

2019

Achieving economic sustainability for niche social profession courses in the Australian higher education sector: final report

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Achieving economic sustainability for niche social profession courses in the Australian higher education sector

Final report: 2019

Lead institution: Edith Cowan University

Project leader: Associate Professor Trudi Cooper, Australia Learning and Teaching Fellow

Team member: Dr Miriam Rose Brooker

<https://ywdaf.org>



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- Youth Work South Australia
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List of acronyms used

ALTF	Australian Learning and Teaching Fellows
ASCED (FoE)	Australian Standard Classification of Education (Field of Education)
AYAC	Australian Youth Affairs Council
CCDP	Australian College of Community and Disability Practitioners
CGFC	Commonwealth Government Funding Cluster
CGS	Commonwealth Grant Scheme
CRDP	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CROC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CROP	Convention on the Rights of Older Persons
CRC	Cooperative Research Centres
CTC	Cooperative Teaching Centre
EFTS	Equivalent full-time student
HEI	Higher education institution
HERDSA	Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australia
LCNAU	Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities
MBA	Master of Business Administration
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
OLT	Office for Learning and Teaching
QILT	Quality Indicators in Learning and Teaching
SPOL	State Priority Occupation List
SRHE	Society for Research into Higher Education
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WAND	Western Australian Network for Dissemination

Executive summary

Purpose

The purpose of this fellowship was to develop a nationwide collaborative strategy to improve the economic sustainability and geographic availability of niche social profession courses. The niche courses in social professions examined in this program meet specialist social needs in disability services, social gerontology, and youth work.

Context and approach

Context: Specialist courses in social professions have limited availability across the Australian university sector and availability has declined over the last decade. This is despite a continuing need for specialist graduates, as attested by the relevant professional bodies, and by policy implementation reviews (see Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, calls for Royal Commission into the Disability Services) in the areas where graduates from these courses might provide stronger leadership.

Approach: To improve learning opportunities for students and achieve collaboration, the program leader worked with colleagues and professional bodies nationally to analyse trend data and develop a working plan for each field of education

Program impact

The program has **raised awareness** about the need for urgent system-wide action to support niche social professions and has **developed collaborative network(s)** to strengthen cross-institutional relationships between staff offering courses in niche social professions. The program has **strengthened relationships** with relevant state and federal professional bodies in each field and has established a network of colleagues to help resolve these challenges. In addition, the fellowship has **proposed changes** to support a nationwide collaborative strategy that will enable institutions to offer viable programs for the niche social professions. Dissemination has occurred to **move beyond known interest groups**, and staff from 16 universities and nine professional associations have been involved in discussions, consultations and planning for change. The issues and proposed strategies are outlined in this document. The working groups in each discipline will continue to collaborate to build momentum for change and to engage with colleagues at other universities to continue the work commenced by this fellowship.

Key findings

The fellowship program found there had been a **sustained loss of degree availability** in specialist social professions over the past seven years. This had occurred particularly for undergraduate courses in social gerontology and disability. Youth work undergraduate student numbers have increased, but the specialist youth work degrees were still only available in public universities in two states (Victoria and Western Australia). There was considerable **variability between disciplines**; for example, in 2019, only one university offered a specialist undergraduate degree in disability (The Flinders University of South Australia [Flinders University]), and only one university offered a specialist undergraduate major in social gerontology (Charles Sturt University), whereas four public universities were

offering specialist undergraduate youth work degrees (Australian Catholic University, Edith Cowan University, RMIT University and Victoria University).

Professional associations expressed concern about the consequences of lack of specialist undergraduate degrees. Concerns focused on the decline in availability of specialist undergraduate degrees in disability and social gerontology and lack of availability of youth work degrees in most states and territories. More advanced **professionalisation** in the youth work field of education, compared with either social gerontology or disability, has supported **clear career pathways** and the growth in youth work student numbers (and lack of decline in availability of degrees). Other **indicators of continuing external need for specialisms** include ongoing documented workforce shortages (for example, all professions are also on the State Priority Occupation List [SPOL] in WA) and workforce education and leadership recommendations emerging from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Standards, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse and from concerns expressed by the disability sector and users of disability services.

Universities were **somewhat aware of the problem** at the commencement of the fellowship. Both staff and senior managers **expressed concern about course losses** in these fields of education. However, **no-one is monitoring the big picture** and, unlike special provisions made to monitor and protect low-availability foreign languages courses from closure, no similar provision is in place for specialist social welfare courses. Even those teaching in these fields of education expressed surprise at the extent and rapidity of the decline in availability of specialist undergraduate disability and social gerontology courses across the university sector. Four course coordinators spoke of their **struggle to maintain courses** within their institution.

Three **models for collaboration** were examined (informal cross-institutional enrolment; formalised cross-institutional collaboration, for example, through joint double-badged courses; and a Collaborative Teaching Centre model). Informal cross-institutional enrolment arrangements are simplest to implement but the establishment of Collaborative Teaching Centres (CTCs) would offer the most stable solution. Identified **barriers to collaboration** between institutions included the fierce competition engendered by the change to demand-driven funding. This had intensified **competition between courses within universities**. Coordinators of small courses perceived they were disadvantaged by internal competition because larger courses were allocated bigger marketing budgets, which they used to attract students away from small courses. This does not prioritise the students' best interests, the needs of specialist professions or social need.

Changes to university **funding mechanisms have unintentionally contributed** to the loss of specialist undergraduate courses in social professions. The transition from centrally planned university funding to demand-driven university intensified competition within and between institutions, and universities that previously collaborated have become direct competitors. This has reduced willingness of universities to participate in cross-institutional collaboration without additional incentives. This is exacerbated by allocation of these courses to a **Commonwealth Government funding cluster (CGFC) classification that does not reflect the costs of course provision**. These courses (ASCED FoE Codes 090505, 090507, 090509) along with social work and other welfare courses, are allocated to Commonwealth Government Funding Cluster 3b (behavioural science or social studies). Pedagogically, they are unlike lecture-based courses in this cluster (politics, policy studies, human geography or anthropology) because of supervised practicum requirements. The pedagogy and costs of

specialist social professions are more akin to allied health or clinical psychology in funding Cluster 5 (clinical psychology, allied health, foreign languages, visual and performing arts) (Department of Education and Training, 2019). Cluster 5 receives a higher level of government fee support than Cluster 3, and this affects the attractiveness to universities of offering these courses. Another structural problem is the well-documented (Kemp & Norton, 2014; Noonan, 2015) **diversion of teaching funding into research**. Universities are using teaching-derived income to support research as a means of achieving higher ranking on the university league table. A consequence of this is that courses that cover costs, but are not highly profitable, have become vulnerable to being discontinued.

During the fellowship, it became apparent that other specialist and emerging disciplines were facing similar challenges; these included careers (guidance) education, leadership and development training (for police and others), integrated palliative care, and permaculture.

Recommendations

This report makes the following recommendations.

1. **Establish Cooperative Teaching Centres** as centres of teaching excellence in specialist social professions disciplines. This will provide seed money for the development of shared teaching resources and will encourage and support cross-institutional collaboration
2. **Reclassify social welfare courses to the same CGFC as allied health or clinical psychology**. Align the CGFC decisions with the pedagogic requirements of teaching, as well as social and economic need, and future graduate income.
3. **Monitor and report** on the availability and discontinuation of specialist courses across the sector and prevent closure (similar to protection of low-availability foreign languages).
4. **Provide additional support** for the provision of specialist courses in social professions where there are skills shortages or unmet social needs through lower student contribution costs.
5. **Teaching funds for teaching-related activities**: Where student places are supported by Commonwealth Grants Scheme (CGS), limit the capacity of universities to divert funds away from teaching and student services. This will necessitate reinstatement of better research funding for universities.
6. **Teaching recognition**: Instigate or reinstate programmes that give status to university teaching that is responsive to social needs, values community service, and support human well-being.
7. **University funding models**: adjust to reduce barriers to collaboration between universities, and to actively support provision of diverse specialist collaborative courses to meet specialist social, cultural and economic needs.

Outputs

Website (<https://ywdaf.org>), publications (see Appendix G, also see website), contact information for course coordinators and professional bodies in the three disciplines (see website). Strategic trend data for each cluster (see website). See Action Plans (Appendix H).

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As part of the dissemination process and feedback some of the material presented in this report was published as a conference paper for the [2018 HERDSA conference](#) (Cooper, 2018), where the paper received the best scholarly paper award. The material is represented here with some updates, clarifications, minor changes and additions.

The fellowship focused on undergraduate courses because these have Commonwealth-supported places for domestic students. The number of undergraduate students attending university in Australia has increased rapidly since the 1980s (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008) but the availability of specialist courses has declined and many specialist disciplines have struggled to survive. This decline is best documented for foreign languages (see Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities [LCNAU]). Comprehensive historic information about the decline of other specialist degrees is difficult to obtain because universities do not publicise courses they have chosen to discontinue. For example, at Edith Cowan University several specialist degrees in the social professions have been closed during the last 15 years, including degrees in disability studies, women's services, social gerontology and Indigenous services. A proposed major in community mental health did not commence, despite strong employer demand for graduates, because the projected cohorts were considered too small to be financially viable. Anecdotally, this is typical across the sector, but closures have not been systematically documented. As the authors found, degree courses remain on websites and in handbooks for some years after they are no longer available to new students. This can lead to a false impression about course availability.

Continuing need for specialist graduates

Graduates of specialist degrees in the social professions fulfil important roles, leading change in practice in response to new research, changes in social policy and changes in social conditions. Degree courses in specialist social professions prepare graduates to provide effective leadership for the implementation of policy reforms developed in other areas of government, such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) (National Disability Practitioners, 2016). The Productivity Commission (2017) forecast that 1 in 5 new jobs in future will be in disability care but that the workforce is not growing at anything like a fast enough rate to meet this need. There are also concerns about how the NDIS has been implemented and calls for a Royal Commission into the abuse of people with disabilities (Cadwallader, Spivakovsky, Steele, & Wadiwel, 2018; Mavromaras et al., 2018). In aged care, a Royal Commission into standards of care is in progress (Commonwealth of Australia, 2018). Workforce education, including graduate leadership, in all three field is required to ensure that policy is effective and to ensure policies are implemented consistently with international treaty obligations, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.), the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (CROC) (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, n.d.), United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Cooper, 2018; Freistein & Mahler, 2016; United Nations, 2017) and the proposed United Nations Convention for the Rights of Older Persons (CROP) (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014).

This high-level work requires well-educated, specialist graduates who understand international research in their specialism; can translate research into innovative practice; and are able to monitor, evaluate and adjust practice, where necessary. Absence of specialist graduates increases the risk that social programs will be implemented without an adequate evidence base, that resources will be wasted, and that policies will fail. Loss of specialist expertise in Australian universities will have adverse consequences for important translational Australian national research (National Health and Medical Research Council & Australian Association of Gerontology, 2011).

Most specialist social professions require a relatively small (compared with teaching or nursing) but highly trained specialist workforce. The disability workforce alone is predicted to grow by 104 per cent between 2013 and 2018—from 100,500 to 205,100 (National Disability Practitioners, 2016). In Western Australia, the State Priority Occupation List (SPOL) for migration currently lists residential care officers and disability services officers as Priority 2, and youth workers as Priority 3, indicating there is an unmet demand (The Department of Training and Workforce Development, 2018). Continued reliance on overseas skilled migration to provide a graduate trained workforce is a risky strategy, especially if migration policy changes, if the availability of skilled migrants declines, or if migrants are unfamiliar with the Australian social and cultural context.

Collaboration

In many countries, especially the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (US), institutions have successfully collaborated to offer courses in various niche disciplines (Ajiferuke, 2005; Black & Ogborn, 1977; De Jonge & McDougall, 1989; Dow, 2008; Goodrich & McCauley, 2009; Jansen, 2010; Kitagawa, 2010; Lee, 2011; Robertson & Shannon, 2009; Schmidt & Molkentin, 2015; Shepherd, Gillham, & Ridley, 1999). Learning from the international experience of collaboration is important, but it is also necessary to examine how models of collaboration that were developed internationally would operate in the Australian policy context.

In Australia, there are few publications documenting sustained collaboration on undergraduate teaching. Examples include two previous Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) projects to promote collaboration for small courses in foreign language teaching in Australia (Dunne, Lehmann, Evans, Wormleaton, & MacKay, 2009; Hajek, Nettelbeck, & Woods, 2013), a Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Education (Tynan & Ryan, 2009), landscape architecture (Ware et al., 2014), and film (Petkovic, 2014). The Rural Universities Network (RUN) supports cross-institutional collaboration as a matter of policy, for example, in the teaching of languages and creative and performing arts (RUN, 2015). A key finding was that low student enrolments could not be explained solely by lack of student demand, and that other institutional and cultural factors needed to be addressed (Hajek et al., 2013). The fellowship leader completed a curriculum renewal project for youth work that provided some foundational work for this program (Cooper, Bessant, Broadbent, Couch, & Edwards, 2014). No other OLT projects or programs have examined the needs of niche social professions. This program will: document the trends and current undergraduate enrolments in youth work, disability and social gerontology; analyse trends and develop action plans to support change; and begin processes of implementation.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Availability of specialist degrees in social professions

The decline of specialist language courses has been well documented by the Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities (LCNAU, n.d.). Through networks in the field, the authors were aware that the availability of specialist undergraduate degrees in social professions had been adversely affected by the closure of programs in youth work (Western Sydney University in 2008), disability (closure of the major at Edith Cowan University in 2010, closure of the degree at RMIT University around 2010), and social gerontology (closure of the major in Edith Cowan University in 2003, closure of the major at Southern Cross University in 2012). These closures have not been systematically documented even though closure of a single course often eliminates availability of that discipline across the state. State losses of disciplines are significant because over 95 per cent of undergraduate students do not travel out of state for their undergraduate studies (Noonan, 2015). Data and analysis of recent trends and the current position of specialist social professions degrees formed part of the program implementation and can be found in Chapter 4.

Some of the most promising sustainability strategies for niche courses depend on collaboration between institutions and making good use of educational technology. Dow (2008) described how five universities in the US collaborated on a niche course in archive education, funded by the Institute for Museum and Library Services (Dow, 2008). A benefit was access to a greater range of subject specialists. Collaboration was achieved through cross-institutional enrolment, and each partner institution was responsible for provision of at least one course/unit per year. The grant only covered collaboration travel costs, not course provision costs. Other projects collaborated to develop shared digital learning environments for joint teaching, and Robertson and Shannon (2009) in the US, described the benefits of an arrangement where all institutions had access to a single shared online learning course (Robertson & Shannon, 2009). This was cost-effective because it meant that they did not have to duplicate the resource. Schmidt and Molkentin (2015) describe a collaborative project for undergraduate entrepreneurship education (Schmidt & Molkentin, 2015). The partners achieved cost savings because there was no duplication of resources and there was a pooling of expertise. McCall and colleagues (2000) stated that a benefit of the collaboration between The University of Melbourne, Monash University, and various professional medical colleges was that it built on the strengths of each institution, enhanced the reputation of the institutional providers, and provided the status needed to successfully gain additional funding from government (McCall et al., 2000). Goodrich and McCauley (2009) found that an important benefit of cross-institutional collaboration was that it reduced staff feelings of isolation and marginalisation (Goodrich & McCauley, 2009).

The arrangements for collaboration between universities varied and not all writers described how the institutional arrangements operated. Dow (2008) reported there was no formalised arrangement between institutions, although the project had the informal support of each partner institution (Dow, 2008). Robertson and Shannon (2009) did not discuss whether institutional arrangements were formalised (Robertson & Shannon, 2009). Schmidt and Molkentin (2015) described a collaborative project between 11 colleges and universities to create regional ecosystem for undergraduate entrepreneurship education in Ohio. They established a separate consortium (Entrepreneurship Education Consortium) to operate the course (Schmidt & Molkentin, 2015). In a discussion of inter-university research

collaboration, Kitagawa (2010) argued that collaboration mechanisms needed to take a strategic relational approach to territory (Kitagawa, 2010). Decisions needed to be made about: the scale of the collaboration and networks, which partners and networks to include, what to network, and especially, the extent to which each organisation was prepared to relinquish sovereignty to a shared enterprise. A separate shared management structure requires each organisation to commit to separate governance arrangements. The issue of divided loyalties was also raised by Schmidt and Molkentin (2015). Kitagawa (2010) suggests that issues of dual loyalties can emerge even when universities do not create a separate collaborative organisation. Informal collaborative arrangements need not be complex, may require very little change of practice and no loss of sovereignty. Informal mechanisms include practices such as when course leaders informally refer students between institutions. Pathways from vocational education that recognise prior learning are another less formalised collaborative method.

Several factors were identified in the literature as being important to collaboration. These included: strong interpersonal relationships, relationship-building, communication, and personal links (Black & Ogborn, 1977; Robertson & Shannon, 2009; Shepherd et al., 1999). Several studies stated that it was important for potential collaborators to get to know each other as human beings (Black & Ogborn, 1977; McCall et al., 2000; Shepherd et al., 1999). Institutional leadership, including policies that offer advice and support for both formal and informal cross-institutional collaborative arrangements, were also considered to be important (McCall et al., 2000). The provision of external funding was also mentioned as important (Black & Ogborn, 1977; Dow, 2008; McCall et al., 2000; Robertson & Shannon, 2009), as well as effective communication, administrative support, clear roles, and shared commitment to the outcomes of the project (McCall et al., 2000). Shared technology for online delivery was specifically mentioned in some projects (Robertson & Shannon, 2009).

Difficulties encountered in cross-institutional collaboration

The benefits of collaboration have been supported in the literature. Implementation can be difficult, however, especially in a competitive environment. Previous research emphasised the need for strong personal relationships between collaborators (Black & Ogborn, 1977; McCall et al., 2000; Shepherd et al., 1999).

Although international experience of collaboration is useful, its relevance to the Australian context should be assessed. Successful solutions in other countries sometime fail in Australia for geographic or techno-cultural reasons. For example, the national and international literature on cross-institutional collaboration often favours regional networks (for example, (Dow, 2008). However, technology has changed and competition between universities has intensified since these articles were written. The benefits of regional networks will need to be balanced against the problems of managing competitive pressures, the benefits of teleconferencing, and the greater distances in Australia.

Models of university collaboration

Different models of collaboration vary according to the degree of interdependency, how risks and benefits are shared, and requirements for communication, trust and commitment. Examples of **low interdependency collaboration** include cross-institutional enrolments, the establishment of an articulated pathway between two institutions, and Open Universities Australia. This kind of collaboration requires low communication about what is taught or when or how teaching occurs. The ownership and responsibility for the unit(s) is not shared.

Arrangements can be established informally or with a low level of formality; for example, agreement by one institution to recognise study completed at another institution. The risks of failure are low for both parties. Examples of this kind of arrangement exist in most institutions, for example, through pathways between institutions to facilitate recognition of prior learning (RPL), and through low-stakes formal cross-institutional enrolment arrangements. These arrangements can be established or terminated quickly, and sometimes termination can be unilateral, for example, termination of an advanced standing agreement. Benefits of low interdependency collaboration arrangements include that they do not require much institutional engagement, they are easy to establish, and they do not require collaborators to cede sovereignty. The limitations are that they may depend upon interpersonal relationships between key staff and may not survive staff change or conflict. It would be difficult to maintain a stable and coherent course using cross-institutional enrolment (for example, by using units from multiple partners in the Open Universities Australia structure) because each participant would be able to change what they offer without consultation.

Medium interdependency collaboration requires formal agreements over a more extended timespan. Examples of medium interdependency collaboration include formalised cross-institutional enrolment arrangements, as described by Dow (2008), and also where courses are jointly badged, or where units owned by one institution are formally included in the course plans of another institution. Medium interdependency collaboration requires formalisation and initial agreement on the duration of collaboration, agreement on pedagogy and content, and a commitment to offer the unit(s) at particular times of year for the duration of the agreement. As an example, a jointly badged undergraduate degree in Naval Architecture (Edith Cowan University, n.d.) involves collaboration between Edith Cowan University and the Australian Maritime College at the University of Tasmania. The benefit of medium-level collaborations is that they provide access to awards that no single institution could offer alone. The risks are that quality standards may not align.

High interdependency collaboration involves high levels of formality and extended commitment to enable fully shared courses to be developed and shared and offered through multiple institutions. To achieve this, a separate legal entity is usually established, which means sovereignty is ceded. Participating institutions agree to share risks and benefits through a separate entity, for example, the Entrepreneurship Education consortium described by Schmidt and Molkenin (2015). Alternatively, arrangements could be seed funded by government, using a model similar to the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC)(Australian Government Business, 2019) model used for research. Cooperative research centres can be linked to universities but have shared governance and agreements about how risks and benefits are shared. Seed funding supports establishment but then they must become self-supporting or cease to operate. Benefits of this type of arrangement are that Australian universities are familiar with the governance structure, that the arrangement promotes collaboration between multiple partners and stakeholders, and that it supports strong links to external bodies. A limitation is that sharing of benefits and risks would have to be adapted for a teaching rather than a research context. This provides a possible template that could be adapted to develop centres of collaboration for teaching excellence in specialist fields. In this report, this is referred to as a **Cooperative Teaching Centre (CTC)** model.

Table 1: Models for collaboration

	Low interdependency	Medium interdependency	High interdependency
Examples	Informal cross-institutional enrolment, RPL pathways between awards, Open Universities Australia	Formalised cross-institutional enrolment; Joint badging of courses offered by two or more institutions	Collaboration to develop and share a course offered by multiple institutions
Formality	Informal/Low	Medium–contractual	High–contractual
Coordination and communication	Low, one institution accepts or rejects what another offers	Medium, required for establishment and changes	Shared governance
Shared resources	Low/none	Low, separate responsibilities in agreed framework	High, shared responsibilities in agreed framework
Quality control	One-sided. No input to quality control for one partner	Responsibility for quality control according parameters	Shared quality control
Financial risk and benefit	No sharing, and one benefits more than the other	Apportioned financial benefits and risk	Shared financial benefits and risks
Control stability and curriculum coherence	One-sided, may lead to instability, content may drift over time	Each control agreed partners within parameters to establish coherence	Shared control
Responsiveness to change	Change may destabilise	Change negotiated	Change negotiated
Scale up to multiple partners	Yes	Hard to scale up. Usually two or three partners	Yes
Capacity to innovate	Low, cannot develop new courses	Medium, can develop shared courses	High, can develop new courses
Durability	Unstable, easily formed, easily broken	Yes	Yes
Incentives to participate	Low in competitive environment	Low	Low, only if seed funded

Policy context: demand-driven funding

Since 2012, Australian higher education has operated in a demand-driven policy environment and this has changed how universities decide what courses to offer (Lomax-Smith, Watson, & Webster, 2011) and has removed incentives for cross-institutional collaboration between universities. The demand-driven funding mechanism was introduced for undergraduate courses in Australian public universities in response to recommendations contained in the Bradley report (Bradley et al., 2008). Demand-driven funding initially permitted Australian public universities to receive government funding for all eligible domestic students they enrol and to choose what course mix they offer (Lomax-Smith et al., 2011), although later changes capped student numbers. Demand-driven funding was fully implemented in 2013, but during 2011 and 2012 universities had more scope than previously to reallocate their enrolments between courses, and to receive payments for

over-enrolments (Kemp & Norton, 2014; Lomax-Smith et al., 2011). The outcomes of demand-driven funding were reviewed in 2014 by Kemp and Norton (2014), who concluded that demand-driven funding had been beneficial for higher education. However, they acknowledged in their report (p. 38) that more detailed analysis was required to understand the effects of demand-driven policy on specialist areas where there may be skill shortages. One area where this would apply is specialist social welfare professions, such as youth work, disability studies and social gerontology. Lomax-Smith et al. (2011) warned that if the details of the funding model under-estimated costs then some courses could disappear, and this observation seems pertinent to the specialist courses examined in this fellowship.

The distortions to funding stemmed from a lack of external advocacy in some professional fields (especially those with weak professionalisation)—this was recognised by Lomax-Smith and colleagues (2011). In all three professions, there is a workforce shortage, but none of these fields have professionalised to the point of professional closure, so there is limited advocacy to promote the importance of these specialisms within the higher education system. There has been no previous review of the implications of demand-driven funding for the specialist social welfare cluster of disciplines, and these disciplines are not mentioned in any of the government reviews.

Four reports have examined various aspects of demand-driven funding in Australian higher education: the Bradley report (2008), the Lomax-Smith report (2011), the Kemp-Norton review (2014), and the Noonan report (Noonan). Each of these reports had a different primary purpose, but all analysed issues relevant to the nexus between demand-driven funding, the availability of university courses, workforce skills, funding sustainability and student choice. Understanding the nexus between workforce skills, sustainability, and student demand is particularly pertinent to this fellowship program.

The Bradley report was commissioned to address the concern that Australia was ‘falling behind other countries in performance and investment in higher education’ (p. xi). The Bradley report recommended demand-driven funding as a means ‘to broaden the base of higher education qualifications in the population and the need for skills upgrading over the life cycles’ (p. xiv) and to address the issue of skills shortage in the Australian workforce. According to the Bradley report, research by Access Economics had forecast that from 2010 onwards the supply of graduates would not keep pace with demand. For this reason, they contended it was necessary to increase participation in higher education, especially by population groups underrepresented within the system.

Several of the recommendations contained in the Bradley report informed policy implemented in 2012. They proposed that the centrally planned funding arrangement should be replaced by a market driven uncapped demand driven system of higher education funding. Recommendations included that all qualified students would be entitled to a Commonwealth subsidised higher education place, that students having a choice of where to study, and that funding would follow students. Universities would be able to choose the course-mix they offer and enrol as many students as they wish. This was implemented in 2012 but modified in 2014 when caps were reintroduced on the total number of Commonwealth supported places. The funding changes essentially implemented a voucher system of shared funding for undergraduate public higher education (Sheehy, 2010), on a purchaser–provider model.

The Bradley report made several recommendations that were not fully implemented, including for increases to funding for teaching, and that financial support for students

should be increased, made fairer and be based on need (p. xiii). These recommendations are pertinent to this fellowship program because one reported reason for closure of specialist social professions courses was that they were not financially viable. Although university funding increased in absolute terms, the per capita funding for teaching was reduced by the so-called 'efficiency dividend' introduced in 2012, which reduced base funding to universities (Kemp & Norton, 2014).

The Lomax-Smith report was commissioned to establish the 'enduring principles to underpin public investment in higher education' and especially the relative balance between public and private funding contribution for student fees (Ministers' Media Centre for the Department of Jobs and Small Business, 2010). This report is pertinent to this fellowship because it examines how the technical minutiae of funding affect course availability and viability. The Lomax-Smith report examined the implications of a demand-driven funding system for changes to the calculation of base funding for universities and made three observations that are pertinent to discussion of specialist courses in social professions. Firstly, the Lomax-Smith report found that courses with practicum components are underfunded. To acknowledge additional costs, some professional courses with practicum—especially in allied health, but also education and nursing, and clinical psychology—receive higher levels of government funding support under the Commonwealth Government Funding Cluster (CGFC) arrangements. The specialist social professions have a supervised practicum requirement but have been allocated to the same CGFC as other social science courses that do not have practicum. The social professions degrees were not acknowledged in the Lomax-Smith report, possibly because they lacked advocacy by powerful professional associations, the influence of which were noted by Lomax-Smith and colleagues (2011).

The second observation is that, 'in a student demand-driven environment it is more important that the costs of course delivery match funding otherwise it is conceivable that there may be pressure to reduce or abolish underfunded disciplines' (p. ix). This is probably a contributory factor in the decline in availability of social profession courses, because their CGFC positioning fails to recognise the additional cost associated with teaching professional skills-based courses with supervised professional placement. The third observation is that 'universities should be supported in meeting the additional costs of teaching able but underprepared or disadvantaged students, and base funding should be supplemented by targeted programs to promote social inclusion' (p. vii). This observation has indirect importance in as far as the specialist social professions courses promote social inclusion and attract students with commitment to this concept, many of whom have personal experiences of social exclusion.

The Kemp-Norton report was commissioned to examine the consequences of the growth in student enrolments, and of issues arising from the design and implementation of the demand-driven system. The Kemp-Norton report recommended further deregulation. The Noonan report (2015) recommended deregulation of students' fees and explored the likely positive and negative outcomes of such a policy. Full fee deregulation has not occurred.

Reduced regulation, university purpose and social professions

All four reports (Bradley et al., 2008; Kemp & Norton, 2014; Lomax-Smith et al., 2011; Noonan, 2015), with differing emphases, supported the idea that universities should contribute to skilled workforce development, that all students from all backgrounds should be able to benefit from higher education, and that higher education should also have

cultural purposes beyond workforce development. On this point the Bradley report described universities as ‘a cornerstone of our legal, economic, social and cultural institutions and it lies at the heart of Australia’s research and innovation system’ (p. xi). All four reports also begin from the premise that further deregulation of universities would be beneficial and reflect the dominance of an economic efficiency narrative in their discourse about higher education even though the limitations of this assumption have been comprehensively discussed elsewhere (Marginson, 2002; Sheehy, 2010). Noonan accepts there may be other adverse effects of reduced university regulation (including possible inefficiency, and possible price gouging), but believed these could be overcome. Despite similarity in their overall orientation, there are important differences between the four reports, particularly with respect to the need for government to offer incentives to influence university or student choices, as will become apparent in the discussions that follow.

Protections for specialist courses

When demand-driven funding was introduced, measures were introduced to prevent universities from closing small courses that were strategically important. Courses that had been nominated in this category included some Asian languages. Specialist social professions were not nominated as being strategically important and were not protected. Both the Bradley review (2008) and the Lomax-Smith review (2011) concluded that government intervention was necessary to ensure that university courses align with workforce needs where there were identified skill shortages.

Commonwealth Government Funding Clusters

The Lomax-Smith report considered that universities would need to have additional incentives to provide professional courses that include practicum because otherwise they might stop offering these courses. At present, universities receive no additional funding to support the additional costs of practicum in youth work, social gerontology or disability, and this partly explains the decline of these courses. The Kemp-Norton report was less inclined to support initiatives that intervened in the market but did support continuation of differential government contribution according to a simplified CGFC banding system. Kemp and Norton (2014) claimed that reducing student contributions was not effective as an incentive to encourage student enrolment in high employer demand degrees, even though they also stated that this strategy had been too effective in encouraging students to enrol in science courses, where there was now high graduate unemployment.

Without changing the overarching features of the funding system, some minor adjustments to the CGFC would potentially improve the funding equity for specialist social professions courses and address concerns raised in the Lomax-Smith report. Moving specialist social professions courses to the same band as clinical psychology would increase funding from government (\$10,630–\$13,073 per equivalent full-time student [EFTS], without increasing the cost to students, which may be sufficient to encourage more universities to offer these specialist courses. Moving specialist social professions to the same band as allied health would raise the government contribution (from \$10,630 to \$13,073 per EFTS) but would also raise students’ contributions (from \$6,566 to \$9,359 per EFTS). This would provide universities with more money but may act as a disincentive to student enrolment. Lowering student contributions could also be considered as a mechanism to encourage more students to enrol in courses where there are perceived graduate shortages, as was tried successfully for a period of time with mathematics and science (Norton & Cherastidtham, 2015).

University ranking systems and specialist social professions

World university rankings systems (the [Academic Ranking of World Universities](#), ARWU), [Times Higher Education](#), THE), and [Quacquarelli Symonds](#), QS) have an adverse effect on the willingness of universities to offer specialist courses in social professions. According to Marginson (2007), global university ranking systems function to apply competitive pressure against diversity of mission and purpose within universities. In his detailed analysis, he argued that with minor variations in emphasis the ranking systems favour comprehensive research universities that enrol large numbers of international students, irrespective of the quality of courses. Regional biases also mean that research universities in the United States are favoured because US academics tend to only cite US research. He also argued that these factors disadvantage vocational universities that meet local needs (Marginson, 2007), and this includes universities that offer specialist degrees in social professions.

The effects of the pressure of global ranking systems is apparent from reports that show that Australian universities subsidise research from funds derived from teaching (Bradley et al., 2008; Noonan, 2015; Norton & Cherastidtham, 2015). The prominence of the global ranking systems affects priorities within universities to the detriment of specialist social professions courses in three ways. Firstly, universities give greater priority to courses that enrol large numbers of international students. Secondly, they accord lower priority to vocation courses that serve local or national needs. Thirdly, they prioritise courses that generate surpluses that can be redirected towards research. All these priorities add to the vulnerability of smaller specialist vocational courses in social professions because although they serve real social and job market needs, they do not attract a high volume of international students and are less likely to produce a surplus that can be diverted to support research.

Student decision-making and social professions

The Bradley report (2008) concluded that incentives would be needed to encourage students to enrol in courses where there were labour skills shortages. The Kemp-Norton review rejected this approach stating that such incentives were not effective, but perversely presented evidence of how extra fee subsidies in science and mathematics disciplines had increased student enrolments, which they acknowledged undermined their previous assertion. The Bradley report opined that students need better information to inform their decision-making, so they have realistic expectations of courses. The *My University* website was established to provide this information (now replaced by Quality Indicators in Learning and Teaching, QILT, <http://www.qilt.edu.au>). The site included information about courses and student feedback on their experiences. The Kemp-Norton review examined the *My University* website usage and found that prospective students made limited use of information on the site. University marketing now focuses on image and branding (Szekeres, 2010) rather than the presentation of detailed course information. This approach distorts information to students by promoting large courses more heavily than smaller specialist courses. In a competitive environment, this disadvantages specialist courses.

Disadvantages of reduced university regulation and social professions

All the reports made differing assumptions about the potentially adverse effects of reduced university regulation, and how these might be mitigated. The Kemp-Norton review was uncritical about university deregulation, and assumed that competition would bring only

advantages to higher education. The executive summary made unsupported assertions about the benefits of competition in higher education. The presumption that competition is necessarily benign and beneficial has been rebutted elsewhere (Marginson, 2007; Sheehy, 2010). By contrast, the Noonan report acknowledged there were serious risks to reduced university regulation but presumed that these disadvantages could be overcome.

The other two reports were more circumspect. The Bradley report expressed concerns about the quality of students' educational experiences (p. 11). Bradley et al. expressed concern that increasing productivity and reduced teaching costs in higher education had been achieved at the expense of educational quality, especially at the increase in staff student ratios from 15:1 in 1996 to 20:1 in 2006. By 2015, Universities Australia reported the student-to-staff ratio was 21:1 (Universities Australia, 2015, p. 42). The Lomax-Smith review also expressed concern about rising student-to-staff ratios. The Kemp-Norton review equated quality with student satisfaction, and on this basis contended that quality of teaching had declined. The literature on the assessment of quality and teaching excellence has an extensive literature, which is not the focus of this report. Data on student satisfaction is readily collected and useful for some purposes, the relationship between student satisfaction and educational quality is not straightforward and student satisfaction cannot be used reliably as a proxy indicator of educational quality (Cooper, 2002, 2019).

Increases in funding for teaching recommended by Bradley et al. were not implemented and per capita funding was reduced. This has probably contributed to the decline in specialist social professions courses because larger classes are not feasible. Bradley et al. (2008), Norton and Cherastidtham (2015) and Noonan (2015) acknowledged that teaching funds were being channelled towards research, which means that any future increase in funding for teaching (whether from government or from students) will be directed towards teaching activities only if this is enforced by regulation (Norton & Cherastidtham, 2015). This too has implications for the sustainability of social professions, where the survival of these courses would be enhanced if tighter regulation required universities to direct teaching fees derived from the Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) towards teaching and did not permit universities to direct these funds to subsidise research.

Marginalisation and small courses

Marginalisation of niche courses by the dominant disciplines was noted in the literature by Goodrich and McCauley (2009) in their discussion of a course offered by North Michigan University to expand Portuguese language teaching (Goodrich & McCauley, 2009). This finding was supported in interviews with course leaders who stated that their courses were poorly marketed compared to larger courses (Cooper et al., 2014). Consequently, potential students were unaware that a specialist course was offered. In addition, student advisors preferentially direct potential students towards larger generic courses, because they erroneously believe that these courses give students more options (Cooper et al., 2014).

Implications

The implications of the literature for this fellowship program are that there is a need to collate data about trends in availability and enrolment in undergraduate specialist programs, and it is important to interpret these in the light of what is known about the observed and predicted effects of the policy environment, especially university funding mechanisms.

Chapter 3: Program design

In the initial fellowship plan, the focus of proposed activities was firstly to develop a strategy to achieve economic sustainability for niche social professions courses in the Australian higher education sector; and secondly, to provide a basis for implementation of the strategy by participating institutions, during the fellowship and beyond. Optimistically, the original plan proposed that this would be achievable within 12 months. Five institutions nominated as partners (the Australian Catholic University (ACU), Charles Sturt University (CSU), Southern Cross University (SCU), Tabor, Adelaide and the University of New England (UNE), see Appendix B: List of collaborators). Relevant professional bodies and a reference group were identified in the initial plan, as listed in Appendix B.

The independent evaluator was Associate Professor Lynne Roberts, Australian Learning and Teaching Fellow, who was Director of Research in Higher Education, Curtin University at the commencement of the fellowship. Professor Roberts acted as both a critical friend and independent evaluator. The evaluation used an action-learning process (see Appendix D: Evaluator report). Communications were conducted by teleconference, phone and email.

The key tasks identified were:

1. **Stage 1: Dissemination for readiness: building engagement and development of a niche social professions network.** Contact interested and relevant stakeholders. Gain approval of the Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee, see Appendix E: Ethics.)
2. **Stage 2: Relationship development and exploration of practicalities: Symposia (2–4) and (1–3) webinars.** Symposia and webinars were planned for major capital cities to enable the network members and other interested stakeholders to meet and discuss the potential benefits and barriers to collaboration on teaching, and to develop collaborative solutions.
3. **Stage 3: Develop collaboration strategy and supporting resources and supporting resources:** anticipated to include a database of sharable units and information to support cross-institutional online enrolment, and the types of collaborative arrangements (formal and informal) that each institution would be interested in pursuing.
4. **Stage 4: Support collaboration.** In the original plan it was envisaged that this stage of the fellowship would involve implementation of the Stage 3 strategies by the fellowship team plus new members recruited during the consultation and symposia. Activities to include: formalised arrangements for sharing online units, cross-institutional enrolments for joint programs, planning programs for local courses and shared online units, and addressing local issues or barriers to outcomes. This stage was expected to extend beyond the fellowship.
5. **Final report** and formal and informal ongoing dissemination.

Program plan

Table 2 provides an overview of how activities were expected to achieve program goals.

Table 2: Original Fellowship plan

Deliverable	Goals/Purpose	How it will be achieved
1) Niche social professions network	Dissemination for climate readiness, raise awareness, involve others/participation beyond known group, links to	Phone calls, visits, engagement with champions (especially reference group members), presentations at professional events to raise awareness. Brief online

	professional bodies, provide information	presentation of key issues, possible strategies, and discussion forum
2) Symposia/webinars	Build relationships support engagement. Support collaborative problem-solving, model building, share practice	Forum for collaborative problem-solving and model building, and build/consolidate relationships
3) Brief online presentation of key issues	Dissemination: involve others. Build relationships and engagement, maintain engagement, and begin transfer	Accessible summary of progress to participants and others, discussion forum to prompt feedback and further contributions
4) Database	Transfer: Resource to support collaboration and engagement	Data collected at Symposia and through individual discussions
5) Formal report and presentations and publications; Evaluation	Dissemination: involve others. Dissemination of strategy, maintain engagement, accountability.	Final report, academic publications, presentations. Provide detailed information and reasoning, includes details of implementation.

The proposed process for the program was: (1) raise awareness/engagement/involve others, (2) relationship-building, collaborative problem-solving/transfer ownership, (3) document tried options and transfer knowledge, (4) support transfer to ongoing independent collaboration during and after the fellowship, and (5) document strategy development/support transfer, involve others beyond the known group, ongoing evaluation/action learning, and accountability.

The program planned to use multiple methods to move beyond the known interest group, including traditional academic channels for dissemination, snowballing personal connections, using the Australian Learning and Teaching Fellows (ALTF) network, combined with an action learning approach. In an action learning approach, the program goals are tightly defined, but the means to achieve the goals remain flexible to maximise benefits derived from unforeseen opportunities and to overcome unforeseen hindrances. Hence, the need for adjustments was anticipated. The original timeline (Table 3) was overly optimistic.

Table 3: Initial timeline

Date	Activities	Milestones
Jul–Aug 2016	Program preparation. Contact partners, professional bodies, form reference group, begin ethics process. Appoint evaluator	Appoint part-time support officer and evaluator. Make formal contacts with the reference group. Website operational. Dissemination commenced
Aug–Sep 2016	Dissemination for readiness (Stage 1). Engagement and relationship-building with peak bodies, course leaders, institutions and professional bodies to raise awareness of the fellowship program.	Phone/teleconference/face-to-face discussions with all partners, visits as needed. Ethics approval granted. Symposia arranged. Website has active posts
Nov 2016–Mar 2017	Symposia and webinars (Stage 2). Hold symposia and webinars. Gather and confirm information for the database. Seek ongoing dissemination opportunities. Maintain contact with evaluator	Network has members signed up to the website. Interim report. Symposia complete. Teaching & Learning Forum Western Australia, Western Australian OLT network (WAND)

Date	Activities	Milestones
Mar– Apr 2017	Develop collaboration strategy (Stage 3). Check database information, synthesise findings from symposia and research into a readable online presentation on key features of strategy and choices.	Database available, online presentation on website. Collate and summarise formative evaluation
Mar– Jun 2017	Support collaboration (Stage 4). Respond to individual support requests, proactively encourage collaboration. Maintain contact with evaluator	Additional resources developed in response to need (if required). Summative evaluation
May– Jun 2017	Dissemination. Prepare final report, prepare for other formal and informal dissemination. Develop presentation on symposia, online model presentation	Final report, independent evaluator’s report, online presentations, HERDSA conference

Pre-fellowship preparation: awareness-raising, maintain and build contacts and alliances. Engage potentially interested course leaders and institutional leaders, and extend networks of useful contacts.

During the fellowship:

1. **Awareness-raising.** Role of course leadership and institutional leadership for innovation, options for collaboration, the importance of trust, and exploration of mechanisms to promote collaboration.
2. **Build relationships and connection.** Between course leaders and with professional associations and peak bodies (symposia/ webinars).
3. **Institutional exploration of options.** Document situationally appropriate strategies, deepen understanding of barriers to collaboration and innovation, and options for effective strategy to overcome impediments (symposia, and strategy development).
4. **Development of database.** Include available courses and collaboration preferences.
5. **Active support for collaboration.** Develop resources, facilitate discussion, and document options.

Anticipated impact

The anticipated impact was:

- improved sustainability and geographical availability of niche social profession courses
- improved support for practicalities of inter-university collaboration leading to improved inter-university collaboration and innovative delivery in niche social professions
- improved networks between niche academic social professions and with professional bodies
- reduced staff isolation.

Post-fellowship: Work groups in each specialism will continue the activities of the fellowship. The IMPEL chart is included in Appendix C.

Chapter 4: Program implementation

Significant project changes and reasons

The commencement of the project was delayed until 1 September 2016 because of staff availability. The program then progressed according to plan for the first three months. Desk research was conducted to identify which universities were offering undergraduate degrees in youth work, social gerontology and disability. A researcher searched university websites and online handbooks to identify courses that fitted the parameters of this fellowship, irrespective of title or ASCED (Australian Standard Classification of Education) code, and dissemination for awareness commenced. Visits were scheduled to all partners and to others who had expressed interest at the time of application or where web searches had indicated that the target degrees were offered.

Two things emerged from these initial visits, which ultimately changed the priorities within the fellowship. Firstly, the informal discussions during the visits revealed that the situation for disability and social gerontology was worse than anticipated. Secondly, informal discussions highlighted that there was an understanding about the nature and seriousness of the lack of specialist courses in all three areas, but this was accompanied by a pessimism about the success of any action.

Changed priority (1)—from expansion to survival

The program refocused from supporting expansion of specialist undergraduate degrees in social professions to trying to ensure that these fields of education survived within the sector. The need for this was recognised after the first dissemination for awareness visits to partners, when both disability and social gerontology were found to be on the brink of extinction as undergraduate specialisms, and postgraduate courses were not providing alternative options. Visits confirmed that some undergraduate courses in disability and social gerontology listed in the handbooks were scheduled to be closed, were already in teach-out, or were not accepting any new enrolments. One potential collaborator, who was a social gerontology specialist, had already been made redundant, another collaborator had moved role to a different discipline. University partners were unaware of course loss across the sector because courses still appeared to be available. The closures had happened quietly and had not been publicised. In both disability and social gerontology there appeared to be only one surviving undergraduate course in a public university. The original plan had been to build connections between small courses and to build collegial support and collaboration for mutual benefit, through shared curriculum facilitated through webinars and symposia. From this basis, collaboration could have been extended to other universities. This strategy was no longer realistic with so few specialist staff remaining in the sector. The priority for these disciplines changed from expansion to trying to establish how the university environment would need to change to avoid losing both disciplines completely. A review of the ASCED Fields of Education (FoE) trend data for these specialisms (see Table 4) confirmed that course loss had been occurring for some time. A limitation of this dataset was that it was only available for public universities and the surviving disability course had been coded under a different ASCED FoE (code: 061799 'Health/Rehab Therapies/ Rehabilitation Therapies, n.e.c').

For youth work, the situation was slightly different. There were still four courses in public universities (one in Western Australia and three in Victoria) and one in a private higher

education institute (HEI) in South Australia. At the time of this fellowship, none of the courses were threatened with imminent closure. A review of the ASCED FoE data for youth work showed all public universities had steady or rising enrolments (see Table 4. NB: the data are not available for private HEIs). There had been no undergraduate youth work degree lost since 2008, when the only youth work degree in New South Wales closed. The goal for youth work was still to examine whether collaboration between existing courses and universities without youth work degrees could enable a better distribution of youth work bachelor's degrees nationally.

Changed priority (2)—from trialling collaboration to understanding barriers

The second change of focus was away from trialling models of collaboration and towards understanding what would need to change in the university environment to facilitate cross-institutional collaboration as a strategy. Realisation of the need for this change of focus occurred more gradually, when it eventually became clear that, despite an appreciation of the seriousness of the loss of these specialisms, none of the universities were able to commit to cross-institutional teaching as a solution within the timespan of the fellowship. This was not immediately apparent because staff at all levels in the sector saw potential for cross-institutional collaboration as possible problem solution, but implementation emerged as a barrier.

During the awareness-raising consultations staff at all levels expressed concern about the loss of specialist courses in social professions, about the consequences for society, and about the quality of services. Everyone involved could see the potential benefits to cross-institutional collaboration to address the problem, and to address concerns about course viability. When collaboration was discussed there was strong support for informal arrangements rather than formalised agreements, because of perceptions that informal collaboration would be easier to implement. Staff felt that formal negotiations would be more protracted and would require greater institutional support at all levels, which they were not confident would be forthcoming. Concerns were raised that new course proposals would be blocked by other existing courses, if other course leaders perceived the new course as a competitor that would lead to a loss of students for the existing course. It also appeared that, in a competitive environment, unless courses were well-funded there was an institutional preference against collaboration with other universities, even in universities where cross-institutional collaboration was supported by policy.

Trends in enrolments across the three disciplines

Youth work degrees are available in three states: Victoria (Australian Catholic University, RMIT University, Victoria University), Western Australia (Edith Cowan University) and South Australia (Tabor, Adelaide). There is no geographical coverage in New South Wales since the closure of the University of Western Sydney course in 2008, despite repeated requests from a youth work peak body (Youth Action) and no degree courses in Queensland, Tasmania, Australian Capital Territory, or the Northern Territory. The Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG) conducted a survey of all gerontology courses in 2011 and found that although some educational opportunities were available, they were less than the number required and that provision was not well-aligned with sector needs (National Health and Medical Research Council & Australian Association of Gerontology, 2011). The AAG expressed concern that some courses restricted their entry unreasonably (for example, were only open to people with nursing or medical qualifications), some were only offered

intermittently, and for some the geographic availability was limited. The survey included both medically oriented and social gerontology courses, including some generic degrees offering only one or two specialist units. Charles Sturt University offer the only social gerontology course at an undergraduate level.

Researchers examined ASCED data for the three fields of education in human welfare studies and services (0905) subgroups: Youth Work (ASCED Field of Education 090505), Social Gerontology (ASCED Field of Education 090507), and Disability (ASCED Field of Education 090509) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001). Course enrolments and unit enrolments were searched over a seven-year period (2011–2017). Different patterns were found for youth work, compared with either disability or social gerontology. The trend data for courses are presented in Table 4 and for units in Table 5.

Table 4: Course enrolment trends by EFTS and by unique individuals

Row labels	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Youth work 090505 EFTS	n/a	n/a	264	262	284	319	312
Youth work 090507 ONLY individuals	396	703	654	922	1034	n/a	n/a
Aging 090507 EFTS	n/a	n/a	>1	>1	6	4	12
Aging 090507 ONLY Individuals	32	8	3	3	8	n/a	n/a
Disability¹ 090509 and others	n/a	n/a	158 ³	112	106	104	83
Disability 061799 BD and DE			118	111	106	104	83
Disability² 090509 ONLY Individuals	210	107	60	9	3	n/a	n/a

¹ These data include the Flinders University Bachelor of Disability and Developmental Education which has the ASCED Classification under 061799 'Health/Rehab Therapies/ Rehabilitation Therapies, n.e.c'

² These data only include students enrolled in the relevant ASCED code. Although coded under 090509, the University of New England Disability and Primary Education degree was excluded because advice was provided that this was a special education course.

³ This figure includes 60 individual students from the now closed disability course at RMIT University.

Notes on the data about course enrolment

The search for the course enrolments (EFTS) data included the specific ASCED FoE course code plus other courses with key words included in their title. This was compared with a handbook search and advice received from institutions. Some courses were excluded because they seemed to be miscoded. For example, one course was excluded following institutional advice it was a special education course. The search for 'individual students' was conducted on just the ASCED FoE code. This made no difference for youth work and

social gerontology. There were some differences for disability courses because the ASCED 090509 was used for only some of the units from the only remaining undergraduate disability course in the Bachelor of Disability and Developmental Education at The Flinders University of South Australia (course ASCED FoE 061799).

The summary table (Table 4) shows that many students in all three areas studied part-time. In addition, the data confirm that there is only one surviving bachelor's degree in aging (at CSU) and only one bachelor's degree in disability (Bachelor of Disability and Development Education, at Flinders University). The data show that enrolments in the Bachelor of Disability and Developmental Education degree have fallen 28 per cent over five years. The data also show that social gerontology had disappeared as an undergraduate specialism, but since 2015 and the commencement of the Bachelor of Social Science (Gerontology and Healthy Ageing) at CSU, numbers have begun to grow again. The number of students studying youth work has increased by 18 per cent from 264 in 2013 to 312 in 2017. These enrolments are spread across four courses, with enrolments varying between 40 and 131 EFTS in 2017. Table 5 presents the data on unit enrolment across a seven-year period, by ASCED code.

Table 5: Trends in unit enrolments by EFTS

Row Labels	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Youth work 090505 EFTS	190	284	377	430	464	518	534
Aging 090507 EFTS	38	29	114	248	253	300	299
Disability 090509 EFTS	313	320	366	394	414	356	350
Total	542	634	859	1074	1131	1174	1183

Notes on the data on unit enrolments

Numbers of students studying across all areas have risen. Comparing the 2017 EFTS unit enrolments with the 2017 EFTS course enrolments, 58 per cent of students enrolled in youth work units were studying a youth work specialist degree. For social gerontology, the proportion of specialist majors is only 4 per cent of students enrolled in units. For disability, 29 per cent of students enrolled in disability units were disability majors (inclusive of the Bachelor of Disability and Developmental Education). Because of greater variability in classification of disability courses and units, this ratio for disability studies may be less reliable. The implications of this analysis are that students enrolled in youth work units are quite likely to be enrolled in specialist degrees and to be taught by a specialist in youth work. This provides students with depth and breadth of understanding of the issues in the discipline. Students enrolled in social gerontology units are very unlikely to be enrolled in specialist degrees. These students are enrolled in large courses such as nursing or social work and they usually study one introductory unit in social gerontology. Because social gerontology as a specialism is taught in only one university, students studying single units are less likely to be taught by discipline specialists, unless there happens to be a social gerontology specialist teaching in a non-specialist award. In a single introductory unit, students will not gain a depth of understanding of the issues in the discipline. For disability

studies the situation is less clear. A higher proportion of students are enrolled in the single remaining specialist degree and will gain a depth and breadth of understanding of the issues in disability studies, primarily because of the relatively large enrolments in a single course. Students studying elsewhere are likely to be similarly placed to non-specialist social gerontology students and are unlikely to gain a depth of understanding of disciplinary issues.

Summary of themes from interviews and the symposium/webinar

This section summarises the themes that emerged from discussions with partners, interviews with representatives of professional associations (see Appendix F: Interview analysis) and discussion and feedback provided in the symposium held in Sydney at the beginning of February 2019 (see Appendix F: SWOT analysis). The purpose of the symposium/webinar was to bring together course coordinators, experts and representatives of professional associations from the three disciplines to review and analyse the data gathered, and the progress (and barriers to progress) in the fellowship. The intended outcome was to set goals and develop strategies for implementation after the fellowship ended, and to see what could be learned from the similarities and differences between the three disciplines. Most of the participants did not know each other. Seven participants attended in person and four people participated online, as a webinar. Of the original partners, all attended except one who had indicated early in the project that she may not be able to participate because of work commitments. In addition, a staff member from Tasmania attended, and two Flinders University staff members attended through a weblink. The symposium was also attended in webinar mode by colleagues from Weltech Institute of Technology, Wellington New Zealand and Unitech Institute of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand.

Shared themes across the disciplines included the importance of the role of specialist graduates to lead change in the field and to support research-informed and innovative modes of delivery. Professionalisation was considered important for recognition of skills and expertise, and for the maintenance of quality standards within the profession. In youth work, professionalisation is more advanced (especially in Victoria, Western Australia, and more recently South Australia) than in other disciplines. This was considered to explain the relatively strong positions of the youth work degrees in Victoria and Western Australia, where employers have begun to require youth workers to have a professionally recognised youth work qualification. Professionalisation and ethics were viewed as important components of risk reduction strategy in the wake of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and the ongoing Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. In disability services, there was more ambivalence about degree qualifications, especially because NDIS funding has meant that people with disabilities choose who to employ, and they have not necessarily chosen graduates. In part, this was said to be because of the additional cost. Related to this, one participant questioned whether wages were high enough to attract graduates. In ageing services, mention was made of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety and associated concerns about risk management, quality improvement and rights-based support. Specialist degrees were identified as necessary to ensuring that leaders in the field could take a broad and informed view of changes required and support their implementation. In all three disciplines, interviewees concurred that Certificate IV and Diploma qualifications were not

sufficient for leadership within the field. A summary of the main themes can be found in Appendix F: Themes from interviews and symposium.

Institutional barriers to collaboration

Discussions with course coordinators about barriers they faced to collaboration exposed three additional themes: lack of time, marginalisation, and lack of institutional and funding policy support for specialist courses in social professions. Time was a major barrier, and one fellowship partner withdrew from the program because she became overloaded with her normal work and was unable to find time to participate. In addition, coordinators of small courses said they had very little backup when unexpected things happened, because there were no other staff to share the load or cover for them when they, or other staff, were absent from work. This meant any crisis had a disproportionate effect on them and they could quickly become overwhelmed by the daily demands of keeping their courses going. Some course coordinators mentioned feeling marginalised within their institutions, because they felt that they were treated less favourably than larger courses and received less marketing support. Larger courses competed with them for students and discouraged students from specialising. Meanwhile, course coordinators felt they were blamed, and threatened with closure, if they failed to recruit students, which led to feelings of anxiety. The final theme was concern about lack of institutional support and a push towards large enrolment generic courses, notwithstanding the problems this can cause for graduate employment. Many universities still have policies to reduce the total number of courses offered, premised on the belief that this strategy will increase efficiency.

Project impact and dissemination

Over the course of the fellowship six presentations have been made at conferences and meetings, including to the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE), the Higher Education Research Society of Australasia (HERDSA), the Ako Aotearoa Academy of Tertiary Teaching Excellence (Ako Academy) and the Western Australian Network for Dissemination (WAND). The complete list is available in Appendix G: Outputs and dissemination.

Staff from 16 universities have engaged with the fellowship in some way, and the core groups for each discipline cluster include academics, professional associations and relevant policy advisory groups in each cluster, see Appendix B for more information.

Note. The database of shareable units was not developed because the number of specialist courses was too limited (one in disability, one in ageing and four in youth work) for this to be needed; a ‘snapshot’ of provision (as of 2017) is included in Appendix I and on the website. In non-specialist courses, the relevant units were at an introductory level and could not have been combined to form a specialist course. It is anticipated that the specialist field working groups will provide information about currently available units in their field.

Chapter 5: Outcomes and recommendations

Outcomes

The fellowship achieved the following outcomes in these key areas.

1. **Trends:** documented the position of three niche social professions, youth work, ageing and disability, and future trends.
2. **Working groups:** established cross-institutional working groups in each discipline, comprised of academics and members of professional bodies and associations.
3. **Models of collaboration:** provided models a schematic outline of collaboration options and a comprehensive discussion of barriers.
4. **Policy barriers:** documented policy barriers and proposed solutions.
5. **University environment:** identified how universities could support and facilitate specialist social professions courses.
6. **Professional associations:** strengthened and affirmed the role of professional associations for maintenance of standards and survival of these three fields of education.

Synthesis

There is a need for better systemic support to ensure the survival of these three disciplines. At minimum, this requires: some modifications to existing university funding mechanisms to make it more attractive for universities to offer these courses, better support within universities to protect courses from predation by larger courses, and stronger promotion of cross-institutional collaboration. Institutional changes need to be matched by increased professionalisation within each of the fields. Professional accreditation has an important role to play in ensuring the relevance, content and standards of specialist academic degrees and in liaising with employers to ensure they are aware of the availability of specialist courses and the benefits of employing specialist graduates.

Trends

All three disciplines have very limited availability across the sector. Enrolments in **youth work** are growing, but availability across Australia has not yet been improved, notwithstanding ongoing negotiations to reinstate a youth work degree in New South Wales, where professionalisation is imminent. Changes to the funding model are required to support more extensive geographic availability of youth work degrees and to ensure that existing provision is maintained.

In **social gerontology** only one specialist course remains, and this is offered by CSU. Enrolments are increasing from a very low base and this course requires support to protect capacity and to retain expertise in the university sector in Australia. There are organised professional and advocacy associations who have a commitment to greater professionalisation, and especially to improved leadership in the sector until professionalisation occurs, and pending the outcomes of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

For **disability**, only one course remains, and this is the Bachelor of Disability and Developmental Education at Flinders University. This course has the capacity to provide the leadership required to support the implementation of the NDIS, to respond to concerns that are informing demands for a Royal Commission into disability services, and to provide a nucleus of expertise in the sector. Enrolments in this course are viable at present, but have declined over the last five years. From a national perspective, this course urgently needs support to protect the sector from loss of capacity. Currently, there does not appear to be a national professional association to support standards, and severe workforce shortages and cost-cutting are weakening the effectiveness of existing quality control mechanisms.

Working groups

Working groups have formed in each discipline to consolidate the disciplines and to promote links between university courses and professional associations. These will support existing courses and look for opportunities to extend the availability of specialist courses through partnerships with other institutions. A list of each of the working group memberships from the symposium in Sydney is available in Appendix B: List of collaborators.

Models of collaboration

Cross-institutional enrolment provides the simplest method to make existing courses of study available to students in more universities. This would strengthen existing courses but there are currently few incentives for universities to collaborate in this way. A more formalised and stable collaborative arrangement could be achieved by joint badging of courses, where partners share the benefits and costs—but once again there are few incentives for universities to enter into these arrangements. It is proving very difficult to implement either of these approaches because of competition engendered in the sector by demand-driven funding. A complicating factor that mitigates against both these approaches is that all the financial benefits and control accrue to the university providing the course. A further problem is that, according to several participants, specialist courses are being discontinued as part of university strategy to reduce the number of courses offered. To counter this, there needs to be modifications to the demand-driven funding model to provide safeguards to prevent course closure, and universities need to be given more incentives to collaborate and to maintain specialist courses that meet social, cultural or employment needs.

An additional option would be to establish a CTC for each specialism, justified by the importance of retaining this expertise and teaching capacity in the Australian higher education sector. CTCs could be loosely modelled on the governance structure of CRCs and could be used to support cross-institutional collaboration to develop multi-institutional specialist teaching and research expertise. Seed funding would be required, and consortia of university teachers and peak bodies for the professions could apply for funding to develop new shared courses, making use of online learning technologies. This would enable groups to establish a dispersed collaborative teaching and research group to deliver and support teaching. The intent would be that this group would become self-supporting from student fees by the end of the period of funded support. Incentives for university collaboration would need to be balanced by the requirements to ensure that income derived from student course fees was primarily spent on teaching-related activities and was not used to support research elsewhere in the universities.

Policy barriers

The linkage between courses offered by universities and employment or social needs is too weak. Mechanisms need to be reintroduced to intervene, where necessary, to support student places in courses for which there is an unmet workforce or social need. If a market-based model is retained, this could be achieved by additional funding to fields of education where there is need. From the analysis of all the evidence collected so far, there is a clearly articulated workforce and social need for undergraduate degrees in these fields of education to survive. Across all three fields, the identified benefits of a degree-qualified workforce included: improvement of leadership and management, capacity to develop and implement models of practice responsive to research and changing expectations, and as part of a strategy to manage risks to service users. There is a substantial willingness to collaborate across institutions and to engage with professional associations. The barriers to collaboration were structural. There are several factors in the current environment making it very difficult for undergraduate specialist social professions courses to survive. Demand-driven funding has fostered competition between universities, and between courses within universities, in ways that are not beneficial to students and do not help universities to meet workforce skills requirements.

University environment

Some universities have responded to demand-driven funding by focusing on economic efficiencies rather than their purposes and social mission. This approach has led to closure of some small specialist courses in the social professions, made possible because, unlike some foreign languages, they were not afforded any special protection. The reduction in availability of social professions courses has reduced student choice, notwithstanding the fact that demand-driven funding has allowed more students to attend university (Larkins, 2015). Changes in university marketing can be attributed to increased competition fostered by demand-driven funding and pressure to increase international recruitment. This has provided advantages to large courses and has allowed them to be falsely presented in ways that promote them as replacements for specialist courses, masking the loss of specialist expertise. This has permitted universities to reduce teaching costs, but in the long term this strategy disadvantages universities because it reduces their specialist research capability and harms graduate employment.

Learning and sustainability

The three main things learned from this fellowship were firstly, that the situation was worse than anticipated; secondly, that change has taken longer than expected; and thirdly, that the policy drivers must be aligned to support change. The fellowship has facilitated the formations of cross-institutional working groups that involve representatives from the professions, within each of the fields of education. The fellowship has also built connections between the fields of education. These networks will carry the work into the future, now the fellowship has finished.

Recommendations

- 1) Establish **Cooperative Teaching Centres** as centres of teaching excellence in specialist social professions disciplines. This will provide seed money for the development of shared teaching resources and will encourage and support cross-institutional collaboration.

Provide **incentives for cross-institutional enrolment** and for **jointly badged courses** where teaching is shared across institutions.

2) **Reclassify courses in these Fields of Education (FoEs)** into the same Commonwealth Government Funding Cluster (CGFC) as allied health or clinical psychology, to align the CGFC decisions with the pedagogic requirements of teaching and social and economic need, as well as future graduate income. This could be achieved at low cost.

3) Include courses from these FoEs in the **protected list of strategically valuable endangered courses** that universities cannot close except with special permission. Monitor and report on the availability and discontinuation of specialist courses across the sector. A nucleus of expertise in each discipline still exists within the Australian university sector, and this provides the basis for more widespread availability of these specialist courses. These currently lack any formal protection (unlike foreign languages with limited availability) and this means that they are very vulnerable to being closed. Once loss has occurred, it will be much harder to reinstate these FoEs. The remaining courses in all three FoEs need immediate protection to reduce the risk of imminent closure. This could be achieved without cost.

4) Support undergraduate enrolment in degree courses in these FoEs. Where there are **skills shortages or unmet social needs** encourage student enrolment through **lower student contribution costs**. This would incur moderate costs but could be discontinued easily if no longer required.

5) Ensure that a higher proportion of **teaching funds are used directly for teaching-related activities**. Where student places are supported by Commonwealth Grants Scheme (CGS), limit the capacity of universities to divert funds away from teaching and student services to support research or other institutional activities not directly related to teaching. This would need to be tightly defined and should also include caps on spending on marketing activities.

6) Instigate or reinstate programs that give **recognition to university teaching that is responsive to social needs, value community service**, and support human wellbeing. This could be achieved by adjusting the criteria for teaching awards.

7) **Adjust university funding mechanisms** to actively support provision of diverse specialist collaborative courses to meet specialist social, cultural and economic needs. Allocate courses in these FoEs to CGFCs that align with pedagogy and real teaching costs. Adjust mechanisms to reduce unhelpful competition between universities that hampers collaboration. This may include incentives for universities to offer courses, incentives for students to enrol in socially valuable courses, or adjustments that reallocate funding from fields of study where there is over-supply of graduates to fields of study where there are graduate shortages.

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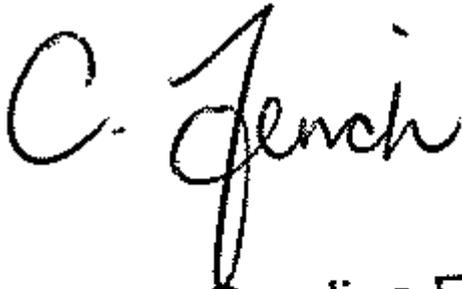
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Appendix A: Certification by Deputy Vice-Chancellor

I certify that all parts of the final report for this OLT fellowship provide an accurate representation of the implementation, impact and findings of the project, and that the report is of publishable quality.

Name: Professor Caroline Finch

Date: 24 March 2019

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C. Finch". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "C" and a long, vertical stroke for the letter "i".

Professor Caroline Finch
Deputy Vice-Chancellor
(Research)
Edith Cowan University

Appendix B: Lists of collaborators

This appendix includes lists of partners, reference group members and working group members

Partners

The initial fellowship partners were:

- 1) Dr Jen Couch, ACU, Course Leader, Youth Work
- 2) Dr Cate Thomas, CSU, Course Coordinator, Social Work
- 3) Professor Kathy Boxall, ECU, Professor of Social Work and Disability Studies
- 4) Professor Mark Hughes SCU, Social Work
- 5) Dr Phil Daughtry, Tabor, Adelaide, Dean of Social Science
- 6) Professor Margaret Sims, UNE, Professor in Early Childhood Education

Reference group members

The initial reference group included: – Professor Kathy Boxall, Social Work, ECU; Dr Tony Henderson, Adjunct A/Professor, Department of Psychiatry, University of Western Australia (UWA) and formerly WA Health Department, Expert, Community Mental Health; Mr Andrew Cumming – CEO Settlement Council, formerly CEO Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC); Mr Dean Williamson – Youth Action, New South Wales, Board Member Advisory Board Member at Australian College of Community & Disability Practitioners (CCDP); Professor Clive Barstow, Dean of Arts and Humanities at Edith Cowan University (ECU). Dr Peter Reynolds, for the Department of Education, was co-opted to join after the project commenced. Dr Tony Henderson retired before the fellowship commenced.

Working group members

The working groups for each field (youth work, aging and disability) include academics, professional associations and relevant policy advisory bodies.

Youth work

Trudi Cooper (Associate Professor, Edith Cowan University (Youth Work) Fellow and programme leader)

Tim Corney (Associate Professor, College of Arts & Education (Youth Work), Victoria University; Youth Workers Association Victoria)

Nikki Hurst (Senior Lecturer, Bachelor of Health and Social Development, Unitech NZ)

Krissy Stapleton (Western Sydney Project Coordinator, Youth Action, also representing Katie Acheson, from the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, who was unable to attend)

Janice Ikiua (Tutor, Bachelor of Youth Development, Weltec NZ)

Disability

Michelle Bellon (Senior Lecturer, College of Nursing and Health Sciences (Disability) Course Coordinator, Flinders University)

Kerry Lante (Lecturer in Interprofessional Communication for Health Human and Disability Service Professionals, Flinders University)

Therese Jones-Mutton (Course Director, Faculty of Arts and Education (Gerontology and Disability), Charles Sturt University)

Stuart Robertson (Lecturer in Community Services, University of New England)

Social gerontology

Peta Cook (Senior Lecturer, Sociology Program Coordinator, specialisation in Aging)

Robin Harvey (Lecturer in Gerontology, Charles Sturt University; Co-convenor Ageing, Workforce and Education Special Interest Group (AWESIG) Australian Association of Gerontology)

Therese Jones-Mutton (Course Director, Faculty of Arts and Education (Gerontology and Disability), Charles Sturt University)

Stuart Robertson (Lecturer in Community Services, University of New England)

Reach of the project

Staff from the following Universities were involved in the Fellowship events or correspondence:

- Australian Catholic University
- Charles Sturt University
- Flinders University
- Griffith University
- RMIT University
- Southern Cross University
- Tabor College (Adelaide)
- Unitech Institute of Technology (N.Z.)
- University of New England
- University of Tasmania
- Victoria University
- Wellington Institute of Technology (N.Z.)
- Murdoch University
- Curtin University
- Central Queensland University
- Griffith University

Professional Associations

The following professional associations were involved through interviews or attendance at the symposium:

- Australian Association of Gerontology
- Council on the Ageing
- National Aged Care Alliance
- National Disability Services
- Youth Action (New South Wales)
- Western Australian Council of Social Services
- Wellington Institute of Technology (N.Z.)
- Youth Workers' Association (Victoria)
- Youth Work South Australia
- Youth Work Western Australia

Appendix C: IMPEL Tool

This shows the post-fellowship intended impact.

Table 6: Post-fellowship IMPEL

Anticipated changes at:	Programme Completion	6 months post-completion	12 months post-completion	24 months post-completion
Team members	Three loosely affiliated groups have formed: Aging Disability Youth Work	Youth Work: negotiations for a youth work degree in New South Wales Disability: stabilise Aging: Stabilise	Informal low-risk collaboration. Joint publication on learning and teaching collaboration	Low-risk teaching and exchange of information Collaboration normalised
Immediate students		Increased cross-institutional enrolment	Maintained	Increased geographic availability of some niche profession courses
Spreading the word	Report and website available	Presentation to professions	Professional bodies take on dissemination	Collaborative publications
Narrow opportunistic adoption		Institutions seek collaboration as alternative to closure		Maintained
Narrow systemic adoption			Collaboration considered for new initiatives	Teaching collaboration is normalised in between partners
Broad opportunistic adoption		Some niche courses in other disciplines seek collaboration	Maintained	International dissemination
Broad systemic adoption	Increase awareness of policy barriers to teaching collaboration	Awareness that policy barriers affect survival of specialist courses	Build support for systemic changes to support niche social professions	Maintained

Appendix D: Evaluator Report

Final Evaluation Report

Achieving economic sustainability for niche social profession courses in the Australian higher education sector

Project Leader: Associate Professor Trudi Cooper

Edith Cowan University

Project Evaluator:

Associate Professor Lynne Roberts
OLT National Teaching Fellow
School of Psychology
Curtin University
Tel: +61 8 9266 7183
Lynne.Roberts@curtin.edu.au

Date: 15 March 2019

Purpose of the Report

This is the final report of the evaluation of the “Achieving economic sustainability for niche social profession courses in the Australian higher education sector” Fellowship, funded by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching in 2016. This report has been prepared to meet the reporting requirements of the Fellowship. The purpose of the evaluation was to evaluate the processes, outputs, outcomes and potential impacts of Associate Professor Trudi Cooper’s National Teaching Fellowship. The evaluation report is based on meetings with the Fellow and a review of a range of project documentation, including the interim and draft final reports prepared by the Fellow for the Department of Education and Training.

Role of the Evaluator

Discussion between the Fellow and the Evaluator at the start of the Fellowship led to an agreement that the Evaluator would have two key roles. The first (formative) role was as a critical friend during the course of the Fellowship. This involved meetings with the Fellow in person and online to discuss progress, issues, and future directions, with additional contact between meetings by phone or email where warranted. The second (summative) role was to prepare a summative evaluation report at the end of the Fellowship, outlining the extent to which Fellowship objectives (raising awareness, developing a collaborative network, developing a nationwide strategy and moving beyond known interest groups) had been achieved and had contributed to the body’s mission along with an assessment of the Fellowship operation and demonstration of high academic standards.

Overview

The Fellowship aimed to develop a nationwide collaborative strategy for niche social profession courses through raising awareness of the need for system-wide actions; developing a collaborative network of stakeholders; developing a nationwide strategy; and mobbing beyond known interest groups. It was apparent early in the Fellowship that the situation for niche social profession courses was significantly worse than anticipated, with the closure of many courses. This required a reorienting of the Fellowship activities away from active course collaborations and towards identifying barriers and possible models of future collaboration. An in-depth analysis of enrolment trends and barriers was undertaken, core collaborations for each of three disciplines (youth work, social gerontology and disability studies) have been developed, and the Fellow has produced possible collaboration models, and a series of recommendations and action plans (see Appendix H: Action plans) to address the decline in niche social profession courses.

Data Used in the Evaluation

The data used to evaluate the Fellowship comprised:

- Meeting notes and correspondence between the Fellow and the Evaluator
- Fellow's diary of contacts (maintained for part of Fellowship only)
- Database of niche social profession courses in Australian Universities created by Fellow
- Summary of verbal feedback from audience following SRHE presentation
- Email feedback from participants following the symposium
- Paper presented by Fellow at 41st HERDSA Annual International Conference in 2018 and later published:
 - Cooper, T. (2018). Student choice and skill shortages: some effects of demand-driven funding. In D. Wache and D. Houston (Eds.), *Research and Development in Higher Education: (Re)Valuing Higher Education*, 41 (pp 25 - 36). Adelaide, Australia, 2-5 July 2018.
- Statement of achievement
- Action plans developed for politicians and policymakers, course coordinators, and professional association
- Interim report prepared by Fellow
- Draft Final Report prepared by Fellow
- Fellowship website (in development)

Project Management and Timeline

The Fellow retained responsibility for managing the Fellowship, supported by Dr Miriam Rose Brooker.

This Fellowship was initially scheduled to begin in July 2016 with a completion date of June 2017. The Fellowship actually commenced in April 2017 and was completed in March 2019. Three extensions to the Fellowship were approved by the Australian Government

Department of Education and Training on 15th February 2018, 10th January 2019 and 7th March 2019. The Fellow's university workload commitments and staffing issues within the School impacted upon both the start date and delays in completing the Fellowship. Further impacting the completion of the Fellowship was the need to significantly change the planned activities after the first phase, as detailed below.

The planned stages of the project were:

1. Program preparation
2. Dissemination for readiness
3. Symposia and webinars
4. Develop collaboration strategy
5. Support collaboration
6. Dissemination

These stages were designed to achieve awareness raising (stages 1 and 2), building relationships between course leaders (stage 3), institutional exploration of options (stages 3 and 4), the development of a database of available courses and collaboration preferences and active support for collaboration (stage 5).

Stage 1 of the Fellowship was focussed on building engagement in the sector through the development of a niche social professions network. The initial consultation phase was scheduled for three months from April to June 2017. A reference group for the Fellowship was established (see Appendix B: List of collaborators, for list of members, comprising three academic members and three members representing government and key professional associations). During this period the Fellow consulted with, and was successful in engaging a range of course coordinators across Australian universities and relevant professional associations. Face-to-face consultations were held with 10 course coordinators from a variety of disciplines, one Pro-Vice Chancellor, two Deans and two Heads of School. Key findings from this initial consultation phase were that the situation for social gerontology and disability studies was worse than had been anticipated, with most specialist courses now closed, accompanied by pessimism about the future, casting doubt over the viability of the Fellowship as planned. The consultation phase was then extended until December 2017 to further explore the viability of the proposed Fellowship activities. During this period further barriers to collaboration between universities on niche social profession courses emerged, including structural reorganisations within universities, and competition within and between universities. A key output from this phase of the research was a conference presentation and related paper published in HERD.

Following completion of Stage 1, the direction of the Fellowship was changed. The rapid decline in undergraduate niche social profession programs required a change in priority from *expansion to survival*. This required a changed focus from *trailing collaborations to identifying and understanding the barriers*. The full reasoning behind these changes are detailed by the Fellow in Chapter 4 of the Final report.

The changing priorities resulted in the decision to undertake a detailed analysis of enrolment trends across the three niche social profession disciplines (results reported in Final report). A symposium was held towards the end of the Fellowship for course

coordinators and representatives of professional associations to review materials and progress and to set future directions. A thematic analysis of interviews with 8 representatives of professional associations and discussion and feedback from the symposium was conducted. Key themes to emerge were the important leadership role of specialist graduates and the need for professionalization in each of the three areas.

Objectives

The planned activities of the Fellowship were to:

- 1) **Raise awareness** of the need for system-wide action on niche courses in general and for niche social professions in particular;
- 2) **Develop a collaborative network** to strengthen cross-institutional relationships between staff offering courses in niche social professions; and strengthen relationships with relevant state and federal professional bodies;
- 3) **Develop a nationwide strategy** that will enable institutions to offer viable programmes for the niche social professions; and
- 4) **Move beyond known interest groups;** Outline issues for consideration by other niche courses in Australian higher education, for example, foreign languages; allied health

The Fellowship has gone some way towards raising awareness of the dire situation of three niche social profession courses (youth work, social gerontology and disability studies) in Australia through the establishment of working groups, a symposium, conference and meeting presentations and an article (see deliverables below). Whilst the Fellow began exploring a range of other niche courses, including careers education, the emphasis has remained on the three professions.

The Fellowship has been successful in developing a small network of academics and professional bodies covering three niche social profession courses (youth work, social gerontology and disability studies), which has now devolved into three working groups, one per profession.

The Fellowship was not successful in developing a nationwide strategy that enabled institutions to offer viable shared programmes for niche social professions. However, through a careful analysis of declining enrolment trends and barriers, and strengthening collaboration between academics and professional bodies, the Fellow has developed action plans, that if actioned by policymakers and politicians, have the potential to reverse the decline in niche social profession courses.

Limited progress has been made in moving beyond the three niche social profession courses (youth work, social gerontology and disability studies). However, a mapping of courses in community mental health, career development and Indigenous studies across Australian universities was completed in 2017 and preliminary discussions were held in the area of career development.

Deliverables

The intended deliverables from this Fellowship were a) a niche social professions network, b) symposia and webinars, c) a brief online presentation of key issues, d) a database to support on-going collaboration and e) formal reporting, presentations and publications.

A niche social profession network has been established in the form of three working groups, for the three discipline areas.

Only one symposium was held, at the end of the Fellowship, and this had a webinar component enabling engagement of those unable to attend in person. This was attended by 7 people in person with a further 6 through the webinar. This one national symposium is significantly less than the planned 2 - 4 symposia and 1 - 3 webinars that were scheduled for early in the Fellowship for major capital cities. These were not deemed viable given the limited number of existing courses and competition within and between universities found during the first stage of the Fellowship.

While a database of niche social profession courses across Australian universities as at 2017 was created by the Fellow (see Appendix I: Sector-wide snapshot of courses), this did not meet the original intention of identifying sharable units. As noted in the Fellow's Final Report, there were insufficient courses or relevant units for this to occur.

The Fellow has met the formal reporting requirements (progress and final reports), has made six presentations and had one article published on Fellowship activities. The high academic standard of these presentations is reflected in the best scholarly paper award at the 2018 HERDSA conference. It should be noted that this paper includes analysis of enrolment trends in, and barriers to availability of, niche social profession courses across Australia, components not originally included in the Fellowship Plan. Further presentations to professions are planned.

Further outputs, supplementary to the original planned deliverables, are:

- Trend data for each of the three professions
- Examination of possible models of collaboration
- Documentation of policy barriers and potential solutions
- A SWOT analysis for each profession
- Recommendations and action plans for policymakers and politicians, course-coordinators and professional associations (see Appendix H: Action plans)

Reference Group and Working Groups

The reference group was established during the first stage of the Fellowship, with some changes to membership throughout the Fellowship (see Appendix B: List of collaborators, for details). The reference group functioned to provide the Fellow with access to networks and to facilitate contact with key individuals.

In addition to the reference group, working groups for youth work, disability studies and social gerontology were formed, comprising members from academia, professional associations and policy advisory bodies (see Appendix B for details).

Dissemination and Impact

Interim findings from the Fellowship have been disseminated to interested parties (reference group and working groups) throughout the project. The findings from the symposium, including the SWOT analysis, have been disseminated to the symposium attendees. Whilst a formal mechanism for feedback from the symposium was not provided, emails, phone calls and texts sent to the Fellow following the symposium indicate it was well-received, with requests for materials and interest expressed in further involvement. In total, the reach of the project has extended to 16 Australian and 2 New Zealand higher education institutions and 10 professional associations. The dissemination of findings throughout the Fellowship have maintained interest and commitment to working together to address the declining availability of niche social profession courses.

Broader dissemination of findings has occurred through six conference and meeting presentations (detailed in Appendix G: Outputs and dissemination). Of note, the presentation at the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) Conference was attended by senior managers in higher education and retired Vice Chancellors. No data has been made available on the number or type of attendees at other presentations. No formal feedback was sought from attendees, but the Fellow advises that common themes in feedback across presentations was that there was low awareness of the declining number of niche social profession courses, that it was viewed as an unintended consequence of changes in higher education, and likely to be problematic beyond Australia. The Fellow was urged by conference attendees to publish her findings to raise awareness of the issue (the first article, based on the HERD conference presentations, has now been published).

The dissemination activities most likely to have impact are occurring at the time of writing this report. Of key importance are the action plans that have been written for policy makers and politicians, course coordinators and professional associations. These provide a concise summary of the 'problem' (declining availability of niche social profession courses in areas where there is demand for a more highly skilled workforce), the causes and consequences of this problem, and the action required to remedy the situation.

The recent development of a website, *Youth Work, Disability and Ageing Futures* (<https://ywdaf.org/>) (still under development at the time of writing this report), will further expand the potential reach of the Fellowship, providing ready access to findings from the Fellowship, copies of conference presentations, the working groups and further resources. As the website has not yet been completed, it is not possible to provide meaningful data on number of 'hits'. The website will be maintained for three years post-Fellowship.

The impact of this Fellowship to date is at the lower stages of the OLT's Impel impact framework. The Fellowship has elevated the Fellow's profile in learning and teaching within her university, across Australia and to a limited extent internationally. The Fellowship has also engaged the Fellow and other course coordinators in three working groups (aging, disability and youth work) increasing collaborations across universities. As detailed above, dissemination activities have begun the process of 'Spreading the word', and this will continue with the further development of the website and future planned presentations.

It is too early to judge whether the Fellowship will result in opportunistic or systemic adoption in the form of being used as the basis for turning around the decline in niche social profession courses. The Fellow is confident there is a nucleus of people in each of the three areas (youth work, disability studies and social gerontology) to carry things forward. The action plans; if acted upon by politicians, policymakers, associations and universities; have the potential to effect change. While the Fellow is committed to further dissemination and the working groups are continuing to collaborate and can push for change, achieving this change will require commitment from professional bodies, politicians, policy-makers and universities.

In summary, the original purpose of the Fellowship, to improve the availability of specialist degrees in youth work, aging and disability, has not currently been met, and doubts remain over whether this is achievable in the current university climate.

Budget

The Fellow advises that all funds have been spent or committed at the time of preparing this report.

Conclusion

This has been a challenging Fellowship, with the state of niche social profession courses in Australian universities significantly worse than anticipated, requiring a refocusing of Fellowship activities. While not all of the original objectives of the Fellowship have been able to be met, the Fellow has comprehensively mapped course enrolments across three niche social professions (youth work, social gerontology and disability studies) and identified policy barriers to collaboration on courses for these disciplines. Three cross-institutional workgroups have been established, one for each discipline. She has examined three possible models for future collaborations, and presented a series of recommendations and action plans to reverse the trend of declining niche social profession courses in Australia. Dissemination of the findings from the Fellowship is ongoing, with a website under development and planned future presentations. The Fellow is continuing to collaborate with the working groups, with future teleconferences already planned. The Fellow is to be commended for commencing the action to reverse the decline in niche social profession courses, with further support from politicians, governments, universities and professional associations required to effect long-term change.

Appendix E: Ethics

This appendix includes documentation of instruments approved by the Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee

Ethics Approval



APPLICATION FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

SECTION 1 – PROJECT DETAILS

1.1 TITLE	
PROJECT NUMBER	16094
PROJECT NAME	Achieving economic sustainability for niche social profession courses in the Australian higher education sector
PROJECT SHORT NAME	OLT Fellowship
PROJECT STATUS	Approved

1.2 DURATION			
WHOLE PROJECT	FROM:	1 July 2016	TO: 31 December 2017
DATA COLLECTION PHASE	FROM:	1 November 2016	TO: 30 September 2017

1.3 APPLICATION TYPE		
MULTICENTRE PROJECT	PERMITS/LICENCES REQUIRED	EXECUTIVE APPROVAL
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

1.4 STAFF PROJECT	
<i>Is this a staff research project?</i>	Yes
<i>Is this project funded by a grant?</i>	Yes

NAME OF GRANT	STATUS OF GRANT	GRANT NUMBER
OLT Fellowship	Approved	G1002464

Information Letters

Information letter: Course leaders, academic staff, expert advisors



A/Professor Trudi Cooper
School of Arts and Humanities
Edith Cowan University
270 Joondalup Drive
JOONDALUP WA 6027

Information Letter to Participants (Course Leaders/ academic staff/ expert advisor)

Achieving economic sustainability for niche social profession courses in the Australian higher education sector - a nationwide collaborative strategy

We would like to invite you to participate in an interview, as part of a research project designed to develop a nationwide collaborative strategy to improve economic sustainability and geographic availability of niche social profession courses. You have been selected as a potential participant because you are a course leader or staff member of a niche professional course, or are an expert advisor in this area.

This research project is being funded by Australian Government Department of Education and Training and conducted at Edith Cowan University. The Project Leader is Associate Professor Trudi Cooper, of the School of Arts and Humanities at Edith Cowan University, who can be contacted at the address given at the end of this letter.

Description of the Research

The purpose of the project is to develop a nationwide collaborative strategy to improve economic sustainability and geographic availability of niche social profession courses. Niche courses in social professions meet specialist social needs in disability services, social gerontology, community mental health, career development, and youth work. Small courses have become expensive for single institutions to offer, and availability of these important and valuable programmes has declined despite continuing need for specialist graduates. This project seeks to raise awareness of the need for urgent system-wide action; establish a network of colleagues to help resolve these challenges; work collaboratively to find practical arrangements to improved availability of these courses; develop a nationwide collaborative strategy that will support other institutions to offer viable programmes; document successful strategies for consideration by other niche courses in Australian higher education.

I am inviting you to take part in an interview about your perceptions of the benefits, barriers and strategies to improve availability of niche courses in social professions. I anticipate that the interview will take up to an hour. The interview will be recorded on a digital recorder. The data you provide will be combined with interview data gathered from other people and presented in a format that does not permit you to be identified, (unless you would like to be identified). Your employing organisation will not be identified. There will be no risk to you in taking part in this project.

The interviews will be conducted at a pre-arranged time and place that is convenient to you. The information you provide will enable your perceptions to contribute to discussions about professional education and the sustainability of niche social professions within Australian higher education.

Data will be kept on an ECU computer and password protected (documents, transcriptions and audio files). As far as possible, all material will be collected and stored digitally. It is not planned that any confidential physical documents will be collected. Names in transcript will be removed unless you choose to be identified. Consent forms will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at ECU. Data will only be accessible by the Principal Researcher and the Project Manager. Data will be stored for five years, then securely destroyed.

If you would like to take part in this research, please retain this information letter and sign the consent form attached. Participation in this project is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. After information you provide has been synthesised with information from other people it will not be possible to withdraw your information from this study. Non-participation will not disadvantage you in any way.

Your contribution is much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,



Trudi Cooper

If you have any questions or require any further information about the research project, please contact me, Associate Professor Trudi Cooper at Edith Cowan University, 270 Joondalup Drive, JOONDALUP WA 6027. Phone 6304 5637, or by email at t.cooper@ecu.edu.au

If you have any concerns or complaints about the research project and wish to talk to an independent person, you may contact: Research Ethics Officer, Edith Cowan University, 270, Joondalup Drive, JOONDALUP WA 6027

Phone: 6304 2170

Fax: 6304 2661

Email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

Information letter: Professional bodies



A/Professor Trudi Cooper
School of Arts and Humanities
Edith Cowan University
270 Joondalup Drive
JOONDALUP WA 6027

Information Letter to Professional Bodies

Achieving economic sustainability for niche social profession courses in the Australian higher education sector - a nationwide collaborative strategy

We would like to invite you to participate in an interview, as part of a research project designed to develop a nationwide collaborative strategy to improve economic sustainability and geographic availability of niche social profession courses. You have been selected as a potential participant because you are a course leader or staff member of a niche professional course, or are an expert advisor in this area.

This research project is being funded by Australian Government Department of Education and Training and conducted at Edith Cowan University. The Project Leader is Associate Professor Trudi Cooper, of the School of Arts and Humanities at Edith Cowan University, who can be contacted at the address given at the end of this letter.

Description of the Research

The purpose of the project is to develop a nationwide collaborative strategy to improve economic sustainability and geographic availability of niche social profession courses. Niche courses in social professions meet specialist social needs in disability services, social gerontology, community mental health, career development, and youth work. Small courses have become expensive for single institutions to offer, and availability of these important and valuable programmes has declined despite continuing need for specialist graduates. This project seeks to raise awareness of the need for urgent system-wide action; establish a network of colleagues to help resolve these challenges; work collaboratively to find practical arrangements to improved availability of these courses; develop a nationwide collaborative strategy that will support other institutions to offer viable programmes; document successful strategies for consideration by other niche courses in Australian higher education.

I am inviting you to take part in an interview about your perceptions of the benefits, barriers and strategies to improve availability of niche courses in social professions. I anticipate that the interview will take up to an hour. The interview will be recorded on a digital recorder. The data you provide will be combined with interview data gathered from other people and presented in a format that does not permit you to be identified, (unless you would like to be identified). Your employing organisation will not be identified. There will be no risk to you in taking part in this project.

The interviews will be conducted at a pre-arranged time and place that is convenient to you. The information you provide will enable your perceptions to contribute to discussions about professional education and the sustainability of niche social professions within Australian higher education.

Data will be kept on an ECU computer and password protected (documents, transcriptions and audio files). As far as possible, all material will be collected and stored digitally. It is not planned that any confidential physical documents will be collected. Names in transcript will be removed unless you choose to be identified. Consent forms will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at ECU. Data will only be accessible by the Principal Researcher and the Project Manager. Data will be stored for five years, then securely destroyed.

If you would like to take part in this research, please retain this information letter and sign the consent form attached. Participation in this project is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. After information you provide has been synthesised with information from other people it will not be possible to withdraw your information from this study. Non-participation will not disadvantage you in any way.

Your contribution is much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,



Trudi Cooper

If you have any questions or require any further information about the research project, please contact me, Associate Professor Trudi Cooper at Edith Cowan University, 270 Joondalup Drive, JOONDALUP WA 6027. Phone 6304 5637, or by email at t.cooper@ecu.edu.au

If you have any concerns or complaints about the research project and wish to talk to an independent person, you may contact: Research Ethics Officer, Edith Cowan University, 270, Joondalup Drive, JOONDALUP WA 6027

Phone: 6304 2170

Fax: 6304 2661

Email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

Consent Form



Associate Professor Trudi Cooper
School Arts and Humanities
Edith Cowan University
270 Joondalup Drive
JOONDALUP WA 6027
Phone: 6304 5637
Fax: 6304 5833

Consent Form

Achieving economic sustainability for niche social profession courses in the Australian higher education sector - a nationwide collaborative strategy

This research project is being funded by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training. The Chief Investigator for this project is Associate Professor Trudi Cooper, of the School of Arts and Humanities at Edith Cowan University.

I confirm that:

- I have been provided with a copy of the information letter which explains the study
- I have read the information letter
- I have had opportunities to ask questions about the interview and the project and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction
- I understand what the study is about and what I will be asked to do
- I know I can contact the research team if I have any further questions
- I know that what I say is being used only for the purposes of this research, which is to improve Australian Higher Education
- I agree to the researcher recording what I say on a digital recorder
- I know that I will be asked for my views on one occasion (and more if I offer)
- I know my identity will not be revealed unless I agree
- I am free to withdraw at any time and do not need to give a reason
- I freely agree to take part in this research project

If you agree to take part in this project, please indicate your consent by signing below

Name

.....

Signature

.....
Date
.....

Interview Questions

Initial questions

Interview questions to course leaders/ coordinators or nominated representatives.
Conversational style of interviewing

1. Discussion about **current and previous and future** social profession courses:
 - a. Which profession social professions courses does your university offer?
 - b. Are there any courses that used to be offered, but are no longer offered?
 - c. Are you planning any future courses?
 - d. Are there any courses you would like to have available but cannot offer?
2. Identification of **benefits/ advantages** of cross institutional collaboration
 - a. What benefits?
 - b. Benefits for whom?
 - c. Who are the stakeholders and what benefits?
3. Questions about **risks/barriers/concerns** to collaboration
 - a. What risks/ barriers
 - b. Potential loses/obstacles
 - c. What stakeholder losses/ who loses?
4. Questions about **how** barriers might be overcome/ risks minimised /collaboration achieved
 - a. What could we do to overcome barriers/ reduce risks?
 - b. What could you offer?
 - c. What would you want?
 - d. Who else would need to act?
 - e. Next steps?

5. Any other questions, comments or observations or anything else it is important to consider?

Additional questions

Questions to be asked of professional bodies (disability, social gerontology and youth work):

1. In view of the current policy environment (NDIS or the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety), how do you envisage Universities contributing to improvements in the provision of niche social profession courses?
2. From your point of view, what would be the value of an undergraduate degree in aged care (or disability care), and how would it complement the Certificate IV offering?
3. What are your campaign priorities for the upcoming election? Do these include workforce upskilling or education?

Appendix F: Themes from interviews and symposium

Interview Analysis

Seven interviews including eight participants were conducted with professional association representatives from around Australia between January 23rd and February 14th 2019. Social gerontology and disability were represented by three professional associations (one representative covered both areas) and youth work was represented by two professional associations. All interviews were conducted by telephone.

Participants were asked three main questions: 1) In view of the current policy environment, how do you envisage universities contributing to improvements in the provision of niche social profession courses; 2) From your point of view, what would be the value of an undergraduate degree and how would it complement the Certificate IV/VET offering; and, 3) What are your campaign priorities for the upcoming national election and do they include workforce upskilling or education?

Table 7 (below) provides a summary of the main themes across all professional associations and interview questions. Under each theme, points of commonality and difference within each professional association area are identified (i.e., social gerontology, disability and youth work).

Table 7: Interview themes by professional association area

Theme 1: There are gaps in the curriculum and training pathways between TAFE/VET and Universities
Aged Care: The Cert IV can be used as a pathway, but it needs to have more of a theoretical framework as it is too practical. Technical knowledge is also needed. Aged care is a growth industry and an undergraduate degree would eventually lead to post-graduate studies and more quality research in this field. Courses need to include health science elements as well as business and management skills; this is a role for universities. Courses need to move into the space of enablement and wellness. Universities need to acknowledge VET programmes (Diplomas, etc.) and students need to be given credit for them.
Disabilities: Organisations need practice leadership, people with a good knowledge of behaviour support etc. There is a real need to provide skills at the clinical end of the scale. The sector needs people with degrees in management/supervision. VET courses teach about what

standards are, but not how to manage. Senior staff or managers tend to do an MBA but they need qualifications in a specialist area and to understand the social determinants of disability. They need tertiary qualifications.
Vs.
Organisations aren't looking for people to gain further qualifications beyond TAFE/VET in disabilities. They don't necessarily need full undergraduate qualifications.
Youth Work: The VET diploma is competency based and behavioural, it's not theoretical. It's relatively weak and so are the graduates that come out of it. The degree is a much better qualification, it's three years, there is a theoretical knowledge base and placements and the opportunity to reflect in both contexts and this is consistent with youth work as a pedagogical practice. In terms of access to university degrees, the diploma is not as important as it once was, there are alternative ways to access the degree.

Theme 2: There is a lack of available workers as well as a shortage of skills
Aged Care: We need to focus on workforce upskilling and education for the aged care sector, particularly the quality of care and the quality of workers in the field. There is a lack of available and interested workers in the field and aged care residents experience difficulties understanding overseas workers. Because people are staying in their homes longer there is the need for more specialised, intensive and individualized care.
Disabilities: There is a skills shortage in practice leadership and management of service delivery. Member organisations are having trouble attracting and retaining staff because there are not enough workers and this leads to no minimum qualifications being required, especially in rural and remote areas.
Vs.
Youth Work: We participated in a campaign to put the Cert IV/Diploma of Youth Work on a register in the state as a fee-free course, which means that it is more possible for more youth workers to graduate. We have also focused on upskilling around the qualifications of workers, especially in the juvenile justice system, out-of-home care and residential care. There is a mandatory minimum qualification set. There are a range of ways that we've been encouraging government and working with them to upskill the minimum qualifications.

Theme 3: Partnerships and communication channels are needed between universities and industry/professional bodies

Aged Care: An industry council including academics and service providers needs to be established to develop a quality framework for aged care. It's important to build industry partnerships that have manager support. There is the opportunity for people studying diplomas, those in the senior years of undergraduate courses, and post-graduate students, to work with industry.

Disabilities: There are some good university units here and there and they need to be knitted together. Collaboration is needed to make sure the curriculum is consistent between universities. It's important to build industry partnerships that have manager support. There is the opportunity for people studying diplomas, those in the senior years of undergraduate courses, and post-graduate students, to work with industry.

Youth Work: Engaging with professional associations can provide a process for discussing the subjects that are taught and the number of hours of placement etc., that would lead to endorsement of the degree course. The importance of a strong university training aligned to what the profession is, what employers are looking for and what young people need. It's a continuous process and the role of universities is to create the education needed and to participate in the critical reflection on youth work as a profession.

Theme 4: The pace of change in the industries/professions

Aged Care: Universities need to be across changes in government policy and the implications for practice/teaching.

Disabilities: Staff come through the ranks with the experiences of the past. This doesn't mean that they are in tune with new models of care.

Theme 5: Quality care/practice and standards are a concern

Aged Care: We tend to ignore the needs of minority groups, particularly Indigenous groups, those from non-English backgrounds and LGBTQI. Universities can assist their students in caring for these groups.

Disabilities: With consumer-directed care models, consumers are not always able to judge quality or standards of care. There is the issue of how to measure quality and standards in frontline services.

Vs.

Youth Work: Professional roles come with a standard of education, and a standard of knowledge that's required to practice. Universities are key in that process because that's where there is the time and capacity to communicate the importance of all aspects of a profession, the concepts, and the ability to clinically reflect. The professionalisation of youth work is about quality standards, quality of practice and consistency of intervention.

Theme 6: The value of university level education is that it provides a critical approach to the issues and policy

Aged Care: The role of universities is to help students get an overview, and to investigate the broader issues.

Disabilities: Health-related qualifications don't include the policy/political and social change understandings around trauma and the justice system. There is the need to connect organisational and systems models.

Youth Work: VET level qualifications are excellent at preparing people for doing instrumental activities but a degree level programme equips students to deliver services, to critically evaluate their value, and to have a more structural and sociological perspective on social issues (emancipatory approach). In the undergraduate degree there is more time to fully develop those concepts that prepare youth workers for not only the job that they will do when they graduate but also that jobs that they will do later, since they're trained to operate in a variety of settings.

Theme 7: University level education underscores the importance of the profession and raises community awareness

Aged Care: At the moment careers in aged care are undervalued because a TAFE qualification is seen as a second best to doing an undergraduate degree.

Vs.

Youth Work: In an endorsed youth work degree, you must have lecturers that have a degree in youth work and have practices as youth workers. It's important that universities prioritise the funding and support from niche social professions like youth work even though it may not be as lucrative in terms of level of return for the university. Youth work and community work and other niche professions are important professions in our community and the financial value of those professions is quite high in terms of managing a range of social issues, even though it's difficult to calculate and it doesn't necessarily offer that level of return to the university.

Theme 8: Economic and political forces influence the employment of highly qualified or tertiary trained staff

Disabilities: NDIS doesn't allocate funds for higher paid staff commensurate with tertiary education. People with lower levels of disability are choosing people without qualifications to support them and choosing staff with similar values/likes. People with higher needs or complex needs are not catered for in this policy environment.

Vs.

Youth Work: What we're trying to communicate through all our work in the professionalisation of youth work is to get people to recognise the value that a youth work intervention has and what's special and unique to a youth work intervention as opposed to something else that a young person might experience at that time. When we talk about appropriate funding it's about encouraging the government to listen to that narrative, to encourage the government to look at the journey travelled and the change that has happened as a result of those interventions and to fund the programs that do that well. If the funding we get is fairly reductionist in its approach, just counting the number of people that we see rather than the change that we've made, then it erodes our ability as a professional association to point youth workers towards greater quality standards.

SWOT analysis for specialist social professions

SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analyses were conducted for each of the FoEs by participants at the Sydney symposium on specialist social professions.

SWOT analysis for youth work

Table 8: SWOT Youth Work Undergraduate Education (FoE 090505)

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Code of ethics • States that have professional body working with universities and peak bodies • Employers demand the qualifications before employing • Raises profile of Youth Workers • State-based regulation, for example, minimum qualification (Cert IV) • Regulation: Chaplains in schools have a low benchmark • Integration of TAFE and University courses 	<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other states to learn from states working well with peak and professional bodies • University in New South Wales to offer Youth Work • Promote to high school students and local communities • International recognition • Talk about risk around minimum qualifications • Skills audits
<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Code of ethics is different in every state. For example, Victoria, South Australia, and Western Australia have a professional body, whereas the other states don't • States that don't have a professional body have lower recognition of Youth Work • Some universities only have Youth Work as a post-graduate option • Youth Work diploma is very generic (youth work elective) • No national body, unified approach (very state-based) 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making everything generic, for example, 'group work' • Making placements generic too

What surprised you?

The youth work group were surprised about:

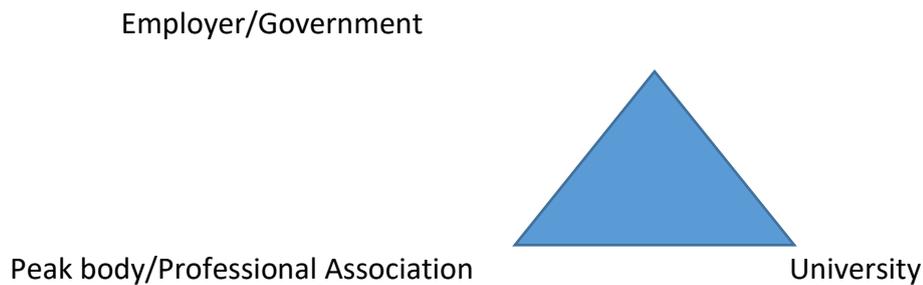
- Not many youth work undergraduates

Achieving economic sustainability for niche social profession courses in the Australian higher education sector

- N2: 2X bachelor level programs
- With professionalization, hoped for increase in students
- Not getting the number of enrolments needed
- Nation certificate to national diploma in youth work

What needs to happen to redress inequalities in current power relationships?

- Setting up endorsement/accreditation process



Outcomes:

- Protects specialisation, e.g., youth work
- Quality assurance, e.g., teachers/youth workers
- Minimum standards/graduate employment cap
- Employment protections, e.g., minimum qualifications, minimum pay

SWOT analysis for disability

Table 9: SWOT Disability undergraduate degrees

STRENGTHS	OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible delivery • Flinders' course is accredited with professional association • Multi-disciplinary approaches • Peak organisation (DIA) is changing the landscape for graduates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short courses as a 'taste or pathway' to different courses • Maintaining generic foundational knowledge in courses – promote content or assessment task that introduces them to specialised areas • To promote disability more • Being agile is important • DIA are looking to accredit other courses • Need for graduates to be able to be adaptive, entrepreneurial, looking into specialist skills could be too narrow. Important of frameworks for

	<p>synthesising information, e.g., Melbourne model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of DIA degree level as an important distinction • Rural and remote – leveraging off the requirements we all have on offer for workforce. Let G8 offer generic degrees and have other focus on specialty. Also, demographics of our universities mean that mature aged predominate and have some idea about what they want to do • NDIS – graduates private practice • Professional Association (AASW, Physio specialist training, OT) endorsement of programs and titling process <p>Value of both Grad Cert & degrees – being offered together doesn't diminish lower degree</p>
<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sociology as a discipline is not professionalised • Data for evaluating statistics • Lack of awareness • Tensions between health and holistic care • In states other than South Australia, lack of recognition of degrees in the sector 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health focus versus social models • Minimum required from disability support is not just a Cert IV – demand is driving down the requirements as a result of the NDIS

SWOT analysis for social gerontology

Table 10: SWOT Social Gerontology undergraduate degrees

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-disciplinary focus and breadth which is necessary for an aging population • Older people's contributions, UN and baby boomer self-advocacy growth • Interdisciplinary leadership in many fields 	<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the post-graduate level, interdisciplinary leadership in many fields • Broad community • Ageing policy → picture/age-friendly communities, etc • ACR Commission – could have input to broaden • AAG input to the Royal Commission on ageing policy, promotion and how best (widening e.g., positive)
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professions advocating for gerontology education – needs work to get this to happen • Professional associations formal recognition of post-graduate qualifications, e.g., AASW College, APA (Physio_ - titling for gerontology specific physiotherapists) • Regional universities can offer specialist courses to meet specific workforce needs – focus on these • Model of universities working with employers/peak organisations to tailor introductory education • Aged care workers with experience plus Diploma/Cert IV's can go into Graduate Certificate – responsive to career in Gerontology, leadership needs and costs of study • UTAS wicking model [Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre] – MOOC → Bachelor of Dementia • Education to gain knowledge, e.g., carers, family members, community members • Mapping courses to integrate better • MOOC's opportunities and challenges, costly • Collaboration to pressure government and employers, peak organisation to support/fund appropriate education
<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data (ASCED codes are not inclusive of all courses of relevance) • Degree level – is it appropriate to the field? No accreditation for social gerontology. • Where social gerontology is aligned in the university – inconsistencies between health, nursing, social work, etc. • Ageism – Within universities and the community • Professions not mandating ageing as part of courses 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ageism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Within universities – lack of career pathways and undervaluing social gerontology as a specialist field of knowledge ○ Community ○ Industry – undervaluing social gerontology as a specialist field of knowledge, lack of support to employees for education in gerontology • Narrow aged care focus (e.g., Royal Commission), government attention

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [non-]Inclusion of specialist discipline/theoretical content from non-professionalised groups like sociology? • Lack of current career pathways for aged care workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low level of qualifications required for aged care • Collapsing/conflating ageing and disability disadvantages both groups • Post-grad – completion of courses slow/challenges due to workload etc. as well as study • Continued low wages of aged care workers, aged care nurses, publicly employed health professions of social and community workers
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Appendix G: Outputs and dissemination

Publications

Cooper, T. (2018). 'Student choice and skill shortages: some effects of demand-driven funding.' Paper presented at the *HERDSA Conference*, Adelaide, 2nd-5th July 2018, <http://www.herdsa.org.au/publications/conference-proceedings/research-and-development-higher-education-re-valuing-higher-2>

This paper won the best scholarly paper award.

Conference presentations

Cooper, T. (2018). '[Engaging Teaching, inspiring learning: Universities after Industry 4.0.](#)' At *Talking Teaching 2018*, Education Conference, Christchurch, New Zealand Nov 29th-30th 2018.

Cooper, T. (2018). '[Some unintended effects of demand-driven funding on student choice and graduate employment.](#)' At *Talking Teaching 2018*, Education Conference, Christchurch, New Zealand Nov 29th-30th 2018.

Cooper, T. (2017). '[Discourses of expectations: how should universities respond to students, employers and society?](#)' *Society for Research into Higher Education Annual Research Conference 2017*, Celtic Manor, Newport, Wales: December 6th -8th 2017.

Cooper, T. (2017). '[Specialist courses: social need, employers' expectations, student demand and universities' interests—some conundrums](#)' *Society for Research into Higher Education Annual Research Conference 2016*, Celtic Manor, Newport, Wales: December 6th -8th 2017.

Cooper, T. (2016). '[Freedom and control: the implications of demand-driven university funding in Australia for student choice: a case study of Australian social professions](#)' *Society for Research into Higher Education Annual Research Conference 2016*, Celtic Manor, Newport, Wales: December 7th -9th 2016.

Meetings

Western Australian Network for Dissemination (WAND) sharing day, Murdoch University, Thursday 10th November 2016 ([see poster](#)).

Cooper, T. (2018). Declining availability of specialist courses in social professions: adverse effects of demand-driven funding. At, The Australian Learning and Teaching Fellows Forum, Christchurch, New Zealand Nov 28th 2018.

Symposium/ webinar

Held in Sydney on Monday February 4th 2019 (see program).

Poster

The [poster](#) is available on the website <https://ywdaf.org> under publications

Achieving economic sustainability for niche social profession courses in the Australian higher education sector - a nationwide collaborative strategy

OVERVIEW

This Fellowship seeks to develop a nationwide collaborative strategy to improve economic sustainability and geographic availability of niche social profession courses. Niche courses in social professions meet specialist social needs in disability services, social gerontology, community mental health, and youth work. Small courses have become expensive for single institutions to offer, and availability of these important and valuable programmes has declined despite continuing need for specialist graduates. To improve learning opportunities for students and achieve collaboration, I will work with colleagues and professional bodies through my national networks to:

1. Raise awareness of the need for urgent system-wide action;
2. Establish a network of colleagues to help resolve these challenges;
3. Work with these colleagues to find practical collaboration arrangements to improved availability of these courses;
4. Develop a nationwide collaborative strategy that will support other institutions to offer viable programmes;
5. Document successful strategies for consideration by other niche courses in Australian higher education.

DISCIPLINE FOCUS

Specialist social professions, for example: disability, social gerontology, youth work, community mental health, Indigenous services and career development.

COLLABORATING INSTITUTIONS

Edith Cowan University, Australian Catholic University, University of New England, Queensland University of Technology, Charles Sturt University, Southern Cross University, RMIT University, Tabor (Adelaide).

Associate Professor Trudi Cooper

Australian Learning and Teaching Fellow
Course Leader, Youth Work, Leader Social Program Innovation, Research and Evaluation group
School of Arts and Humanities, Edith Cowan University, Joondalup Campus
Email: t.cooper@ecu.edu.au

Materials are available on the programme website at <<https://ywdaf.org>>

Appendix H: Action plans

There are four action plans, one for each of the following stakeholder groups: politicians and policy makers; professional associations, employers, policy advisory groups, and lobby groups; university managers; and, course coordinators.

Action plan for politicians and policy makers

This action plan is intended for politicians and policy makers who are interested in youth work, disability and aging policy, workforce planning or higher education policy and planning.

Problem

The availability of specialist undergraduate degree courses in youth work, aging and disability has declined over the last 15 years, as the demand for a more highly skilled workforce in each of these areas has grown. There are now insufficient specialist degree courses available in Australian universities.

The problem is multi-causal. To reverse this trend will require concerted action many stakeholders including by:

- **politicians and federal government policy makers;**
- **senior managers and strategic planners in universities;**
- **professional associations, advisory and lobby groups and employers** in each of these fields;
- **university course coordinators**

Consequences

For politicians and policy makers the loss of undergraduate specialist degrees in social professions means

- A loss of **leadership to implement social policy**
- A loss of expertise and a **risk of low service standards**, with potentially for further Royal Commissions to investigate standards and poor service quality
- University undergraduate courses overly responsive to student demand (that can be manipulated by advertising) and **insufficiently responsive to workforce needs**. The market is not operating to redress this balance.
- This is leading to a worsening match between graduate skills and workforce requirements and an **on-going reliance on skilled migration** to cover skill shortfall

Causes of problems

Politicians and policy makers can address some of the causes of these problem

- Youth work, aging and disability courses (and social work) are **underfunded** because they have been placed in a Commonwealth Government Funding Cluster that does not match costs of required pedagogy (especially practicum)

Achieving economic sustainability for niche social profession courses in the Australian higher education sector

- Demand-driven funding (capped or uncapped) does not adequately link undergraduate degree course availability to **workforce needs**
- Overly cumbersome TEQSA processes which means that universities have **high indirect compliance costs** if they offer small-enrolment specialist courses
- Current demand-driven funding policy (capped or uncapped) promotes **unhelpful competition** between and within universities, which discourages cross-institutional collaboration and rewards universities that fill courses irrespective of workforce or social needs
- University **league tables and a reduction in research funding** mean universities are directing teaching revenue to support research, which provides an incentive to offer only the most profitable courses.

Actions required by politicians and policy makers

Each of the causes of the problem could be remedied as follows

- **Underfunding:** move these courses immediately to CGFC 5, with pedagogically similar courses (like clinical psychology or with allied health) which have similar costs
- **Better linkage to workforce needs:** provide incentives for students to enrol in these courses by **lowering the student contribution** (and compensating through additional government funding). If university places are capped, **direct extra commonwealth support towards areas of high workforce demand** (by providing more places) and do not permit these to be re-allocated to other courses. **Require universities to gain permission** before they can close (as is already required for some other low-availability specialist courses).
- **Compliance costs:** so compliance requirements do not act as a disincentive to provision of specialist courses **simplify TEQSA compliance requirements** for lower enrolment courses
- **Unhelpful competition:** for niche specialist courses only, **establish Cooperative Teaching Centres** (modelled on the Cooperative Research Centres) to promote cross-institutional collaboration between universities and collaboration with professional associations to develop shared teaching materials and shared teaching capacity
- **Use of teaching funds to support research:** provide **extra support for university research**, and **ring-fence teaching revenue** from commonwealth supported places to ensure it is spent on teaching activities and student support. Apply appropriate criteria for full-fee paying courses to ensure this does not distort the provision of places.

Action plan for professional association policy advisors, employers and lobby groups

This action plan is intended for professional association policy advisors, employers and lobby groups who are interested in youth work, disability and aging policy, workforce planning or higher education policy and planning.

Problem

The availability of specialist undergraduate degree courses in youth work, aging and disability has declined over the last 15 years, as the demand for a more highly skilled workforce in each of these areas has grown. There are now insufficient specialist degree courses available in Australian universities.

The problem is multi-causal. To reverse this trend will require concerted action many stakeholders including by:

- **politicians and federal government policy makers;**
- **senior managers and strategic planners in universities;**
- **professional associations, advisory and lobby groups and employers** in each of these fields;
- **university course coordinators**

This sheet provides an action plan for professional associations, policy advisors, employers and lobby groups.

Consequences

For professional organisations, employers and lobby groups any further loss of undergraduate specialist degrees in social professions would mean

- A loss of **research and leadership** expertise on youth work, disability and aging
- A **transfer of education and training responsibilities** on to employers if graduates are not available
- A worsening match between **graduate skills and workforce requirements** and an on-going **reliance on skilled migration** to cover skill shortfall
- A **risk of low service standards**, with potentially a failure to be able to address the recommendation for change that have been /will be handed down by various Royal Commissions to investigate standards, poor service quality, and service failures

Causes of problems

Professional organisations, employers and lobby groups can respond to the causes of these problem

- There are too few specialist university degrees. One of the reasons that universities have been less keen to respond to workforce need for youth work, aging and disability courses (and social work) is that they are **underfunded** because they have been placed in a Commonwealth Government Funding Cluster that does not match costs of delivery

- Under currently funding arrangements universities are rewarded if they respond to student demand but not to workforce demand. This is unbalanced because undergraduate degree course availability is not linked to **workforce needs**.
- University **league tables and a reduction in research funding** mean universities are directing teaching revenue to support research, which provides an incentive to offer only the most profitable courses.

Actions required by professional associations, policy organisation, employers and lobby groups

Professional association, employers, and lobby groups can take actions to ensure others address the problems identified

- **Underfunding:** lobby the federal government to move these courses immediately to CGFC 5, with pedagogically similar courses (like clinical psychology or with allied health) which have similar costs;
- **Better linkage to workforce needs:** lobby government to provide incentives for students to enrol in these courses by **lowering the student contribution** (and compensating through additional government funding). If university places are capped, **direct extra commonwealth support towards areas of high workforce demand** (by providing more places) and do not permit these to be re-allocated to other courses.
- Lobby government to **require universities to gain permission** before they can close (as is already required for some other low-availability specialist courses).
- **Supporting improved availability of courses:** lobby government to **establish Cooperative Teaching Centres** (modelled on the Cooperative Research Centres) to promote cross-institutional collaboration between universities and collaboration with professional associations and develop shared teaching materials and shared teaching capacity that can be rolled out nationally
- **Use of teaching funds:** lobby government to provide **extra support for university research**, and **ring-fence teaching revenue** from commonwealth supported places to ensure it is spent on teaching activities and student support.
- **Collaboration:** collaborate with university **course coordinators, university consultative committees** offer input to the **working groups** to ensure that curriculum and research remains relevant to the needs of the fields.

Action plan for university managers

This action plan is intended for university managers who are interested in youth work, disability and aging policy, or graduate employability.

Problem

The availability of specialist undergraduate degree courses in youth work, aging and disability has declined over the last 15 years, as the demand for a more highly skilled workforce in each of these areas has grown. There are now insufficient specialist degree courses in these fields available in Australian universities.

The problem is multi-causal. To reverse this trend will require concerted action many stakeholders including by:

- **politicians and federal government policy makers;**
- **senior managers and strategic planners in universities;**
- **professional associations, advisory and lobby groups and employers** in each of these fields;
- **university course coordinators**

This sheet provides an action plan for university managers.

Consequences

In the short-term, there may appear to be immediate benefits from closing specialist degrees, because the federal government has unintentionally provided incentives to do this. In the medium and long term there are disadvantages to this strategy because graduate employability is becoming a more important as a quality, and possibly as a funding, measure. For university managers the loss of undergraduate specialist degrees in social professions would mean

- Loss of courses where **employment outcomes are good** and growing because of high and growing workforce demand and steady movement towards professionalisation and professional closure
- **Growing graduate employability** problems in other courses if there is an **over-reliance on generic courses** with a poor match between graduate skills and workforce requirements
- **Potential loss of fields of education** where it is possible for the university to build reputation and become **a national or international leader** in teaching and in research (a big fish in a small pool).
- Loss of an opportunity to provide courses which have high social benefit and fulfil the **social mission** (benefits to society, social well-being, **positive reputational value**) that most universities aspire to.

Causes of problems

University managers can address the causes of these problem

- **Employability:** Since 2012 there has been a presumption in the university funding model that if universities respond to student demand, then workforce needs will be met. This has not occurred, and sooner or later federal government policy will change to ensure universities provide courses where there is workforce demand.
- **Potential loss of fields of education:** has been caused, in part, as an unintended consequence of federal government policy, but also, in part, by universities' failure to nurture and value specialist areas where they could become research leaders. **Unhelpful competition** within universities means that specialist courses may not be as well promoted as larger generic courses that have poorer graduate employment outcomes. Specialist courses may need flexible support to survive that is different from processes that work for large courses.
- **Positive reputational value:** university league tables provide one measure of positive reputation; social benefit provides another measure. Some fields contribute more strongly to one or other of these measures. Ultimately, they should not be mutually exclusive.

Actions required by university managers

Each of the causes of the problem could be remedied as follows

- **Address employability:** When federal government policy changes to ensure universities provide courses where there is workforce demand (whether through incentives or sanctions), universities will need to change their course-mix profile. As it is a protracted process to reinstate a course once it has been closed, active steps are needed to prevent course loss now. These include ensuring that existing courses are sufficiently well resourced to survive; and, entering into collaborative agreements with other universities to share costs and benefits of specialist courses with high workforce demand.
- **Address potential loss of fields of education:** This requires a change in mindset away from the claimed efficiency of large courses towards resilience offered by diverse offerings. This requires university managers to nurture and value these specialist areas where there is future teaching and research potential. To do this, university managers must actively value specialist courses, promote them and protect them from internal predation by larger courses.
- **Nurture existing courses:** Specialist courses may need flexible support to survive and thrive. Processes that work for large course may not work well in these specialist fields. Managers should ask coordinators what is needed in their field.
- **Use positive reputational value:** Use these courses promotionally to demonstrate social responsibility and partnerships with local communities. Grow them so they contribute to other reputational measures as well.

Action plan for course coordinators

This action plan is intended for undergraduate course coordinators in youth work, disability and aging fields. This may also be relevant to coordinators of Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diploma or Associate Degrees.

Problem

The availability of specialist undergraduate degree courses in youth work, aging and disability has declined over the last 15 years, as the demand for a more highly skilled workforce in each of these areas has grown. There are now insufficient specialist degree courses available in Australian universities.

The problem is multi-causal. To reverse this trend will require concerted action many stakeholders including by:

- **politicians and federal government policy makers;**
- **senior managers and strategic planners in universities;**
- **professional associations, advisory and lobby groups and employers** in each of these fields;
- **university course coordinators**

This sheet provides an action plan for course coordinators.

Consequences

For course coordinators of the loss of undergraduate specialist degrees in social professions means:

- An **on-going struggle** to maintain the course in an environment that favours large courses (more advertising, more staff to share the load of maintaining links with the field, requirements of large established fields of education are better understood by the university and do not have to fight for legitimacy).
- **Isolation** within the university as there are likely to be very few other specialist staff in the same specialist field
- **Unreasonable threats/ demands** from others within the university to grow student numbers (without any additional funding) or face closure,
- **Reliance on one or two staff**, which can lead to instability.

Causes of problems

The causes of most of these problems are not under the control of the course coordinator.

- The **on-going struggle** to maintain the course arises from the underlying presumption that larger courses have more legitimacy, even though graduate employability and employer support can be much better for specialist courses than for generic courses.
- **Isolation** within the university will persist unless more staff are appointed.

- **Unreasonable threats/ demands** from others within the university to grow student numbers (without any additional funding) or face closure. This may be an example of **attributing blame to an individual for something that is a systemic problem** (for example if the course is not advertised effectively).
- **Stability of the programme must be prioritised** in planning, and university management need to understand and support this so succession-planning occurs and so that suitable and flexible arrangements can be made to cover staff absence (illness, leave) or crisis.

Actions required by course coordinators

Coordinators can contribute to resolution of the problem as follows

- **On-going struggle to maintain the course:** can become less onerous if university management is supportive of the value and legitimacy of these specialist courses and if the course has strong professional and employer support. **This report** is one part of building the support that is needed. Also necessary is active support from professional associations, policy advocacy groups and employers. Although these relationships take time to nurture, course coordinators should nurture these relationships.
- **Isolation:** within the university may be reduced through contact with similarly placed coordinators in other disciplines. Beyond the university, an outcome of this programme is **the working groups** provide contacts with colleagues in the same discipline at other universities, with national and local professional associations, and with similarly placed coordinators in other allied fields of education.
- **Blaming individuals for a systemic problem:** the first step to managing this problem is to name the multiple causes of the problem and ask others to take responsibility for providing the supported that is required. This report documents what kind of **support is needed from each stakeholder**.
- **Ensuring programme stability:** This may be something that the coordinator can achieve through mentoring staff and potential staff, but most likely it will require middle management support and development of a strategy to cover crises or unexpected absences. **Management flexibility is important.** This may require different arrangements from what would be provided to a large course.

Appendix I: Sector-wide snapshot of courses (2017)

This is a snapshot of available courses in each of the fields of education, summarised from public university report to the Department of Education and Training, (2019) and website and handbook searches on key words.

University	State	Website	Pre Undergrad	Undergrad	Post grad
Australian National University	ACT	http://www.anu.edu.au/		Bachelor of Arts - Australian Indigenous Studies Major	
University of Canberra	ACT	http://www.canberra.edu.au/		Indigenous - Business/Law units, Arts and Design units. Youth - Business and Law units	Disability - Education units
Australian Catholic University	NSW	http://www.acu.edu.au/	Assoc Degree in Inclusive Education and Disability Studies,	Bachelor of Inclusive Education and Disability Studies; Bachelor of Social Work units in Mental Health and ATSI;	
Charles Sturt University	NSW	http://www.csu.edu.au/		Bachelor of Health Science (Mental Health); Bachelor Health Science (Complementary Medicine - units), Units within Social Work, Social Science, for - Indigenous studies, Youth work, Ageing, Disability	

University	State	Website	Pre Undergrad	Undergrad	Post grad
Macquarie University	NSW	https://www.mq.edu.au/		Bachelor of Arts with a Major Indigenous Studies; Bachelor of Social Science with a Major in Indigenous Studies;	Graduate Diploma of Special Education; Master of Disability Studies (2018) (Course Work); Master of Indigenous Education (Course Work); Master of Special Education (Course Work)
Southern Cross University	NSW	http://scu.edu.au/		Bachelor of Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing, Bachelor of Indigenous Knowledge, Bachelor of Indigenous Studies; Youth work units; Bachelor of Social Welfare (Units)	Doctor of Indigenous Philosophies, Doctor of Philosophy (Indigenous Studies),
University of New England	NSW	https://www.une.edu.au/		Bachelor of Community Services (Aboriginal Community Care), Bachelor of Health Practice (Aboriginal Health), Bachelor of Social Science (Aboriginal Perspectives Major), Bachelor of Social Work (units only), Bachelor of Special and Inclusive Education (Primary) (2018)	Graduate Certificate in Disability Management (has an NDIS focus), Grad Cert NDIS Business Development, Grad Cert Mental Health Practice, Grad Dip

University	State	Website	Pre Undergrad	Undergrad	Post grad
					Disability Management, Grad Dip Mental Health Practice, Master of Mental Health Practice (coursework)
University of New South Wales	NSW	https://www.unsw.edu.au/		Bachelor of Social Research and Policy (Indigenous Studies major)	Grad Cert Education (Special Education); Master of Education (Special Education)
University of Newcastle	NSW	http://www.newcastle.edu.au/	Associate Degree - Integrated Care in Ageing	Bachelor of Aboriginal Professional Practice, Bachelor of Arts (Aboriginal Studies Major), Bachelor of Social Science (Aboriginal Studies Major), Bachelor of Social Science (Community Welfare and Human Services Major and Criminology Major - Youth units only)	Bachelor of Aboriginal Studies (Honours); Doctor of Philosophy (Aboriginal Health Studies), Doctor of Philosophy (Aboriginal Studies),
University of Sydney	NSW	http://sydney.edu.au/		20 Undergrad degrees offer a major in Indigenous Studies, Bachelor of Social Work units only	Grad Cert and Grad Dip in Educational Studies (Special and Inclusive Education), Grad Dip Indigenous Health Promotion, Grad Cert and Grad

University	State	Website	Pre Undergrad	Undergrad	Post grad
					Dip in Indigenous Language Education (Indigenous students only/not available currently?); Masters in Indigenous Language Education (Not available currently?)
University of Technology, Sydney	NSW	http://www.uts.edu.au/		Bachelor of Health Science, Indigenous unit only	
University of Wollongong	NSW	http://www.uow.edu.au/index.html		Bachelor of Health Science (Indigenous Health), Bachelor of Arts (Indigenous Studies), Bachelor of Public Health (Major Indigenous Health)	Grad Cert in Autism, Grad Cert in Dementia Care (Clinical based qual), Grad Cert in Gerontology and Rehabilitation (clinical based), Grad Cert and Grad Dip in Mental Health Nursing (clinical)

University	State	Website	Pre Undergrad	Undergrad	Post grad
Western Sydney University	NSW	https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/		Bachelor of Anthropology (Indigenous Australian Studies Major and Sub Major),	Post Grad Units available for - School of Education - Teacher Education: Special Education, Nursing Qualifications and specialisations,
Charles Darwin University	NT	http://www.cdu.edu.au/	Associate Degree of Applied Social Science (Indigenous focus), Associate Degree of Indigenous Languages and Linguistics,	Bachelor of Applied Social Science (Indigenous focus), Bachelor of Indigenous Languages and Linguistics,	Grad Dip of Indigenous Policy Development; Doctor of Philosophy (ACIKE),
Bond University (private)	Qld	https://bond.edu.au/		Physiotherapy and OT units - Disability related	
CQ University	Qld	https://www.cqu.edu.au/		Bachelor of Social Work (Indigenous unit, Mental Health unit)	Grad cert and Grad Dip in Healthy Ageing; Grad Cert

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University	State	Website	Pre Undergrad	Undergrad	Post grad
					and Grad Dip Dementia Care;
Griffith University	Qld	https://www.griffith.edu.au/		Bachelor of Social Work (Mental health unit, Indigenous units, Ageing unit); Bachelor of Human Services elective units - (Youth)	Graduate Certificate in Disability Studies; Grad Cert in Disability Inclusion; Grad Cert in Autism Studies; Graduate Certificate in Human services electives - (Disability, Indigenous, Mental Health & Ageing); Grad Cert in Case Management (Mental Health units), Post Grad units (Disability); Elective for Career Development, Master of Human Services (Disability Major)
James Cook University	Qld	https://www.jcu.edu.au/		Bachelor of Social Work, Bachelor of Arts (Human Services and Sociology majors)	Grad Cert in Career Development

University	State	Website	Pre Undergrad	Undergrad	Post grad
Queensland University of Technology	Qld	https://www.qut.edu.au		Bachelor of Human Services, specialisation in Youth Services or Indigenous Health; Disability unit; Social Work units;	Post Grad electives Gerontology,
University of Queensland	Qld	https://www.uq.edu.au/		Bachelor of Social Work - Minors in Child Youth and Family, Health and Ageing & Mental Health) units; Bachelor of Arts (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies);	Grad Cert Mental Health; Grad Dip Public Health (Indigenous Health); Master of Mental Health; Master of Social Work Studies; Master Public Health (Indigenous Health);
University of Southern Queensland	Qld	https://www.usq.edu.au/		Bachelor of Human Services (Community Development and Indigenous Studies Major; Child and Family Studies Major; Health and Social Wellbeing major);	Grad Cert Health (Gerontology); Grad Dip Health (Gerontology), Grad Cert Counselling (Mental Health Counselling); Grad Dip Counselling (Mental Health Counselling); Master of Health (Gerontology); Master of

University	State	Website	Pre Undergrad	Undergrad	Post grad
					Counselling (Mental Health Counselling);
University of the Sunshine Coast	Qld	http://www.usc.edu.au/		Bachelor of Arts (major in Australian studies units), (major in Sociology units), Bachelor of Health and Community Care Management (Nursing and paramedicine units in aged care, indigenous unit and youth); Undergraduate degrees Faculty of Science, Health, Education and Engineering (major and minor Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health);	Grad Cert Arts (Specialisation in Indigenous Studies)
Flinders University	SA	https://www.flinders.edu.au/		Bachelor of Disability and Developmental Education, Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood and Special Education)/Bachelor of Disability Studies, Bachelor of Education (Middle/Secondary and Special Education)/Bachelor of Disability Studies, Bachelor of Education (Primary R-7 and Special Education)/ Bachelor of Disability Studies, Bachelor of Arts (Indigenous Studies major); Bachelor of Healthy Ageing (online, new); Bachelor of Health Sciences (Disability and Community Rehabilitation Major);	Graduate Certificate in Disability Studies, Grad Cert in Aged Care Administration; Graduate Cert & Diploma in Applied Gerontology, Graduate Diploma in Mental Health Sciences, Grad Dip in Palliative Care in Aged Care; Master

University	State	Website	Pre Undergrad	Undergrad	Post grad
					of Disability Policy and Practice, Master of Disability Studies, Master of Applied Gerontology, Master of Education (Wellbeing and Positive Mental Health), Master of Mental Health Sciences, Master of Palliative Care in Aged Care; Master of Remote and Indigenous Health;
Torrens University Australia	SA	http://www.torrens.edu.au/		Bachelor of Human Services (Ageing); Bachelor of Human Services (Disability);	Grad Cert Education (Special Education); Grad Cert Education (Autism); Grad Cert Education (Learning Differences); Grad Cert Education (Mental Health); Master Education (Special Education)

University	State	Website	Pre Undergrad	Undergrad	Post grad
University of Adelaide	SA	http://www.adelaide.edu.au/		Bachelor of Arts (Major or minor Indigenous studies);	
University of South Australia	SA	https://unisa.edu.au/		Bachelor of Arts (Indigenous Cultures and Australian Society), Bachelor of Social Work & Human Services unit (Mental Health)	Grad Cert and Grad Dip Aboriginal Studies; Master Aboriginal Studies
University of Tasmania	Tas	http://www.utas.edu.au/		Bachelor of Social Science unit (Youth), minor in Indigenous studies units, Bachelor of Dementia Care, Bachelor of Arts (Aboriginal Studies),	
Chisholm Institute	Vic	https://www.chisholm.edu.au/	Diploma of Youth Work, Diploma of Mental Health	Bachelor of Community Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs;	
Deakin University	Vic	http://www.deakin.edu.au/		Bachelor of Arts (Major in Australian Studies), Youth unit	Grad Dip Indigenous Research; Grad Cert Disability and Inclusion;
Federation University of Australia	Vic	http://federation.edu.au/		They offer Bachelor of Community and Human Services, and a Bachelor of Social Science - however no specific unit detail was available	
La Trobe University	Vic	https://www.latrobe.edu.au/		Bachelor of Arts (Aboriginal Studies);	

University	State	Website	Pre Undergrad	Undergrad	Post grad
Monash University	Vic	https://www.monash.edu/		Bachelor of Arts (Indigenous cultures and histories), Bachelor of Psychology (mental Health unit), Bachelor of Social Work (mental health unit)	
RMIT University	Vic	https://www.rmit.edu.au/	Diploma of Youth Work (Vocational)	Bachelor of Education (Primary Education and Disability Studies); Bachelor of Social Science (Youth Work); Bachelor of Social work units (mental health & Indigenous studies), Bachelor of Social Science (Psychology) Indigenous unit; 13 electives in Indigenous studies	Grad Cert and Grad Dip Careers Education and Development;
Swinburne University of Technology	Vic	http://www.swinburne.edu.au/		Bachelor of Arts (Sociology major) Indigenous units;	Grad Cert and Grad Dip Career Development - though only unit appears to be offered at this stage, others are no longer being delivered from 2017
University of Melbourne	Vic	http://www.unimelb.edu.au/		Bachelor of Arts (Major in Australian Indigenous Studies); Bachelor of Arts youth unit;	
Victoria University	Vic	https://www.vu.edu.au/		Bachelor of Youth Work; Bachelor of Arts, Community Development, Education & Youth Work Indigenous units; Bachelor of	

University	State	Website	Pre Undergrad	Undergrad	Post grad
				Health Science (Indigenous Health specialisation); Bachelor of Education (Major in Disability Studies in Education);	
Curtin University	WA	http://www.curtin.edu.au/	Assoc Degree in Indigenous Professional Practices	Bachelor of Psychology (Indigenous unit); Bachelor of Applied Science (Majors are available in Indigenous Community Management and Development, Indigenous Community Health and Indigenous Mental Health.) - available only to ATSI students; Bachelor of Social Work (Mental health unit), Bachelor of Health Science (mental health unit); Aged care units offered in specific health degrees (Physio, OT, Nursing etc)	
Edith Cowan University	WA	http://www.ecu.edu.au/		Bachelor of Youth Work; Bachelor of Social Work (Indigenous units and Mental Health units); Indigenous studies minor	Grad Cert Education (Learning Difficulties); Grad Cert Education (Special Education); Grad Cert Dementia Studies for Health Professionals only;
Murdoch University	WA	http://www.murdoch.edu.au/		Bachelor of Arts (Australian Indigenous Studies major); Law unit Indigenous studies; Honours in Indigenous Studies available; Bachelor of Arts (Youth unit); School of Education - disability units;	

University	State	Website	Pre Undergrad	Undergrad	Post grad
				Mental Health units only in Nursing, Chiropractic,	
University of Notre Dame Australia	WA	http://www.nd.edu.au/fremantle		School of Arts and Sciences (Indigenous units, Community Mental Health Units, Gerontology unit, Youth unit)	
University of Western Australia	WA	https://www.uwa.edu.au/		Bachelor of Arts (Indigenous Major); Bachelor of Science (Indigenous major); Bachelor of Science (Social Work units in Mental Health)	Grad Cert Autism Diagnosis