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Career pathways of youth work graduates

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SCHOOL OF COMMUNITY AND LANGUAGE STUDIES
Centre for the Development of Human Resources

CAREER PATHWAYS OF YOUTH WORK GRADUATES

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PERTH WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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Without the co-operation and support of youth work graduates in the field this study would not have been possible. We wish to express appreciation to all those workers who gave generously of their time to provide the information sought for the study.

This study is the first of its kind undertaken by the University since it began providing courses for youth workers in 1984. We would like to assure those who participated in the project that much valuable information has been provided which will be given every consideration by those lecturers responsible for the continued development of the youth work studies curriculum.

The researchers wish to acknowledge the support provided by the Edith Cowan University in undertaking the study.

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ABSTRACT

A survey of the 49 youth work students who graduated from the Edith Cowan University in the years 1986 to 1988 was undertaken. Information was sought on the occupational destinations of graduates including the time taken to obtain a first appointment, impediments experienced in attempting to gain a position, and perceived barriers to future career prospects. The study found that most graduates were able to obtain employment in the youth affairs field. However, it is clear that life is not easy for many youth workers for reasons such as low salaries, adverse working conditions, lack of professional status, and uncertain funding arrangements. In spite of the impact of these factors a majority of graduates have chosen to remain in youth affairs.

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INTRODUCTION

The Youth Work Studies course was first offered by the Edith Cowan University in 1984 as an Associate Diploma in Community Studies (Youth Work). The two year full-time course was designed to prepare youth workers with a sound conceptual and practical understanding of the issues, skills and resources necessary to be effective in working with young people.

In 1987 the Associate Diploma in Community Studies (Youth Work) was discontinued and became the Associate Diploma of Arts (Youth Work). The change was made to bring the course structure into line with the Bachelor of Arts (Youth Work) which was introduced in 1985. The majority of students in the first and second year of the Associate Diploma program transferred over to the Bachelor program with advanced standing.

Other course developments in youth work studies have taken place. In 1989 the Associate Diploma of Arts (Youth Work) was offered in the external mode to students throughout Australia. In the same year the Graduate Certificate of Arts (youth Work), a twelve month part-time course for students who have completed a degree in another field, was introduced. In 1990 the B. Soc Sci. (Youth Work)-Honours became available. The Master of Social Science (Human Services) degree provides the opportunity for youth workers to undertake graduate studies. Appendix One lists the current courses in youth work offered at the University in 1991.

The present investigation was initiated in response to a need to expand upon the information provided by the annual survey of graduates in all course conducted by the University. There are two major limitations to the annual graduate survey. First, the data is collected through a mail-out questionnaire. The response rate to the questionnaire is usually extremely low, i.e., less than twenty per cent. With a relatively small number of graduates annually the response rate is a critical issue. Second, because the annual survey is conducted across all University graduates it is able to provide only very superficial information about the employment history of respondents.

This study is concerned with what happened to the students who graduated from the course in the years 1986 to 1988 inclusive. Specifically, the study aims to examine their employment opportunities within the youth work field or other fields upon graduation, and the reasons for their particular choice of employment. Knowledge of the career pathways of youth work graduates will address the following questions:

Are an appropriate number of graduates being produced by the course offered by the University?

Where are the graduates finding employment?

How can students best prepare themselves for the workforce?

What sort of career pathways can students expect on graduation?

Are there ways in which the present course can be modified to facilitate employment of graduates?

METHOD

A questionnaire was used to collect the data. (see Appendix 2). The questionnaire was designed in four sections; with two sections designed to collect background information regarding age, gender, degree completed, prior youth work experience, and youth field employment since graduation. A third section aimed at gathering more detailed information on those graduates working in the youth affairs field since graduating. The last section concerned those graduates not working in the youth affairs field since graduating, and the reasons for this.

Graduates were contacted predominately via youth field networking, telephone or direct mail-out of the questionnaire after confirmation of address.

A total of 46 out of 49 Bachelor of Arts and Associate Diploma Youth Work graduates were contacted to participate in the study; (with two graduates coming from the Associate Diploma). Nineteen out of the 46 returned questionnaires by mail, 12 participated in personal interviews, and 5 participated in telephone interviews; meaning that a total of 36 questionnaires were completed.

As mentioned above, the survey participants had graduated from the University in the years 1986 to 1988. Thus, some of the respondents have had at least three years experience in the youth affairs field while others may not have had twelve months youth work. Unfortunately, the number of graduates does not permit a more fine-grained analysis other than a global overview of the data collected.

RESPONDENTS

In terms of the numbers graduating from the Bachelor of Arts (Youth Work) and taking part in the study, there were 35 respondents. One respondent participating in the study graduated from the Associate Diploma (Youth Work). Out of the 35 Bachelor of Arts Graduates, 9 completed their degree in 1986, 9 completed their degree in 1987, and 17 completed their degree in 1988. The Associate Diploma graduate completed their degree in 1988.

Out of the 36 respondents, 21 were female and 14 male. (One person did not reply to this question). Table One reflects the age of the respondents upon graduation.

Table 1. Age of survey respondents according to gender.

AGE	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL
Under 25	7	4	11
25-30	5	6	11
30-40	7	3	10
Over 40	2	1	3
Total	21	14	35

Out of the 35 respondents, 31 did not identify themselves with an ethnic or Aboriginal community; leaving 4 respondents who identified themselves as Welsh, Austrian, Aboriginal and ethnic, and one respondent who did not specify their ethnicity or Aboriginality.

One aspect of the study attempted to ascertain whether experience as a youth worker prior to commencing the course had influenced their decision to enter the course. Twenty Bachelor of Arts graduates had experience as youth workers prior to entering the course, while the remaining Bachelor of Arts graduates and the Associate Diploma graduate had no previous experience as youth workers. Twenty two of the Bachelor of Arts graduates cited their youth work experience as a reason for embarking on this particular course of study; showing a significant effect of prior youth work experience on their decision. What is not revealed by the present study is whether the course attrition rate is related to whether or not students have engaged in youth work prior to admission. Clearly, this question needs to be addressed in a later study.

The type of experience held by respondents in the youth work field prior to commencing the course was also examined, with three respondents holding positions as paid workers, ten as volunteers, four as both paid and volunteer workers, two as volunteers and management, four as paid, volunteers and management, and one as both volunteer and volunteer management. (A total of 24 responses to this question). The background experience of the respondents covered the whole gamut of positions available in the youth work field.

Involvement in the youth affairs field continued and expanded while undertaking study, with 30 of the respondents (including the Associate Diploma graduate) gaining youth work experience outside of the normal course requirements. Thus, the student who has had no relevant work experience by the time of graduation tends to be the exception.

RESULTS

So what actually happened to the graduates upon leaving the College? Out of the 36 graduates, 26 indicated having worked in the youth affairs field, five in other areas, with five graduates indicating a yes and no response to this question! With regard to the five respondents who answered both yes and no to having worked in the youth affairs field, one respondent started work within the field but then moved onto another profession, and another questioned the meaning of `the youth affairs field', pointing to the ambiguity of the term. For the purposes of this discussion it will be assumed that 31 graduates (i.e. 85 per cent) have worked in the youth affairs field. This figure compares favourably with the rate of employment of graduates in other professions.

The youth affairs field

Out of the 31 respondents (including the`yes and no' group) who indicated having worked in the youth affairs field, six have worked within government youth affairs only, and 13 in non-government youth affairs only. Out of the remaining group of respondents, eight have worked in both government and non-government, with two of those also having worked in other areas. One respondent also indicated having worked in the non-government area as well as in other areas.

Work in other areas

Five respondents indicated not having worked in youth affairs since graduating, however seven respondents answered this section of the questionnaire. Of these respondents three have found other positions, two felt that they were not suited to youth work, one noted insufficient youth work positions available, while one noted that knowledge gained from the course enabled them to develop other areas of interest.

In terms of restrictions on the type of position that these respondents were able to accept in the youth affairs field, five respondents noted no restrictions while one noted the lack of a drivers licence as a problem, and another as their private life being more important when confronted with the possibility of shift work. Four of the respondents do not consider that they will work within youth affairs in the future, while three are open to the possibility. Four of the seven respondents noted that completing the youth work course assisted them in finding employment, while three did not.

First appointments

Information was gained regarding the nature of the first appointments taken up by the 31 respondents working within the youth affairs field, with the majority of these appointments being described as part-time contract, relief work, or part-time positions. The full breakdown of appointments includes: full-time (11); part-time (5); contract (11); contract part-time (1); contract full/part-time (1); voluntary (1); and other (1). In terms of how these appointments arose, five respondents indicated that their first appointment arose out of a field placement during the course; three respondents indicated that their first appointment came out of work they were doing prior to the course; and ten respondents indicated that their first appointment came out of work that they were doing during the course.

The majority of the respondents indicated that their first appointments resulted from networking within the youth affairs field. More specific comments included: "word of mouth", "contacts with other workers and friends or other workers contacting them".

A total of eight graduates responded to advertised employment notices to gain their first appointments. Three respondents noted that a combination of responding to an advertised position plus networking led them to obtain their first position. Other individual comments included: "personally approached while still a student"; "own enquiries"; "combination of trade skills and degree"; and "involvement in local church".

Table 2 indicates that more than 80 per cent of those who eventually found employment in the youth affairs field did so within three months of graduating from the course. It should be noted that employment does not denote secure employment. As pointed out previously, many of these positions were of a part-time or contract nature.

Table 2. The time taken to receive the first appointment in the youth affairs field.

Time of Appointment	No. Graduates
Prior to graduation	6
Within 3 mths after grad.	18
3 to 6 months	0
6 to 9 months	2
More than 9 months	1
Not known	4
Total	31

Restrictions to employment

The study attempted to ascertain if the respondents encountered any restrictions or barriers in gaining employment within the youth affairs field. It is interesting to note that out of the 31 respondents who answered this question, 20 did not note any physical restrictions on the type of employment they were able to accept; whilst 11 noted a number of restrictions. These included: not being able to accept shift work outside of the metropolitan area, family commitments, marriage, children, not being able to do shift work, and inadequate income. One respondent mentioned that a move to a large country town would be acceptable. Another mentioned a self imposed restriction due to age, as they did not consider detached work appropriate at the age of 40.

Other than physical restrictions, 20 of the respondents did not note any difficulties in gaining employment, whilst 11 noted a number of difficulties. Individual comments are reported in Box 1.

Box 1. Comments on restrictions to employment experienced by respondents.

Too young.
Reluctance to employ graduates without direct youth work experience.
Wariness towards graduates.
Recycling of well known workers.
I'm not a social worker.
Lack of experience.
There is a difference between placement and real work.
Own confidence problem.
Any restrictions were self imposed.

An overall comment by a majority of the respondents concerned the lack of available positions within the youth affairs field, therefore posing difficulties in obtaining employment. As one respondent commented, `the youth field is not a hot bed of opportunity'.

Barriers to career development

The study also attempted to explore barriers faced by respondents in the development of their further careers within the youth affairs field. Twenty-one of the respondents noted barriers in their career development, five noted no barriers, whilst five respondents did not answer this question.

Comments made by the respondents point to a variety of barriers faced when working within the youth affairs field. Broad opportunities for career development within youth affairs were not evident to five of the respondents. This was seen as a result of lack of available and attractive positions/options, and poor salary/working conditions. For example: `no job sharing', `lack of Local Government employment', and `no barriers as no career paths'. Youth work was seen as a specific degree with few positions available; especially within the government sector.

Two respondents noted that the lack of career structure within the youth affairs field meant that workers are left with the option of having to leave the field to progress.

A total of 12 respondents noted that social workers were seen in more favourable and legitimate ways by employers and also by other professions. (Youth work was at the end of the professional hierarchy). Respondents commented that other professions did not recognise youth work qualifications, with youth workers not being employed in social work positions even though both may possess the required skills. Finding employment therefore was seen as extremely competitive.

Two respondents observed that the youth work degree was not yet generally recognised, and suggested that individuals had to make his or her own way as far as career prospects were concerned.

A further two workers felt that the lack of post-graduate qualifications hindered career development. Maintaining motivation to continue with further study, and the difficulty in obtaining study leave was seen by two of the respondents as a further limitation to career development.

Age discrimination was seen as a problem in terms of career development by two of the respondents. A further five suggested that youth workers need a broad range of skills to offer prospective employers.

Effect of other professions on employment prospects

Of the 22 respondents, 13 suggested that gaining employment can be difficult, as other professions do not recognise the youth work degree. Other professions were seen to be more highly recognised. For example, social workers are seen as more professional even though youth workers receive very similar training.

Three respondents noted that other professions have clearly defined and established unions or associations. Youth workers on the other hand have not as yet formed into a professional body or become strongly unionised, which according to these respondents hinders workers in applying for various positions. Two respondents suggested that people from other professions can gain youth work positions which may lead to the youth work being owned by other fields.

Another reason that gaining employment in youth work may be difficult as suggested by two respondents is that youth work is too specific an area; while another respondent suggested that it is still a very new area of work.

In terms of overcoming these sorts of difficulties in gaining employment and career development, seven respondents strongly suggested unionisation or the formation of a youth work association. A professional field would enable qualifications to be recognised, salary and working conditions could be addressed, and youth work would increase its profile and professional status.

A further three respondents noted that the personal credibility of workers and their competence would also improve the image of youth work.

It was also suggested that the youth affairs field must decide its future. Perhaps the field could align with other specialist areas, broaden networks, and expand the concept of youth work itself. One respondent suggested that workers gain more skills and training, for example in the legal area and computing. Three respondents considered the answer to lie with post-graduate study.

Positions held by graduates

Thirty one respondents provided details of positions held in youth affairs since graduating, and included the time spent in each position. (Four respondents did not indicate a time span). Out of the 31 respondents, 14 have held three or more positions since graduating. Sixteen respondents have held a position for approximately for one year. Even though graduates have been in the field since 1986, no-one has held a position for a three year period.

These responses point in part to the lack of secure employment opportunities within the youth work field; and also to definite choices of employment made by some respondents that suit their life-styles. The results tend to support the South Australian findings by Quixley and Westhorp (1985). However, data obtained in a recent study by White, Omelczuk and Underwood (1990) led these investigators to conclude that the employment situation in the youth affairs field was becoming more stable.

Rewards and dilemmas of working within youth affairs

To provide a sense of the direct experience of working within youth affairs respondents were asked to comment on the positive and negative aspects of working with young people. Individual comments on the positive aspects of youth work are reported in Box 2.

Box 2. Comments on the rewards of working within youth affairs.

The pure contact and informal group work.
Their natural energy, willingness to learn and experience new things.
Groups of young people connecting over an issues such as homelessness so workers can build on their understanding.
Passing on skills.
Have been successful in reducing some ares of institutionalisation.
Worker support and solidarity.
Face to face work can see positive results and is a challenge to creatively solve problems.

The raising of self-esteem and building of trust relationships, seeing young people respond to information and also to workers, were seen as positives by 15 of the respondents. These respondents also saw assisting young people in identifying options and linking them into decision making processes and the macro community as positive aspects of their work with young people.

Seven respondents noted the positives of learning from young people and experiencing life at their level. They also noted how this could assist them to re-evaluate and increase their understanding of issues affecting young people. Four of the respondents commented that direct work with young people was challenging, rewarding, satisfying and meaningful work.

In terms of the negative aspects of working with young people, individual responses are reported below.

Box 3. Comments on the difficulties experienced by respondents working in the youth affairs field.

Not enough follow up and ongoing support.
Dependency is created with too much contact.
Intervention in every aspect can be negative which does not necessarily have to happen.
Sad when dealing with suicide.
Unrealistic expectations of young people.
Workers at risk in some environments.

Six respondents commented on the frustrations resulting from a limited scope for creativity within services due to government restrictions and guidelines. Similarly respondents working within institutions faced dilemmas when assisting young people to `deal with problems' particularly as the `government wants to see results'.

Supporting young people within services was noted as difficult due to the lack of suburban services, therefore decreasing the opportunity for referral within the local community.

Another negative as seen by two of the respondents concerned the issue that a worker's role is often broader than working within the confines of the agency; that the community should also be involved.

The lack of appropriate levels of funding for youth services and lack of resourcing was noted by seven respondents. It was suggested that coupled with the above, workers on a low salary would leave positions. This was stressed particularly if lack of worker support and isolation was evident. The lack of funding also increases the frustration of workers as they cannot give enough quality time, or offer a broad range of options to young people.

Reaching young people was seen as difficult by seven respondents. This related especially to disadvantaged young people locked within the system. Coupled with this issue, three of the respondents found it difficult to motivate these young people.

Frustrations were noted by five respondents with regard to giving young people autonomy and skills to act appropriately in their own lives. Progress was seen as slow, with workers struggling to motivate and find options for young people. This was noted particularly in crisis work and work with young women.

A further three respondents noted that long term results were hard to achieve as workers may have only three months of contact with young people. Within this time they noted that workers would have to deal also with social barriers and negative concepts of young people.

Three respondents noted that direct work with young people was often centred on symptoms and results, which did not allow workers to begin to address the causes of issues affecting young people.

Two graduates saw themselves as possessing basic skills for working, although they noted the need for other skills in their working life that they did not get from their study. The lack of legal skills was cited as a hindrance.

A further two respondents suggested that there is no `connection' with other workers within the youth affairs field. This was seen as a concern as they saw face to face work dependent on team work and consistency throughout the field.

Only two graduates raised the issue of a felt lack of skills relevant to youth work practice. The matter of skill development is under constant review by the youth work staff.

Politics, policy, coordination, management committees

A number of individual respondents commented on the positive aspects of policy, coordination and management committees within the youth affairs field (see Box 4).

Box 4. Comments on the positive aspects of policy, coordination and management committees.

Management committees are okay if good people are participating.
The ability to work with several members of a community.
Working with committed people who are interested in young people.
The ability on occasion to influence policy that impacts on young people.

Coordination and information sharing amongst groups within the youth affairs field was seen as positive by three respondents. The commitment to consultative, participatory decision making processes and lobbying was noted by two of the respondents in a positive light also.

In the areas of politics, policy, coordination and management committees, a number of concerns were expressed regarding the negative aspects involved in dealing with these areas. It is interesting to note that the negative comments expressed far outweigh the positive ones.

In terms of politics, individual comments are reported in Box 5 below.

Box 5. Comments on the politics of youth affairs.

Bureaucratic bungling hampers work.
Too much political bullshit.
Goals are not defined.
Youth work field like any other in a political way - positive or negative?.
Youth workers can show unprofessional attitudes.
Accountability of workers is often lacking.
Evaluation of projects is values based.
Politics negative overall.
We work in out-dated, directionless organisational structures which are static rather than dynamic.
No-one questions anything - it's too dangerous.

Ten respondents expressed negative views regarding political and personal power issues and `games' undertaken by individuals and groups within youth affairs. This included the government, and to a lesser extent, non-government youth affairs field. It was suggested that individuals have hidden political agendas and hold judgemental attitudes towards others. These agendas and attitudes do little to address the concerns of young people according to these respondents.

Other negative aspects of politics included: the lack of information provided by government departments, serving to decrease workers' ability to support young people, and the frustration of working within the system and not being `too radical'. Funding restraints and the inequitable distribution of resources was once again noted by two respondents.

In terms of policy, it was noted by five of the respondents that direct service providers have little time for policy work, and limited input into policy decisions. It was suggested that to overcome this problem strong links need to be developed between `grass roots' and peak structures. Another comment made by five respondents concerned the lack of consultation by government policy makers.

Individual comments concerning coordination included: `coordination is hard in an under resourced field', and `ownership of service difficulties'. Five of the respondents felt that a coordination gap was evident between the non-government and government youth fields. This gap was also coupled with a lack of cooperation.

A total of 14 respondents commented on management committees within the youth affairs field. A general comment concerned the need for adequate resourcing and training of management committees; particularly those committees made up of `well intentioned' volunteer members with no understanding of youth work, or the broader issues concerning politics and power.

Accountability requirements by funding bodies were seen as beyond the capacity of volunteer management committees. Respondents noted that this can place workers in the position of supporting their committee and taking on accountability issues on limited time resources. To energise and educate their committees was seen to place workers under stressful conditions, often resulting in the decreasing quality of the overall service.

Management committees were also seen to have limited power, and open to exploitation in an inequitable and hierarchical system. Respondents also noted that management committees are often not representative of the community; that they are comprised of service providers who seek `more power' and who are prone to politics and power plays. It was suggested that this can once again serve to decrease the quality of the service. It was noted by one respondent that although management committees work hard, they receive little thanks for their efforts.

Working hours, salary, career prospects and conditions

In terms of the positive aspects of working conditions and career prospects, five respondents suggested that working hours were reasonable. It was also noted that particular positions within the youth affairs field allowed a worker flexibility and freedom to structure hours. (This related to contract and part-time work).

Two respondents felt that if a worker was effective, they could enjoy reasonable salary and career prospects. Although one respondent noted that career prospects could only be found within the government sector.

Three respondents suggested that working conditions and salary levels had improved over the last five years and that this was positive. They pointed to being guaranteed a three-year contract, are able to work with support staff, and have a reasonable budget and service accommodation.

Again, as with the preceding area, the negative aspects far outweigh the positive in terms of working conditions, hours, and career prospects.

Box 6. Comments by respondents on working conditions within the youth affairs field.

Youth workers are poorly regarded.
Be prepared for working with untrained workers - they take up a lot of time and energy.
Job descriptions are too broad.
No professional recognition.
Working hours, salary, career prospects, conditions - are not well provided for!
Be prepared for isolation, for example, physical, stimulation, information.

Nineteen respondents considered that salary levels were too low, especially for workers with a three year degree. Overall, respondents noted that renumeration was not in accord with the long working hours. It was stated that worker expertise is not paid for and that ` the government expects too much for the money they are willing to pay'; leaving workers in exploited positions.

A further seven respondents noted that coupled with low salaries, workers had no award, no union, no over-time or superannuation schemes. This was particularly so in the non-government sector. This was seen in a negative light, especially when considering the responsibility and danger which some workers face. Five respondents had similar issues with the lack of appropriate salary, `over work', lack of recognition and support, as these issues placed workers at risk of `burn out'.

Unacceptable working hours were seen by three respondents as the result of lack of reasonable funding levels. Coupled with this, five respondents noted that lack of funding does not provide job security. A further two respondents also saw the lack of funding actually setting workers `up for failure', as programs cannot be developed to their full potential, and workers can be blamed if they fail.

In general, twelve respondents considered working conditions within the government youth sector as more attractive that the non-government youth sector. It was suggested that the issue of working conditions should be addressed by the whole field.

With regard to career prospects, 15 respondents noted that career structures were limited, particularly since most work is short term. Respondents suggested that youth work is often limited to service delivery, and therefore workers are forced to seek alternatives and make their own career paths.

Two respondents noted a lack of policy regarding health risks to workers, as in health and safety issues. The expectations of employers were also seen as too high by two respondents; and the necessity to address `voluntary overtime' and lack of relief salaries was mentioned by seven of the respondents.

From youth affairs to other fields

At the time of the study (late 1989), eleven respondents indicated that they had previously worked in the youth affairs field, but were not doing so currently. These respondents came from the population of 31 who had answered that section of the questionnaire.

Out of the group of eleven, six have found employment in similar or other fields. These six respondents stated that their creative needs and energies are more satisfied; one can give and gain more in other careers, and that further skills can be gained. Youth work was not considered to offer enough options.

Given the frequency with which human service workers cite 'burn out' as the reason for seeking employment in other fields (Cherniss, 1980; Farber, 1983; Gillespie, 1987), it is somewhat surprising to find that only two respondents gave this, together with poor salaries, as the reason for not working in the youth affairs field at the time the study was being conducted.

A further two respondents commented that having a family or increased family responsibilities prevented them from working in the field at that time.

All in all, it appears that the movement of graduates out of youth work into other fields is no greater than one would expect for most occupations. Given the working conditions that tend to prevail in the area, e.g., long hours, low pay, short-term employment contracts, etc., it suggests that the field is supported by dedicated workers.

Effect of the course on finding employment

Thirty respondents commented on the question regarding whether completion of the youth work course assisted them in finding employment.

Box 7. Comments on the value of the youth work course for employment purposes.

The course is obviously an asset when applying for jobs.
The job I have now I could have obtained with another degree.
Course skills can be used in any field.
Yes - the course helped in finding some employment - not all.
Course still hasn't a positive name - still seen as too radical.
Helped me find employment in the end, not initially.
Course expanded my limited work experience.
Course helped me find a job in a particular area, not others.

Two respondents commented that completing the course assisted them in developing critical analytical thinking processes. A further four commented that the course gave them a broader understanding of Australian society, and also assisted them in `developing skills'.

Table 3 reflects the number of responses given when considering whether the course assisted respondents in finding employment, furthering their career, and/or furthering study.

Table 3. The extent to which the course assisted the career development of respondents.

	Yes	No
Finding employment?	25	4
Furthering career?	22	6
Furthering study?	15	7

In terms of furthering career development, two respondents commented that the skills learnt in the course could be transferred to another area, and that analytical skills could only but help career development.

A total of ten respondents stated that they would return to study, but did not specify in what area. A further four stated that they would return to study but not in the youth work area. It was reprted by one respondent that the completion of a youth work degree allowed for a 36 point exemption from a 72 point degree at Murdoch University (undergraduate study).

It seems reasonable to conclude that a majority of graduates feel that their prospects for employment or career development have been enhanced by undertaking the course.

FUTURES

Following the theme of the University assisting graduates entering the workforce, the questionnaire asked graduates to comment on how the University could be of assistance in preparing future graduates. These comments will be presented firstly grouped together where more than three responses were similar (denoted by *); and secondly, the remaining responses will be presented individually so as not to lose the essence and variety of responses.

* By far the most comments made by respondents concerned the ability of the college to balance and integrate theory and practice. Respondents suggested that the course needed to be realistic and relevant to a practical world. The theory element of the course was seen as necessary, although a need was seen for more basic, practical skills, and basic knowledge of issues.

* Respondents noted a basic necessity for the college and lecturers to continue to liaise with the youth affairs field, thus allowing students an accurate insight into the field they will be working in.

* The restriction of students straight from school was also noted as unless: `they are exceptional - they are too busy being young'.

* It was also noted that ideology was important, but gave students great enthusiasm and high aspirations and expectations. Some respondents considered that this can serve to alienate graduates, and as a consequence unable to affect change.

* As some graduates gained employment due to their informal networks and via lecturer contact with the field, it was suggested that the college assist this process by forming an employer and graduate network.

Individual comments included:

`prepare graduates with better strategic steps, for example half of third year theory, and half practice. Theory is overdone and as students leave college into reality and society they are not ready';

`do not encourage students to think specifically about doing something singularly for youth';

`enter into contract learning with individual students';

`don't flood the field with so many graduates - they should be taken in according to demand';

`take more input from the youth work field';

`difficult to answer due to the gap between the course and the practical environment';

`recognise that there are other people than English speaking in the community. Employ an Aboriginal and Non English Speaking Background lecturers!';

`don't overemphasise the underprivileged young people to the exclusion of others. Recognise that young people from supposedly financially secure families often have the same problems';

`the college should circulate skills of the course to the field, for example this is what we produce';

`don't set students up for failure';

`college has resources so create more research, write more papers on current youth issues so information is kept up-dated';

`it's all very personal although a more intensive selection criteria could be introduced so that prospective students are clear on where they are heading';

`college/course to be more honest in what course is. It's great for knowledge but as a career prospect it is a waste of time, but college can't spoonfeed graduates either';

`encourage an internship, for example, one year face to face before policy work.... not necessarily that cut and dried but encourage graduates to do face to face as a basis to start from';

`assist students with a better understanding of government and increase skills in understanding how to work with government';

`have workshops/training for graduates out in the field';

`have units on job applications, letter writing, resume writing and computing';

`more training in Aboriginal youth work by Aboriginals - make it a core unit and keep it practical';

`keep good elective choices';

`provide exposure to all forms of youth work';

`make students work (write) in the noisiest places with people and other distractions';

`more relaxation techniques, focussing on the issue of turning off the brain';

`more unbiased material - all sides need expressing';

`explore ideology more or base of ideology';

`offer political alternatives to the boring conformity of traditional institutionalised professions. Maintain diversity of political, social options - stimulate students to think broadly and deeply about social issues';

`stress the continued learning out in the field - the course is a learners permit';

`longer practicum placements, for instance, legal, Aboriginal, computer areas';

`subsidies for placements, for example petrol (country travel), distance, agency costs incurred';

`allow more student input into structure of course';

`allow full ownership of work done for publication';

`identify strategies and models for working with the disadvantaged'.

Advice to future graduates

These are the comments given to graduates about to enter the workforce from those who have been out there for some time already! (* denotes more than three

similar responses, and + denotes more than one similar response.) Individual comments will then be listed, again to retain the essence of the message of the respondents.

This is the advice from respondents to graduates about to enter the field:

* `be clear about how you use knowledge from the course - don't isolate yourselves';

* `don't set yourself up as an expert, you are fresh graduates - recognise the experience of others, be receptive to all new experiences and learn. Don't isolate yourselves from other professions. Don't overload yourself with duties in order to prove yourself';

* `the prime responsibility is to the client population - otherwise get out of it. Identify who you are working with and what for. Analyse what you believe - decipher what works for you - don't use everything at once';

* `be realistic - change comes about (in most cases) by people getting amongst people and getting their hands dirty. Theory and vision are not always practice straight away. Feel the ground and remember people don't always listen to radicals. Explore all elements of society before tackling it. Take it slowly in relation to change';

* `take things as they come and don't be quick to judge until you have gained experience. Take anything to get you started. Don't get hung up on ideological soundness, work it out as you go along. Don't give up - ideology is not practice straight away';

* `get a mentor or support group around you - network! Often it's who you know. Emphasise the importance of networking and linking into relevant organisations to be politically effective';

* `do relief/voluntary or committee work whilst studying so you get acquainted with the grassroots of youth work. This helps put links between theory and practice';

* `you never stop learning, be prepared to stretch your knowledge and learning. You are not experts although don't undermine your skills, file your degree, start from scratch';

+ `have a break before working - clear the mind';

+ `don't be susceptible to rumours and don't become personal';

+ `advice must come earlier in the course so people know if they wish to continue';

+ `don't expect great glowing rewards'.

Individual comments included:

`assess your preferences and capabilities and sell yourself as you really are';

`assess your values and see if they still match up with doing youth work';

`volunteer work and networking are as important as assignments';

`listen to workers with experience';

`be aware that first jobs are hard on the ground';

`prepare for hard competition';

`be committed to taking risks';

`beware of management committees - they are not as informed about youth work as you are and wield unnecessary power and influence - also the community isn't as informed';

`do not get youth work practice and issues lost in academic work';

`be subversive and flexible';

`read Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy, Goodbye and Thanks to the Fish, Dancing Willy Masters, and Make Haste Slowly';

`encourage inservice training';

`try and understand the political ramifications of your work, we are subject to political whim';

`work and play hard and don't forget your commitment';

`it's hard';

`remember ideology - it's not unimportant, you must know where you are coming from as this assists in your work'.

And finally, the thoughts of respondents on the youth work studies course, their ideas and feelings about their experiences. The comments are as follows:

`This sort of research is long overdue';

`I would not have lasted two days without the course - not because of lack of skills in working with young people, but for the skills needed to work in the community, for instance, social workers, Local Government and management committees';

`Youth work is still seen in a welfare mode by the politicians and funding bodies. It is a catch 22 situation;good people don't stay due to poor conditions and exploitation. Until we educate workers on the ramifications of exploitation we've no chance of educating government bureaucrats. I see the course playing a major part in educating future (and current) workers regarding these issues. If workers are happy they produce good work. Poor conditions and wages mean that young people don't gain the support they need. Politics/policy should be mandatory';

`Students should have more units regarding policy. What is it, how can it be defined, where does it come from and how is it done';

`We must realise that 50% of youth work is face to face or small group. We must keep open and flexible minds and not become overcritical, particularly in regard to key people and organisations. There is too much personal hostility hampering work with young people. However, evaluation and constructive criticism of youth work is essential to developing a more cohesive field. The course gave positive critical analytical skills';

`Without formal youth work training I would not have tackled the work I do';

`I will be keen to see the results of the research - obviously it's pretty important stuff - good luck!';

`If entering the course make sure what it is about';

`Great course - assists with critical analytical abilities, which are imperative in our work towards change';

`Students come out with a passion - is this wholly positive? There are consequences - nothing is purely positive';

`Grateful for completing course and especially the lecturers - their time, support, knowledge (not necessarily just academic';

`It's important to maintain reasonable contact with different organisations, for example, the Police';

`This survey should not be used to decide on the number of graduates. A CAE should not be determining the number of youth workers needed. Broaden the social base of it's application';

`The course helped broaden my scope and I have used knowledge from the course over the last three years'.

And finally.....

`In future use both sides of the paper - and you never asked my name'.

CONCLUSION

These comments reflect the diversity, energy and commitment of all those who took part in this research. Thirty-one out of the thirty six respondents have worked in youth affairs since graduating. Every respondent, except one, was involved while studying in the youth affairs field over and above what was expected of them from the youth work studies course.

Twenty of the respondents have worked in part-time or contract positions in a field characterised by low salaries, limited career structures, poor working conditions and uncertain funding arrangements. When asked to comment on the positive and negative aspects of their work, the number of negative comments far outweigh the positive comments. Yet, one does not get a sense of futility or resignation from any of the comments. In fact, the comments show a high degree of reflection and interest in issues relevant to working in the youth affairs field.

Students considering entering youth work studies will find this a useful document to read before making any decisions regarding their future career path. Staff from youth work studies will find it useful feedback from the graduates, on the applicability of the course to their work in the field. For those working in the field this document will hold few surprises. Rather, it will confirm what is already known and experienced by many.

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APPENDIX ONE

COURSES IN YOUTH WORK

The following course in youth work are provided by the Edith Cowan University through the Department of Community and Behavioural Studies.

Associate Diploma of Social Science (Youth Work)

A two year full-time program designed as a basic course for people wishing to work with young people. The award is also available on a part-time basis, and is offered in the external mode. The course was also known as the Associate Diploma in Community Studies (Youth Work) and the Associate Diploma of Arts (Youth Work).

Bachelor of Social Science (Youth Work)

A three year full-time degree providing a professional qualification for people working in the youth affairs field. The award is also available on a part-time basis. The Department of Community and Behavioural Studies is planning to offer the award externally in 1992.

Bachelor of Social Science (Youth Work)-Honours

Students who have demonstrated an outstanding academic performance in the B.Soc.Sci. (Youth Work) may be admitted to the Honours year of the degree.

Graduate Certificate of Social Science (Youth Work)

A twelve month part-time award designed for those people who have completed a degree in an area other than youth work, but who are now employed, or seeking employment in the youth affairs field.

Master of Social Science (Human Services)

A two year master's degree requiring course work and a thesis is available to those who have completed a first degree in youth work. The degree is available on a part-time basis.

Doctor of Philosophy (Human Services)

The University plans to introduce the Ph.D. (Human Services) in 1992. Youth workers who have completed the B.Soc. Sci.(Youth Work)-Honours or the M.Soc.Sci.(Human Services) will be considered for admission into the research award.

APPENDIX TWO

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION 1

1. Which course did you complete?

Associate Diploma	[ ]
Bachelor of Arts	[ ]

2. When did you complete the course? 19]

3. Did you have experience as a youth worker prior to commencing the course?

Yes	[ ]
No	[ ]

Is that one of the reasons you came into the course?

Yes	[ ]
No	[ ]

4. If you answered YES to Question 3 were you:

a paid worker?	[ ]
a volunteer?	[ ]
both?	[ ]
involved with volunteer management?	[ ]

5. While at University did you gain experience as a youth worker outside of the normal course requirements, e.g. other than field placements?

Yes	[ ]
No	[ ]

6. Since completing your course have you worked in the youth affairs field?

Yes	[ ]
Government	[ ]
Non-Government	[ ]
Other	[ ]
No	[ ]

IF YOU ANSWERED YES TO QUESTION 6 PLEASE COMPLETE SECTIONS B AND D.

IF YOU ANSWERED NO TO QUESTION 6 PLEASE COMPLETE SECTIONS C AND D.

IF YOU RESPONDED TO BOTH PLEASE COMPLETE ALL SECTIONS.

This section to be completed only if you have worked in a position to youth affairs since graduation.

SECTION B

7. Did your first appointment arise out of a field placement during the course?

Yes	[ ]
No	[ ]

8. Did your first appointment arise out of work you were doing prior to commencing the course?

Yes	[ ]
No	[ ]

9. Did your first appointment arise out of work you were doing during the course?

Yes	[ ]
No	[ ]

10. Was your first appointment:

Full-time	[ ]
Part-time	[ ]
Contract	[ ]
Other	[ ]

Please describe_____

_____

11. How did your first appointment arise?

_____

_____

_____

12. How many months after you graduated did you obtain your first appointment?

Months_____

13. Were there any physical restrictions on the type of position you were able to accept?
For example:

Unable to work outside the metropolitan area.
Did not have an appropriate driver's licence.
Couldn't work more than two nights a week.

Yes [ ]
No [ ]

14. Other than physical restrictions did you experience difficulties in obtaining employment?

Yes [ ]
No [ ]

If YES in what way?

_____

_____

_____

15. Please list the youth work and other positions you have held since graduation.

Title	From	To
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

16 What positive and negative aspects do you find working in the youth field with regard to:

a) direct work with young people?
For example:
Creating opportunities for young people.
Assisting young people to deal with problems.

_____

_____

b) politics, policy, co-ordination, management committees?

_____

_____

c) working hours, salary, career prospects, conditions?

_____

_____

17. What barriers, if any, have you experienced to your career development?
For example:
Competition with other professional groups.
Lack of a post-graduate qualification.
Gender discrimination.

In what way _____

_____

18. What is it about the other professions that make gaining employment difficult (if any)?

_____

_____

How could you overcome this?

_____

_____

_____

19. Please comment if you have worked in the youth field since graduation but are not doing so currently.

For example:

Unable to find work because I am raising a family.
Did not find the work satisfying.
Able to earn more money in another occupation.

Comment

_____

_____

_____

20 Did completion of the youth work course assist you in

finding employment — Yes [ ] No [ ]

furthering career development — Yes [ ] No [ ]

furthering study — Yes [ ] No [ ]

any other

_____

Comment

_____

_____

_____

THIS SECTION TO BE COMPLETED IF YOU HAVE NOT WORKED IN A POSITION RELATED TO YOUTH WORK.

SECTION C

21. Please comment on why you have not worked in a position related to youth work.
For example:
Unable to find suitable employment.
Do not think I am suited to youth work.
Found another interesting position/field.

Describe

_____

_____

22. Are there any restrictions on the type of position you are able to accept in the youth field?
For example:
Unable to work outside the metropolitan area.
Do not have an appropriate driver's licence.
Can not work more than two nights a week.

Yes [ ]
No [ ]

23. Do you think you will work in the youth work in the future?
Fo example:
Direct work with young people.
Policy.
Co-ordination.

Yes [ ]
No [ ]

Describe_____

_____

24. Please list the occupations you have had since graduation.

Title	From	To
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

25. Did completion of the youth work course assist you in finding employment?

Yes	[ ]
No	[ ]

SECTION D

26. Are you:

Male	[ ]
Female	[ ]

27. To which age group did you belong on graduation?

Under 25 years	[ ]
25 - 30 years	[ ]
30 - 40 years	[ ]
Over 40 years	[ ]

28. Do you identify yourself with an ethnic or Aboriginal community?

Yes	[ ]
No	[ ]

29. How can the University be of assistance in preparing graduates for the workforce?

Comment_____

_____

_____

30. What advice would you give to graduates about to enter the workforce:

Comment_____

_____

_____

31. Any other comments?_____

_____

_____

<u>THANK YOU!!!</u> FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION AND CO-OPERATION

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GUIDE TO AUTHORS

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The first line of each new paragraph to be indented five spaces.
Margins should be: Top 10, Bottom 10, Left 15, Right 15 and text should be right hand justified.
The preferred font is Times, size 12 but this is not absolutely necessary.