VET to higher education programs is surprising given the substantial growth evidenced in universities applied social and behavioural science programs, which are a direct result of the marketisation of the higher education sector. By and large, universities have aggressively pursued growth in student numbers through developing a broad range of courses. Unfortunately, this has taken place with little evidence to show that the community services sector was consulted and assisted in the identification of the required knowledge, skills and values set of graduates or the development of course structures. In so far as universities identify that particular courses of study will prepare graduates for careers in the community services workforce, this lack of consultation is problematic. The end result appears to be a mismatch between the sector's workforce requirements for 'job ready' employees, with the ability of these programs' graduates to undertake the often complex, challenging and diverse array of functions, roles and tasks of professional practitioners in the contemporary community services (such as caseworkers and case managers, community educators, counsellors, family support workers etc). This study has identified that many of these graduates from social and behavioural science programs are obtaining employment in the community services, usually with lower responsibilities, remuneration and career prospects than the more traditional disciplines such as social work and psychology.

The qualification base of workers within the community services sector is broad and this breadth is, in part, a reflection of the substantial growth in employment opportunities. However, graduates of generalist social and behavioural studies programs are unlikely to have undertaken formal education in fields such as professional communication, assessment and community service interventions. In these ways, they are likely to be under-prepared for the specific and often demanding roles in which they are employed. Furthermore, the lack of financial recognition of formal qualifications and the limited capacity of employers to support staff to undertake study acts as barriers to practitioners upgrading their qualifications once employed. The recent revaluing of the Social and Community Services (SACS) award by the

Queensland Industrial Relations Commission provides a welcome change to this through significantly increased remuneration linked with the recognition of higher qualifications, skills and responsibilities.

The variability in the content of the social and behavioural science programs stands in sharp contrast to the relatively standardised curriculum in accredited social work courses, which have a clear link between the accreditation by professional associations and input by the sector and employers into curriculum development. Many other helping profession undergraduate programs such as human service and social welfare degree programs (psychology excluded) have a significant component of work-integrated learning as part of the curriculum, and the programs were often focused on educating students with the knowledge and skills to practice in specific fields of the community services such as youth work, corrections, child and family welfare etc. The AASW accredited courses have by far the most placement hours (a minimum of 980 hours).

Many educational institutions offering social and behaviour studies programs assert that their programs prepare graduates for careers in community and human services fields, however, there is little external validation of these claims. In particular, many education providers choose to remain outside the industry standards setting and quality assurance processes such as accreditation by the AIWCW. Consequently, there is significant variability around the specific knowledge and skills sets that are within curriculum, including, in some cases, limited or no work-integrated learning components.

The social work courses were demonstrably standardised with core content being a requirement of the AASW accreditation processes. However, these programs were characterised by a generalist and generic curriculum that often left little room for students to specialise. Feedback from the community services indicated that while this meant that graduates could readily apply knowledge and skills across a variety of practice fields and situations, they were not always seen as 'practice ready' for specified roles and duties.

Of particular significance was the overall numbers of graduates from the social and behavioural science programs and psychology, which were significantly outstripping the numbers in social welfare/ human services and social work programs. This imbalance has significant implications for the overall makeup of the community services workforce, and raises serious questions about the extent to which graduates have the knowledge, skills and values set that the broad sector requires for ensuring its ongoing sustainability. In effect, a clear trend of increased graduate diversity is demonstrated, with the social work component becoming a decreasing proportion and workforce minority, which could have serious implications for the overall knowledge, skill, moral and ethical underpinnings for social care work, and perhaps increasing a trend identified in the broader literature for technical rather than humanistic approaches to social problems and service users. Additionally, those attracted to social work education are significantly older and more life experienced than those who select psychology and social and behavioural science programs and, hence, rapid expansion of these courses tends to decrease the overall age and life experience levels of new entrants into the community services workforce.

The relatively low demand for social work, social science and other caring occupations, such as nursing, indicates that the caring occupations are attracting a lower proportion of high achieving academic students than other disciplines. This is likely to be due to a number of factors. Firstly, caring occupations such as social work and nursing have long attracted a majority of women. Yet, women now have a much broader set of career choices than they have had in the past and with increased choice are no longer choosing caring occupations in the same proportions as found in the past. Secondly, the salaries and career prospects in the community services are not as attractive as those found in other sectors of the economy. Thirdly, the rapid proliferation of social and behavioural science programs has spread the

student existing demand too broadly. Finally, the attractiveness of care work may have suffered as a result of an ideologically-driven political discourse that has disparaged the community services sector and service users with such terms, for example, as "do gooder", "bleeding hearts", "dole bludger" and "welfare cheat". Public caricatures of "young" social work and human services workers, while inaccurate given the age profile of these professions, possibly also services to dissuade school leavers from applying to educational programs in these fields (for discussion, see Healy, 2009).

Workforce

The social work and human services workforce is predominantly female and has greater representation from a range of marginalised and minority groups than other sectors of the general workforce, which is a positive characteristic that enables the social work and human services workforce to better meet the diversity of community needs. However, more can be done to encourage people from equity groups into the social work and human services educational pathways and workforce, including scholarships and career incentives. Meagher and Healy's (2005, 2006) findings of a generally older and rapidly ageing workforce were confirmed by our study results. Taken overall, employees receive lower wages than those in other comparable sectors. Social workers are relatively stable employees within this broader community services workforce with a large majority staying in the sector, more so than psychologists who, in general, receive higher salaries.

The remuneration levels available to many workers in the social work and human services workforce do not properly reflect the increase in responsibilities or qualifications, and there is little, if any, financial incentive or support, to take postgraduate study. This is an active disincentive for practitioners to access educational pathways and to undertake further study which will prepare them for those roles and functions that require higher-level expertise and skills. If the sector is to meet the growing demand for services to meet the complex needs of people who have significant and challenging life circumstances and issues, then a range of specialised postgraduate curriculum and courses will need to be developed across the country. Furthermore, workers should be enabled to undertake such study and be recognised and remunerated for doing so.

Comparisons of the levels of postgraduate qualifications of practitioners revealed that social workers were not keeping pace with broader societal trends to upgrade skill and knowledge levels. This suggests that, when compared to Masters Degrees in areas such as counselling and clinical psychology, the postgraduate social work programs are not meeting practitioner and employer needs. It is, however, difficult to determine how national needs for practitioner specialisation in fields such as child protection and mental health will be met within a marketised higher education sector that focuses on generalist programs that attract higher demand.

Overall, the workforce is experiencing significant growth which can be expected to continue in the foreseeable future. However, most of this is occurring due to the increase in the Welfare Support Worker classification, which is comprised largely of workers with VET qualifications or those with qualifications from a range of social and behavioural science programs. The overall trend is one of paraprofessionalisation which, given the poor access to educational pathways, has implications for meeting the demand for practitioners with high-level expertise, where continued workforce shortages are expected. Further, if sufficient people cannot be attracted to the VET and higher education programs, then this growth may be met through unqualified staff, which will exacerbate the deprofessionalisation that Meagher and Healy's (2005; 2006) earlier research identified.

THE KEY ISSUES

Taken overall, this study presents evidence of a range of salient issues relating to the VET and higher education curriculum and, consequently, the provision of a sustainable workforce that meets our society's needs for a compassionate, ethically-sound, well-trained and highly-skilled community services workforce. If these issues are left unaddressed there are serious implications for the nature of our civil society and the wellbeing of the vulnerable and needy sections of our community.

Curriculum

The VET programs have not had a clear enough articulation with the higher education programs and the pathways for students are inconsistent for student progression. Taken overall, there is inadequate communication and collaboration between education providers and employers on curriculum alignment, clear articulation pathways and workforce requirements. There is a discrete separation of the VET and higher education providers yet they are providing graduates to the same sector. Viewed overall, the system is characterised by an *ad hoc* alignment of curriculum to workforce needs. These problematic arrangements have hindered the required expansion and development of the social work and human services workforce, and unless changes occur will likely continue to be a significant hindrance.

The marketisation of the higher education sector has not served the community services sector well. Rather, the unplanned growth of a broad and diverse range of VET and higher education programs has meant that many graduates do not have the knowledge, skill and values set required by the sector and, hence, the needs of service users of social welfare programs are not always appropriately addressed. Employers have had inadequate participation in the development of curriculum, particularly in social and behavioural science programs. Understandably, some employers appear to be uncertain about the differences in the educational content of the various programs leading to uncertainty about the differing training and support needs of graduates of different programs. Across the higher education sector, there has been insufficient attention to addressing the needs for generalist and specialist practitioners, and many are not practice-ready when they graduate. In an attempt to address this issue, in 2008 the AASW introduced minimum standards for social work curriculum in relation to child protection, mental health, working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and working with people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The general lack of support in terms of student enrolment or financial support for postgraduate programs in social work and related fields is notable. Employer-sponsored program offerings are a welcome exception to this situation.

Given that the Bradley Report and subsequent policy announcements by the Australian Government indicate a continuation of institutions competitively attracting student demand, there is a need for an alternative approach to meet the sector's workforce needs. A national workforce and curriculum plan is required to ensure that the broad societal and sector needs are met in what is otherwise a largely unregulated system. This is particularly the case for postgraduate education to meet the needs for higher-level expertise in a range of specialised areas such as child welfare, mental health, specific areas of physical health, sexual assault, and domestic violence. Further unregulated diversification of the curriculum and, therefore, the workforce's knowledge, skills and abilities will likely be counterproductive to the identified need for job ready graduates but also for specialised practitioners with recognised expertise.

Workforce

There are a number of pressing workforce issues including rapid ageing, labour shortages (particularly in the community-based not-for-profit agencies, and rural and remote locations), and ongoing significant growth which is largely being met by an aggressively competitive VET and higher education sector. Social work and human services educators in the higher education sector face significant tensions between some employers expectations, and wish, for 'job ready' graduates, and the academic and professional responsibility to build students' knowledge of, and capacity for, critical analysis of welfare institutions and practices and for preparing students for a life-long career in a range of practice roles (Healy and Meagher, 2007).

At present, employers across the social work and human services sector face recruitment challenges in a highly competitive environment but, interestingly, this has not led to higher salaries in comparison to other sectors of the economy (the recent Queensland SACS award revaluation excluded). With little overall planning it is unsurprising that we should now be in a situation where these workforce issues threaten workforce quality and sustainability of the sector.

Achieving diversity in the workforce needs to be balanced with ensuring that practitioners have the knowledge, skills and ethical frameworks to perform their role competently. Whereas national registration of health professions has been embraced by COAG, no such similar system exists for the social and community services, despite service users constituting some of the most vulnerable sectors within our society. This is an important issue because most of the staff-service user contact in this sector frequently occurs in one-to-one situations, often in private settings, including people's own homes. At present, there is an over-reliance on trusting the goodwill of a diverse group of practitioners, many of whom do not have a strong ethical component to their education or the oversight of a professional body. Apart from the ethical codes and requirements of professional associations such as the AASW, AIWCW and APS, there is little by way of protective mechanisms other than agency policies, procedures and contractual obligations, most of which are operating in small community-based not-for-profit concerns that do not have access to the sorts of infrastructure and resources of their larger government and NGO counterparts.

Planning for national workforce requirements in the social and community services is an identified need but is nevertheless fraught. There is a lack of transparency and accessibility in much of the available workforce and curriculum-related data. DEEWR and ABS provide very useful data on a range of relevant issues and trends, but as we have already identified, methodological and definitional variations make it difficult for the uninitiated to decipher and make valid and reliable comparisons and conclusions. Hence, most employers and other stakeholders, including educators, are uninformed as to the key workforce trends and issues, and remain dependent upon their own localised sources including anecdotal evidence. This means that employers lack information needed for comprehensive workforce planning.

The data from our study reveal that the rapid ageing of the sector's workforce will have compounding effects over the next 5-10 years. Many experienced and highly skilled staff will take well-earned retirements, notwithstanding the recent impacts on superannuation nest eggs as a result of the global financial crisis. Many of these practitioners will be from the core human service disciplines of social work and psychology. Yet the workforce trends we have identified indicate that they will likely be replaced by people with generalised social and behavioural qualifications, or with regard to the direct care positions, by people without formal qualifications. This raises significant human resource management issues such as the matching of skills and knowledge with roles and responsibilities, re-building workforce capacity, training and career development needs, and responding to the deprofessionalisation and paraprofessionalisation that we have identified. Furthermore, whereas we have found that the social workers have a very high degree of identity and commitment to this sector

and work, it remains uncertain whether newly trained social and behavioural science graduates will be the same. If they do not have high commitment and move out of the sector in large numbers, there will be a compounding of the high staff turnover experienced in some fields such as child protection services.

Recruitment of suitable staff is dependent upon the attraction of the right sorts of committed people into the most suitable training and educational programs. While equity groups are better represented amongst social work graduates than in many comparable occupations, there is need to further increase the number and proportion of graduates from these groups given their representation as users of social work and human services. Our study has identified that social work and human services courses are not attracting sufficient students to meet the rapidly expanding workforce, leading employers to source staff from a variety of social and behavioural science courses.

The inadequate take up of postgraduate education has serious implications for the development of the social and community services workforce. Social workers, social welfare professionals and welfare associate professionals, by and large, have not engaged with formal knowledge and skills development opportunities in the field of social work. With respect to social workers, this may be partially due to the unattractiveness of existing Masters Programs in social work. Our data shows that there is reasonable demand amongst social workers and human service professionals for postgraduate study in cognate fields such as counselling. Overall, it is clear that gaps are emerging in the capacity of the sector to meet demand for practitioners with well developed skills in complex areas such as child welfare, mental health and drug and alcohol services. It would appear that educators, professional associations, unions, and employers need to work collaboratively to ensure that educational programs are orientated towards building practice relevant knowledge and skills and, also, that practitioners are supported to, and recognised for, undertaking further study.

QUESTIONS ARISING FROM THE STUDY

There are important issues concerning the rapid growth and ageing of the social work and human services sector. The evidence produced in this study shows a lack of co-ordination between the marketised VET and higher education sector and between higher education providers and employers. Our analysis suggests that a more systematic way of addressing the nation's social and community services sector needs is required. Some of the specific questions include:

Curriculum

- What are the social and community services sector's curriculum needs as a whole, as well as the requirements of its individual fields and specialisations?
- What sorts of curriculum and qualifications best meet sector workforce needs?
- How well does the array of Social and Behavioural Science courses meet the sector's workforce needs?
- How do we enhance the pathways through VET training, higher education, employment and workplace?
- How might we raise the profile and status of a career in the social and community services sector and thereby attract sufficient committed and capable students and staff?
- What systems and mechanisms are needed to ensure that the VET and higher education sector produces sufficient graduates with the right sorts of qualifications and abilities to meet the social and community services sector's workforce needs?

- What role should professional associations, given their responsibilities in accrediting courses such as social work, psychology, and social welfare human services, play in addressing the identified curriculum issues?
- How do we address sector needs for highly specialized knowledge and skills?
- How might the attainment of postgraduate qualifications be made more attractive to professional staff in the sector?

Workforce

- Who are the most suitably trained and educated people for the varied positions, roles, functions and responsibilities within the social and community services sector?
- Given the current workforce shortages and predicted strong future growth, what policy measures are required to ensure that sufficient properly trained and educated people are attracted to this sector?
- What incentives can be used to increase numbers and proportions of staff from equity groups?
- How can the social and community services sector ensure that the VET and higher education sector is producing sufficient numbers of people with the right sorts of qualifications and abilities to sustain the workforce and meet future community and service user needs?
- How do we build workforce capacity over the medium- and long-term?
- What level of workforce regulation is needed to ensure adequate quality assurance accountability and community and service user protection?
- How might employers and other stakeholders more effectively contribute to the identification of workforce issues and needs?
- Do we need a national workforce plan, and if so, what sort of forum should have responsibility for its preparation?
- Given the existing institutional responsibilities, should DEEWR hold the national responsibility for workforce analysis and planning?

RECOMMENDATIONS

As this study has shown, there are many pressing issues confronting the social and community services that threaten its workforce sustainability, and therefore its ability to carry out the societal mandate given to the sector. While not yet at crisis point, there are a number of well-established trends that forebode future difficulties, if left unaddressed. There are significant difficulties already being experienced in recruiting sufficient committed and capable people into a career in the sector. The workforce demand for staff to meet its growth are being met by either unqualified people in direct care positions or, increasingly, by graduates from a diverse range of study programs that have been designed with little or no input from the sector in which graduates are to be employed. The general mismatch of curriculum with workforce needs has significant implications for the quality assurance of social work and human services delivery.

As noted earlier, the social and community services sector is a vital cornerstone to the structural arrangements that helps us to remain a democratic, compassionate and civil society. One of the hallmarks of a morally just society is how well it cares for those who are disadvantaged, marginalised and in need. The social welfare programs and services that are required need committed and highly skilled practitioners in order to effectively address the needs of vulnerable people and to promote their social inclusion. Providing necessary social

support and assistance also plays a key role in ensuring the nation's economic prosperity through maintaining the broader workforce health and wellbeing.

Curriculum

- That DEEWR identify accredited social work and human services courses as a national education priority (similar to education and nursing). By providing students with access to reduced HECS fee places, the government could encourage student enrolment in these programs and, in so doing, assist to meet demand for graduates of these programs.
- That higher education providers in the fields of social work, human services and social and behavioural sciences courses undertake a curriculum review with stakeholders in the social and community services sector to ensure the relevance of their academic programs for this entry level workforce.
- That the VET and higher education providers undertake a collaborative process to examine the issues hindering the development of clear and accessible pathways between training and education courses designed to meet the workforce needs of the social and community services sector.
- That the Australian Heads of Schools of Social Work, the Australian Association of Social Workers and Australian Association for Social Work and Welfare Education initiate a review of the postgraduate coursework social work degree offerings to ensure their relevance for the social and community services workforce development and attractiveness to professional staff.
- That educators, employers and other stakeholders, such as professional associations and unions, collaborate to develop incentive structures for practitioners to undertake advanced level study in fields of practice requiring high-level knowledge and skills, such as senior child protection workers and those working with individuals and families affected by drug and alcohol issues.
- That VET and higher education providers collaborate with industry stakeholders and contribute to the development of a national social and community services workforce analysis and planning process.

Workforce

- That a national forum of social and community services curriculum and workforce stakeholders be held to examine the trends and issues identified in this report and determine strategies to address them and ensure ongoing workforce sustainability.
- That DEEWR undertake a national workforce analysis and planning processes in collaboration with CSDMAC and all social and community services sector stakeholders in order to ensure its ongoing workforce sustainability.
- That COAG examine the need for national regulation of the social and community services workforce in order to provide appropriate accountability systems and ensure that there is proper protection for the public and service users via appropriate practice and educational standards.

CONCLUSION

This study of the social work and human services curriculum at the VET and higher education levels and the workforce has identified a number of key trends and issues that, taken together, indicate there are significant risks to its long-term sustainability. The rapid and unplanned growth that has been experienced in the health and community services sector has led to workforce shortages, which have been particularly acute in the not-for-profit and community-based agencies, and in the non-urban locations. Over the past decade the disciplinary base to the workforce has broadened, fed by the entry of an increasingly diverse range of graduates from the social and behavioural science courses in particular. These courses have arisen partly as a result of a competitive environment in the higher education sector where universities have aggressively moved to develop programs that will increase their student numbers.

Industry involvement in curriculum development is mixed. The Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council has facilitated employer involvement in curriculum design. The social work courses have a consistent curriculum developed by the professional association (the AASW) which have industry input. The human services/ welfare degrees are sometimes, but not always, accredited by the AIWCW and do have a 400 hour field education requirement, but were found to be much less consistent than the social work degree programs. However, non-accredited social and behavioural science programs are significantly less likely to have industry input into curriculum design. These curriculum problems have been exacerbated by an *ad hoc* system for the articulation of students from the VET sector to higher education. There is also a problem with the generally poor uptake by the sector (apart from psychologists) of postgraduate study that does not provide any significant career progression, or professional development opportunities that are in sync with industry needs. This appears related to the relatively poor salaries across the sector and the lack of financial support or incentive to undertake postgraduate study

The rapid and unplanned growth in the sector and the available curriculum has contributed to an undersupply of suitably-educated and trained graduates. A continuation of an unplanned and uncoordinated growth in the sector and continued proliferation of curriculum that is often unaligned with industry needs and informed by research and theory from social work and human services disciplines will have a significant adverse effect on the ability of the sector to meet its social care responsibilities. For this reason we concluded that there is an urgent need for the development of a comprehensive national workforce planning process. Because of the inadequate curriculum alignment this planning responsibility should rest with DEEWR, which can collaboratively involve CSDMAC and other key stakeholders to ensure that the social work and human services workforce has the knowledge, skills and ethical frameworks required to serve and promote the social inclusion of its most vulnerable citizens.

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Appendices

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Project Industry Forum Participants, Sydney 13-14th November 2008

Kandie Allen-Kelly, Australian Association of Social Workers
Professor Margaret Alston, Monash University
Elaine Atkinson, Teachers in Welfare Work & Community Development, TAFE Victoria
Davinia Blomberg, National Centre for Vocational Education & Research Ltd (NCVER)
Associate Professor Natalie Bolzan, Australian Council of Heads of Schools of Social Work
Kay Butler, S.A. Department for Families & Communities
Maryanne Carver, S.A. Department for Families & Communities
Associate Professor Mike Clare, University of WA, Social Work & Social Policy
Jude Ekerick, Catholic Social Services Australia
Lyndsey Fitzgerald, President - Australian Institute of Welfare & Community Workers
Robin Flynn, Community Services & Health Industry Skills Council (CS&HISC)
Associate Professor Margarita Frederico, La Trobe University
Jeff Grant, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services & Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)
Desley Hargreaves, Centrelink
Sonya Hilberts, Community Services & Health Industry Skills Council (CS&HISC)
Lyndall Hulme, Council of Social Service of Qld (QCOSS)
Associate Professor Jude Irwin, University of Sydney
Catherine Mahoney, Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS)
Clare Martin, Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS)
Professor Catherine McDonald, RMIT University
Kate More, National Disability Services Ltd (NDS)
Ian Murray, Australian Institute of Welfare & Community Workers
Wayne Newell, Anglicare
Lyn O'Connor, NSW Department of Community Services
Professor Elizabeth Ozanne, University of Melbourne
Michelle Robertson, Health & Community Services Workforce Council Qld
Karin Rule, CSHT&R Curriculum Centre, TAFE NSW
Etienne Scheepers, SA Department of Health
Dr Joe Smith, Department of Human Services
Kim Sykes, Victorian Department of Human Services
Lisabeth Thomson, Defence Community Organisation
Louise Voight, Barnardos
Associate Professor Deborah West, Charles Darwin University
Linda White, Australian Services Union (ASU)
Rosie Whitton, S.A. Department for Families & Communities
Deborah Wilmoth, WA Department of Health

Appendix 2 Outline of data used in developing Social Work and Human Services Workforce: Report from a National Study of Education, Training and Workforce Needs

DATA PURPOSE AND ATTRIBUTES	DATA SOURCES USED	COMMENTS – MAJOR ISSUES
Labour Force Features and Movements Attributes of workforce including educational background and remuneration and the dynamics of employment in occupations and industries	ABS Labour Force Survey data quarterly from 1996 Census snapshots for 1996, 2001 and 2006	These sets of data had a range of inherent limitations arising from reliance on respondents' self identification of both the highest qualification achieved and current occupation. Self-reporting of occupational titles is problematic in the social work and human services workforce due to the lack of regulation of occupational titles.
Paraprofessional Enrolment and Completion Data Attributes and training outcomes of students training in the Community Services training package were gauged All training package enrolments and Outcomes were used as a benchmark	National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER) Students and Courses Collection 2007 – special extraction	Annual training data only relates to the training activity conducted by public providers such as TAFE and government contracted activity conducted by private providers. does not cover training data that is associated with fee for service conducted by private providers. The NCVER data does provide a good indication of how this component of the training sector has grown over the last few years and the profile of those undertaking the training.
Paraprofessional Student Outcomes Post training success in the undertaking of further education, particularly at the university undergraduate level with a focus upon articulation.	NCVER Student Outcomes Survey (2007) – special extraction	Low response rates to these surveys handled by aggregation of data to a national level to improve the reliability of the data through smaller standard errors within the survey findings. In addition, the outcome data was aggregated for all qualification levels in the CHC package and also for Certificate IV and above levels within the package.
University Data related to Undergraduate Programs Attributes, quanta of enrolments and completions of "Helping Profession" undergraduate students studying in the Australian universities.	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) University Data Collection Some data especially extracted.	A course classification "series break" in 2001. System changed from a "Field of Study" to the "Field of Education" ASCED values. Applying our own concordance, values for Social Work and Psychology lined up reasonably between the two schemas. 'Other Helping Professions' values did not concord well. Pre2001 numbers prior are understated compared to post 2001 education activity. Scope was expanded from 2001 to include mid-year enrolments and inflating 2001 onwards trend values.

Tertiary Entrance Scores 'Unmet Demand' for education places at aggregate levels provides a context to examine the movements of tertiary entrance cut-offs.	State Tertiary Admission Centre Data Universities Australia Unmet Demand data (DEEWR) University Data Collection	Cut-off scores in programs identified by Moodie (personal communication, April 2008) from tertiary admission centre data were weighted by the relative program size to produce average program scores for comparison between years. Cut-offs not being implemented for various university programs over years and the identification of "Other Helping Profession" cutoffs. As these courses mostly lie within a general "Social Sciences" category, an average "Social Sciences" cut-off score was used as a surrogate.
University Graduate Outcomes- Immediate post education employment, further study and rates of remuneration outcomes	Graduate Careers Australia (GCA) results of annual Graduate Outcomes and Course Experience Survey Some data especially extracted.	GCA publications aggregate Social Work and 'Other Helping Profession' graduates' outcomes and opinions to streamline reporting and improve validity through use of a larger sample.
University Data – Postgraduate Attributes, quanta of enrolments and completions of undergraduate students studying in the Australian universities.	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) University Data Collection	Issues with the extraction and use of this data are common with experienced with university data related to undergraduate programs.
Longer Term Employment Prospects Relative longer term labour market trends impacting on Social Work graduates relative to the economic advantage in terms of other graduates (i.e. derived weekly earnings) Occupational projections and subsequently a forecast of opportunities for 'Helping Profession' and associated paraprofessional graduates	ABS Labour Force Survey data quarterly from 1996 Census snapshot 2006 DEEWR "JobProspects" analysis	Inherent issues in terms of self identification in data collection. Indicative levels of 'Helping Profession' and associated paraprofessional job opportunities required to meet the emerging needs of the labour force determined through incorporating the "Jobprospects" analysis with ABS labour force survey data. As pitfalls of using models to forecast occupational demand in detail or for periods into the future, forecasts calculated are purely indicative of skills that are growing in demand rather than of absolute numbers required.