Discussion Paper prepared for the South Australian Child Protection Systems Royal Commission


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A Preliminary statement

The nature of human service provision

While the focus of the Royal Commission is on the child protection system in South Australia it is important to make a minor digression from this central focus to explain the wider context of human service provision. Child protection service systems cannot be seen in isolation from other service areas.

Kennedy, Leiman, Richards, 2016 (in press) refer to Zins (2001,7) definition of human services to capture the broad scope of this service system ‘designed to meet human needs that are required for maintaining or promoting the overall quality of life of prospective service populations’. In particular there are vulnerable or at risk populations that are characteristically identified through service systems such as juvenile justice, adult corrections, employment, child and family welfare, mental health, disability, rehabilitation, income security, community health, aged care and crisis services.

There has been some debate in the literature about the inclusion of health and education or even the police force in the broad scope of human services. At one level this argument could be seen as less of an issue now because of the increasing interconnectedness of all service systems with vulnerable client populations, individuals and families. For example, it is not possible to consider the issue of child protection without some acknowledgement of the role of hospitals and their staff around treatment of children and GPs for their involvement with families and children. It is not possible to consider the issue of child protection without having regard to the critical role of the school community as an environment where children are seen and behaviours observed. The adequacy of care can be evident in terms of a child’s presentation and the presence or lack of family support.

The contemporary themes in service provision are around inter agency collaboration and coordinated service provision in complex client situations. All the evidence is that child protection is one of the most complex presenting social issues requiring a mix of skilled service responses, high level professional judgements and intervention to minimise continuing risk to children and any potential for change in family functioning.

It is evident that contemporary social issues and political priorities significantly shape the development of human services. For example, current social concerns about homelessness, domestic violence, refugees and asylum seekers, unemployment and drug addiction are shaping policy, funding initiatives and service development. The current Royal Commissions into child protection and institutional sexual abuse have the potential to realign priorities in the human services. The point being made here is that there is a dynamic element to the human services.

There are specific observations to be made about child protection sector. Families and children may come to the attention of human service agencies or workers in a variety of ways. They may come into contact through a formal agency with a mandate to intervene and where the workforce is professionally based. It may also be possible that the point of entry will be through a service or agency that is not primarily a child protection service but where staff
members have mandatory reporting responsibilities. This is where schools, health service providers, police as well as community based agencies contribute to child protection. Early intervention services are more likely to be in the non-government sector. In many non-government and community based services the skill base of workers is more diverse. While there is a trend to a stronger professional base in these services particularly at management levels the existing workers come into the sector with limited training, skills developed through life experience and combinations of these. Expectations of service vary depending on the strength of the organisation, its leadership and resource base. This is not to argue that only good service provision flows from particular worker profiles and qualifications. The comment is made in order to recognise the diversity in the human services.

A further complication of service delivery in a largely deregulated market place with high demand for workers has led to broader employment eligibility criteria across the human services and particularly in non-government agencies. The increasing shift of service delivery to non-government organisations and the resultant employment demand has seen selection of staff based on employer assessment of competency, availability and budgetary considerations rather than qualifications and professional title. Oversupply in some graduate areas (such as law, media studies, journalism and teaching) has generated further diversification in the backgrounds of workers. And there are a significant proportion of workers entering the human services with TAFE level qualifications, particularly in youth work and residential care.

This point about the diversity of workers engaged in child protection is emphasised in the Report of the Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry Volume 2 (2011, page 411). That report emphasises the fact that the child protection workforce includes health and allied health professionals, educational professionals and child care providers, legal and law enforcement professionals, salaried and non-salaried carers and providers of social and family services. Current critiques of child protection often focus attention on the inadequacy of education and training of social workers. This broader workforce is often overlooked in terms of training and professional education around child protection. The discussion that follows does address issues around social work education, registration and professional development but it is essential to keep this wider perspective in mind. The appendices provide contextual data on the worker profile in the community services (Appendix 1); details on social work programs (Appendix 2); and, abstracts of recent articles on social work education (Appendix 3). This content has been collated with the assistance of Dr Karen Grogan.
Education of social workers

Background to Social Work Education in South Australia

Social work education in Australia dates back to the late 1920’s and early 1930’s and post-dates developments in training in both the UK and USA (Martin, 1986, 227). In 1935 the first training for social service workers in South Australia was established. Mrs Amy Wheaton was appointed Director of the new course being offered in conjunction with the University of Adelaide. The course remained small and largely populated with women for several decades. To illustrate this point Martin (1986) reports that there were only 40 trained social workers employed in Adelaide in 1956. But this number more than doubled in the next ten years and demand was further increased with the election of the Dunstan government with its commitment to welfare. By the 1970’s with growth in service delivery at the Commonwealth level and increasing involvement of non-government organisations in welfare services social work education expanded with a course opening at Flinders University and the University enabling their course to move to the South Australian Institute of Technology (to become the University of South Australia).

In the 1980s social work education was extended to a four year undergraduate degree format although across the country there were variations from integrated four year programs and various combinations building on study in other degrees as foundation for the four year program. From its inception Flinders University began with a significant innovation of an end on degree where graduates studied a further two years to acquire a recognised entry level social work qualification.

The Australian Association of Social Workers was formed in 1946 to provide a voice for the growing profession. The AASW has maintained an active role in the accreditation of Schools of Social Work since the 1960s. In the AASW documentation on accreditation it is stated that this role is based on mutual agreement with higher education providers. Graduates of AASW accredited social work programs will be eligible for membership with the AASW.

The history serves to illustrate the relative newness of the social work profession and its unique growth and development in line with government initiatives to develop welfare services to support communities and vulnerable populations. Social work has become a major element of professional service delivery in the human services because of state involvement in welfare and social services.

Pattern of social work education in Australia

The AASW website provides a full listing of higher education providers and the social work programs offered. There are in fact 30 institutions listed across the country: ACT 1; NSW 8; NT 1; Qld 8; SA 2; Tas 1; Vic 6; WA 3 and I understand that Wollongong University is also developing a social work degree currently holding provisional accreditation. Interestingly there is a higher education provider (other than a University) in the mix. Social work qualifications are now offered through the Australian College of Applied Psychology. Details on social work education providers and programs are provided in Appendix 2.

Within each of these educational institutions is a varying mix of social work programs from undergraduate offerings for entry level to the profession with increasing honours provisions, entry level programs as qualifying masters, masters programs (both course work and research based) and opportunities for doctoral studies. In addition programs may be offered in different modes from on-campus, various combinations of on-line and on-campus teaching to full on-line programs and in some situations off-shore programs.
In South Australia there are two universities offering a mix of social work programs that offer entry to the profession. These are detailed in Appendix 2. Also in this document are the entry scores for students moving through matriculation. Social work has always held relatively lower entry scores opening the programs to a wide range of students some of whom select the course because of ease of access rather than interest. This does not mean there are not students with higher scores who want to study social work. However the profile and standing of the profession has meant it is not as highly sought as the established professions or the associated allied health professions.

Students may enter social work programs through a number of pathways including TAFE/RTO, foundation programs offered by the Universities, Special Tertiary Admissions Test (STAT), Open University or transfer from other university degrees. A further entry pathway is provided by individual universities enabling overseas students seeking to retrain or gain an Australian qualification that opens up employment opportunities. When a University seeks to generate this market opportunity prerequisite study can be interpreted broadly. Students with first degrees and professional experience in computing engineering, accountancy and dentistry may enter social work for pragmatic reasons but may face significant challenges to orient to the context for service provision in Australia. However, overseas graduates entering social work build a more culturally diverse profession.

**Setting standards for Social Work Education in Australia**

The AASW establishes guiding principles for approving, reviewing and monitoring programs acknowledging the responsibility of the higher education authority for quality of their courses. When a University seeks to establish a social work program it may engage an AASW consultant to assist in the process. Courses may be given provisional approval with the review of the first cohort of graduates and all courses are subject to review within specified timeframes. Eligibility for membership of the AASW is based on a graduate holding an accredited social work bachelor’s degree, social work bachelor’s degree with honours or a social work master’s degree (qualifying masters).

The AASW documentation offers a definition of social work and declares that social work programs must be able to demonstrate how they assist students to develop a critical understanding and commitment to this definition. The Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS) 2012 V1.4 Revised January 2015 at page 7 declared that social workers:

- work with individuals groups and communities to shape and change conditions in which they live
- advocate for and with disadvantaged members of society
- work towards the amelioration of social inequalities in society to facilitate a more equitable distribution of resources
- engage in research to build social work knowledge base and understanding of society
- analyse, challenge and develop social policies.

In articulating the principles of social work education (ASWEAS 2012 v1.4 Revised January 2015 at page 9) there are two key points noted here as being particularly relevant to the issues of training around child protection. The first point is that Australian entry-level professional social work education is generalist. Preparation of graduates focuses on building a knowledge base that incorporates content from social and behavioural science as well as social work theory and skills and methods relevant to practice. It is assumed that generalist skills are transferable. Secondly, field education is seen as a core component of Australian entry-level professional social work education. It is a cooperative endeavour between the higher education provider, the student, agencies and field educators and is argued to be the
critical point of integration of theory and practice. Specific guidelines of field education are included in the accreditation documentation.

The AASW declares that social work graduates should have the following attributes (2015, 10):

- Demonstrated sense of identity as a professional social worker
- Sound understanding of and commitment to social work values and ethics to guide professional practice
- Ability to apply social work knowledge and interventions to respond effectively in meeting the needs of individuals, groups and communities in diverse settings, client groups and geographic locations
- Ability to apply knowledge of human behaviour and society, as well as the social, cultural, political, legal, economic and global contexts of practice to respond effectively within a human rights and social justice frameworks
- Ability to review, critically analyse and synthesise knowledge and values and apply reflective thinking skills to inform professional judgement and practice
- Ability to apply research knowledge and skills to understand, evaluate and use research to inform practice and to develop, execute and disseminate research informed by practice
- Demonstration of effective communication and interpersonal skills
- Ability to work with diversity and demonstrate respect for cultural difference
- Understanding of the importance of and commitment to ongoing professional development.

The AASW also specifies that current programs include content on mental health, child wellbeing and protection, cross cultural practice and practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. Curriculum guidelines in specialist areas are developed by the AASW and made available to schools of social work.

At any given time the emphasis on specific focused curriculum content will reflect current social issues and policy direction. There can be a lag time in the introduction of new content as can be seen in the attention to child protection. In the past it would not have been unusual for more emphasis on medical content although this has less focus now. Attention to cultural diversity and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content has been on the agenda for a number of years. It might be argued that content around domestic and family violence, disability, ageing and substance abuse could equally be accorded priority now. However there has always been a challenge to balance core context and social work knowledge with the interests in specific fields of practice or contemporary social issues. As has been suggested elsewhere in this document social work has grown with the developments in the state and is continually shaped by dynamic social needs and political interests.

**Field education in social work education**

The AASW specifies some 980 hours of field education in both undergraduate and post graduate entry-level programs. These AASW guidelines specify that this learning must have the full status of an academic subject in the program. Students undertaking field education are not paid. The model of learning is not identified as an apprenticeship, internship or work experience per se. It is usually described as ‘learning in practice’.

During a field education placement a student will undertake a range of activities in an agency under the supervision of a qualified social worker with no less than two years practice experience. Academic and field education staff members from the university provide complementary learning with seminars and
take responsibility for assessment of performance on placement. Where there is no qualified social worker in the agency and external professional supervisor is appointed and paid by the University.

Students are expected to have placements in different sectors across the two placements. Interstate online students are able to do placements in their home state. However in these circumstances the host University may or may not take responsibility for locating these placements.

With the increased numbers of programs and students there are challenges finding suitable placements where attention will be given to the learning needs of the social work student. The number of students being taken into social work programs has stretched traditional placement opportunities. A significant number of employers are reluctant to invest time in the first placement as they see the skill development at this stage of the program as limited. This is particularly evident in clinically based settings or complex practice settings such as child protection. However this does preclude students who come into the program with experience in the human services from these clinical placements unless the University can persuade the organisation to consider the particular student.

Field education also poses challenges for many students who are struggling to meet the costs of higher education and must maintain paid employment. These extended field education courses do not fit so easily with employment commitments and as a result students may defer placements (if they can gain the support of the school) until the end of their course in conflict with the notion of integrating practice learning into the program.

For the experienced human service worker coming into a program to obtain professional qualifications there can be issues around field placement on the grounds that ‘they are already experienced’. In more recent years the AASW has opened up provision for students to undertake placements in their place of employment providing they are engaged in work that is different from their usual role. A further option is now available with a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) provision. This has been a difficult policy area for the AASW and has limited availability because of the conditions imposed and the resources needed within the field education team to assess in these circumstances. RPL can only be made considered for the first placement and only ‘recognised practice consistent with social work’ can be considered for this purpose. It is a very determined student that will pursue this option.

Overseas students pose specific challenges in field education and there are some reservations in the field about their appropriateness for placement. The entrepreneurship of higher education providers has imposed new demands on social work programs. The acquisition of an Australian degree opens opportunities for students and some schools of social work, with the support of university administrations, have been opportunistic about recruiting these students.

The availability of onsite supervisors for students poses significant challenges for social work programs. Traditionally individual social workers often held the commitment to supervision as a strong professional responsibility. Organisations too would commit to supporting the learning culture. In addition, organisations identified the offering of placements as a strategy to promote their commitment to professionalism. In some cases, this allowed for time allocation to the task or a student unit structure within an agency to support student learning opportunities. However the pressures in current practice environments have undercut both organisational and individual support for this task. Supervisors are not paid for this additional responsibility in the employment setting nor is it seen as a marker for performance review. Employers often see staff engaged in this task as taking time from their primary work. The casualization of the workforce has also meant that staff and organisations have not been able to guarantee continuity around supervision of students. Yet another impact of changing work
environments is that the student may be seen as an extra employee undercutting the notion of learning in practice. These conditions have contributed to Universities employing external professional supervisors who are paid well below standard supervision rates set by the AASW. However for many of these supervisors the task remains a professional commitment and a positive way of staying connected to the field.

Field education represents a labour intensive element of social work training. Universities engage in the development of placement opportunities, assessment processes across the field education placement, provision of complementary teaching and responsiveness to issues that require arising support to the parties involved in the learning process. The AASW guidelines require at least one visit (usually for mid placement assessment) to the agency during field education and this represents a significant logistical task and time commitment with large student numbers in concurrent placements. This requirement is not necessarily in place for distant, interstate or international placements.

Field education can present challenging learning for the student as skills, personal and professional values, communication styles as well as knowledge are under scrutiny. This is the environment where the ‘fit with practice’ becomes more evident as this is where competence levels and interaction between clients and colleagues are exposed. Not every student finds it easy to work in teams or as a single social worker in a setting where the professional orientation is understood in a limited way. Not every student finds it easy to be faced with situations well beyond their life experience or where they face emotional responses that open up personal issues which may impact on practice. Failure in a field education course can represent a significant personal and professional crisis and requires a skilled assessor and supervisor to manage the process and outcome with integrity and a sound evidence base.

**Standing of social work programs in Universities**

Social work education has been maintained in the University system since its introduction to Australia. Social work has been identified with the University’s profile and commitment to professional education and is now present in all Universities in Australia except the private Universities. Social work programs have at times been located in social work schools led by senior academics some of whom were locally grown but over the years overseas candidates have also been attracted to leadership roles in Australian institutions.

With more recent developments in University corporate models of organisation social work has lost its individual school base. Social work schools can be located in larger schools or faculties where professional programs in social science or behavioural science are housed. Local Universities are illustrative of that pattern with the University of South Australia having a School of Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy within the Faculty of Education, Arts and Social Sciences and the Flinders University of South Australia having a School of Social and Policy Studies within a Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences. In these corporate structures social work is but one interest group and inevitably has limited senior leadership in schools and faculties, limited direct control over budget arrangements and the decisions over student numbers. Universities can determine the student numbers to ensure quotas for funding across the University are met and social work courses can be useful filling points with lower entry scores. Schools are not able to screen or select students and this can pose issues for a student with a criminal record, for example, when it comes to field education.

**The impact of University deregulation on social work education**

The neo liberal economic agenda has seen major reconstruction of higher education. Deregulation, corporate management imperatives, income generation, competitive and externally defined research imperatives have shaped the environment for universities. Universities are required to demonstrate
performance against criteria that leave little space for particular professional interests. Online teaching, rationalisation of courses, shared curriculum across programs, globalisation and commodification of education have led to serious challenges in higher education.

Rationalisation into larger management units and increased decision making driven by economic and administrative imperatives has dramatically affected the nature of professional education. While professions may retain a role in accreditation of programs this exercise is now constructed in terms of negotiation process. The higher the standing of the profession the more resistance might be offered to the imposition of corporate imperatives but no profession is immune to these demands.

The drive to increase research profiles in universities has opened opportunities for stronger doctoral pathways and early research opportunities. To some extent this has meant less value is placed on practice informed teaching and experience. This trend has particular impact in social work practice teaching and field education.

**Commentators on social work education in Australia**

As can be seen from the literature review in Appendix 3 there is not a significant level of commentary on social work education in journal articles. The AASW holds an important position in terms of social work education in Australia because of its role in accrediting social work programs and promulgating practice standards. The current President of the profession is Professor Karen Healy and she is head of the Social Work faculty at The University of Queensland. There are a number of social work consultants available to universities setting up programs.

Both Dorothy Scott and Lesley Cooper have submitted individual papers to the Commission identifying issues relevant to social work education. In addition the SA Branch of the AASW has made submissions that include commentary on social work education. I have read these submissions and will highlight some relevant issues raised in these documents.

Professor Scott argues that research shows that professional socialisation for the student is much weaker than organisational socialisation experienced after graduation. This point raises interesting questions about how professional identification is fostered. While the AASW as the professional association has had a number of leaders from academia, the schools themselves have varying levels of identification with the profession that impacts the way professional identity is constructed for students during the education experience.

The membership of the AASW continues to be small compared to the numbers of practitioners. Many students do not see relevance in membership of the profession even if they have a strong sense of professional identity with the social work profession. In addition, the costs of membership can be a barrier to active AASW involvement because beginning salaries are relatively low. The profession itself has a lower profile in the media until there is some scandal. The community itself does not want to know about many of the social issues that confront social work clients. There are less good news stories.

In Professor Scott’s research the values, knowledge and skills in university based courses were found to be rapidly diminished if graduates went to settings which do not provide the conditions under which quality professional practice was possible. Professor Scott presents a cogent argument that these are in fact the conditions in child protection settings where caseloads are higher than appropriate for complex work, there is interagency conflict, infrequent and ‘proceduralised’ supervision and bureaucratic models of service delivery that inhibited individually tailored response based assessment of each child and family (page 1 of the submission).
In considering the place of curriculum, Professor Scott refers to research undertaken during her tenure as Director of the National Centre for Child Protection that audited child protection content in undergraduate and qualifying training across psychology, nursing/midwifery and social work. The research indicated deficits in this area of content across all these professions. However Professor Scott endorses the action of the AASW to require greater curriculum content in child well-being and child protection. It is interesting to note that Professor Scott considers the content around child protection and child well-being places Australian social work programs at least equivalent to professional programs in comparative countries.

Professor Lesley Cooper challenges the dominant teaching paradigm in social work education and argues for stronger focus on assessment of skill at all levels within a program but particularly in the areas core to professional business: namely engagement, interviewing, assessment, collaboration with other team members, learning from clients and carers. Professor Cooper identifies the AASW guidelines as providing direction for program and course input but questions the extent to which those guidelines can be monitored. She also talks about the importance of experienced practice teachers and laments the fact that so many teaching staff members lack the depth of practice experience that can extend students’ theoretical knowledge and adequately assess performance. This issue of performance assessment resonates with the demands on a profession that works with some of the most complex client situations, where risks to children can be profound, where the heart of practice is relationship through which change and intervention is achieved.

The final point I want to document from Professor Cooper’s paper is her challenge to the validity of distance and/or online practice education (that is those practice topics including field education requiring face to face teaching, feedback and assessment processes). In her view it is not enough to hear about practice. Professor Cooper argues that during the education process the practice needs to be scrutinised, explored, reflected upon and skills nurtured.

In 2011 the AASW established the Australian College of Social Work to recognise, promote advanced social work practice and provide leadership in practice excellence. Foundation Fellows have been appointed and in 2015 the College Steering Committee announced that the College has been re-opened to new members. This College certainly has a base of well-respected social workers who have held senior positions in education and practice. A number of this committee act as consultants to social work programs or sit on accreditation review panels and may have valuable perspectives on the current Royal Commission.

Finally, it should be noted that there is a specific Australian and New Zealand Social Work and Welfare Education and Research association (ANZSWWER) that identifies itself as an independent commentator on social work and education and promotes standards and research. The genesis of the organisation in Australia was the Australian Association of Social Work and Welfare Education (AASWWE). There has been overlap between the membership of this organisation and AASW. However one of the important distinguishing characteristics of this organisation is its interests in social work and welfare education that means it has a wider perspective across the human services.
Registration and the social work profession

Current regulation of social workers:
In a significant number of western countries the profession of social work is regulated by some mechanism. In Australia the position is different. Rosemary Kennedy provides a clear statement on the regulatory status of social workers in Australia:

Social workers do not have to be licensed to practise in Australia. Any person can call themselves a social worker and the state will not take action unless fraudulent activity is involved. Nevertheless the activities of social workers are regulated through many mechanisms: through the law e.g. mandatory reporting; independent/external review e.g. ombudsman, complaints entities, or guardians; educational requirements for professional practice; funding body requirements; employer requirements and standards set by the professional association.

Social workers who are members of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) are required to abide by the code of ethics and standards set by that professional body. In reality neither every social worker nor even a majority of social workers is a member of the AASW and this membership status is less relevant to employment in the contemporary world. The selection criteria for eligibility of the AASW membership are seen less often in job advertisements and historically these criteria were applied to government rather than non-government sector employment.

It is possible for colleagues, consumers or organisations to report a social worker for a breach of ethics or to lodge a complaint about service provided by a social worker. However the AASW can only address this complaint if the person is a member and the greatest sanction that can be applied is loss of membership eligibility. This action is taken and there is a register of social workers who have been delisted. There is nothing to stop a member resigning from the AASW prior to a complaint or report being dealt with to avoid engagement in such a process. And there is nothing to indicate that employers systematically seek AASW clearance when appointing social workers to a position.

Despite the slow progress with lobbying for registration there appears limited interest by government to expand the current national regulatory authority. The recent COAG meeting outcomes suggest that the situation is dynamic and the most favoured position from governments is a move to voluntary self-regulation and the endorsement of the Code of Conduct for Unregistered Health Practitioners. In these circumstances legislation would be needed to support powers of investigation and prohibition orders where evidence of breach is established. Most critically state governments would need to be willing to resource the relevant authority so it could undertake the investigation and procedures for prohibition orders. The recommendations from COAG follow the consideration of the Review of the National Regulation and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS) 2014 which covers 14 health professions.

Background to the profession’s stance on registration:

The social work profession in Australia has been divided on the issue of registration. These divisions may reflect different ideological positions or even a degree of apathy around this issue. Those who have historically supported registration have argued that it gives status, credibility and ensures accountability for anyone using this title. The social workers who reject or have reservation about the notion of registration often take the view that it is elitist, self-servicing and provides limited protection for clients. There has not been a strong consumer or client voice demanding regular review of the profession. However it could be argued the current exposure of social work to media scrutiny and coronial inquests
in South Australia, for example, may prompt community support for tighter regulation on the profession.

Registration was a State based regulatory system until national regulation for selected professions was introduced in 2010. In the 1980’s and early 1990’s there was some attention given to registration by the professional body. It should be noted that the nature of social work practice has meant that any call for registration had to be directed to ‘registration of title’ not specific activity. However it was difficult to establish national agreement within the profession body representing social work (AASW) to take a systematic and coordinated approach to lobby state governments on this issue. In 1985 the Northern Territory government introduced legislation to regulate health practitioners and allied health workers prompted renewed interest in registration. At this time the South Australia branch of the AASW made a concerted effort to pursue the issue and to promote the strategy at a national level. There proved to be limited commitment to regulation in the South Australian public service and with the repeal of the Northern Territory legislation in 1993 with regard to social workers, momentum was lost both in this state and nationally.

With the opportunity generated with a national professional regulatory structure the AASW has been active in pursuing inclusion of social work in the regulated bodies. The health focus of the national regulatory structure provided limited cover in social work but nevertheless the profession has lobbied actively for its inclusion.

**The profession’s current stance on registration:**

The profession has been active on the issue of registration in the last few years. There has been a consistent position on the value of registration for social workers to promote public safety. The AASW has also developed standards of practice, professional development standards for AASW members and argued for supervision within the field education environment and early years of practice. While the AASW presents itself as an experienced self-regulator its public statements on registration recognise the need for accountability beyond the members of the AASW.

The mood for regulation of social work has shifted in more recent years as the crisis in child protection has gained international and national attention. It has often been argued that registration was not a significant issue for social work as practitioners are not involved in life threatening decision making. The public exposure of the role of social workers and other service providers has challenged this view. In South Australia the Coroner has recommended registration of social workers following his review of the Chloe Valentine case. The Coroner highlighted the potential for social workers to do harm either by action or inaction. The profession has used this argument previously in its lobbying for registration and has argued that the potential for harm is not only in the jurisdiction of child protection. However the findings from this Coronial review and the media attention that has generated public concern give this argument significant credibility.

In the recent winter edition of the AASW National Bulletin (2015, 3) the National President, Professor Karen Healy, wrote:

> It is good to see the South Australian government has committed to implementing the Coroner’s recommendations. The reluctance, however, of governments in the past to register social workers has been based on three erroneous assumptions. The first assumption is that social workers do not pose sufficient risk of harm to warrant the expense of registration but the tragic death of Chloe and the appalling experience of Katherine X, whose story of extensive childhood sexual abuse was covered by the media in May, demonstrate otherwise. The
authorities knew that Katherine suffered years of abuse yet returned her home despite her pleadings for this not to occur. These and other spectacular failures to protect children from harm support the case for social work registration.

Those who oppose registration may also assume there is already sufficient public safety supervision of social workers’ practice provided by organisations that employ them. Opponents of registration have always put the case to the AASW that social workers in private practice, particularly Accredited Mental Health Social Workers are accountable to ethical codes of their professional associations. Again, it is best not to assume this because many social workers are still not members of the AASW and therefore are not accountable to our ethical code.

The third assumption, that minimal regulation such as a national code of conduct for health practitioners is sufficient to protect public safety, was contradicted by the Coroner when he concluded that the lack of supervision and support for newly qualified workers in complex frontline service delivery contributed to Chloe Valentine’s tragic death. While a national code of conduct would be welcome, it will only address professional misconduct after it has occurred, it will not do anything to ensure employers are accountable for providing the supervision and support new graduates’ need to practise safely.

The AASW President states that the AASW will continue to lobby for registration as it will improve public safety in relation to all social workers. The professional association acknowledges the limitation of self-regulation as it applies only to members and has limited impact on employment options for anyone breaching standards. But in addition the AASW has indicated it will continue to work with other allied health professions to establish a National Alliance of Self-Regulating Health Professionals.

A relevant parallel response to registration/self-regulation

But as has been pointed out elsewhere in this paper, the diversity of roles for social workers, the different job titles that would cover a social work practitioner and the range of background and training of human service practitioners generate particular complications around registration and self-regulation. The attention to regulation in the allied health professions fails to bring under regulation significant numbers of social workers and other practitioners who are identified as human service or community service workers.

There is another ‘professional or quasi professional association’ that provides a voice and base for a growing number of occupations that practice across the human and community service systems. And there are some social workers who are members. The association is Australian Community Workers Association (ACWA) and was formerly known as the Australian Institute of Welfare and Community Work (AIWCW). This association has also been exploring the issue of registration and has recently reported that the majority of members responding to a consultative process has supported mandatory registration to demonstrate professionalism, protect the public and ensure unethical practitioners are unable to continue to work in the sector.

The AICW Board reports that the Association will pursue a self-regulation scheme in the first place. An initial stage of this process is the establishment of a community workers’ register. In their preparatory work in this area the AICW indicates that it has met with major employers, government and non-government organisations, unions, peak bodies, recruitment and educational providers. It is reported there is strong interest in a third party authority to authenticate qualifications and work history. Interestingly these consultations have highlighted the impact of significant changes in funding models for in-home care across disability and aged care sectors. There are increasing concerns about the
vulnerability of individuals reliant on in-home services that they may either acquire through self-directed care or brokered service arrangements.

**Making sense of regulatory options for social work and other occupational groups engaged in child protection**

Community concern about social work has been raised by recent public reviews here and overseas. It could be argued that social work has suffered major damage in this process and the implications are significant for its previous dominance in sectors such as child protection. However this is not the focus of the discussion on regulation beyond reinforcing the point that this political climate may ensure that regulation of some form is now more likely to be addressed. The options are clear: leaving the status quo or including social work into the existing NRAS or supporting the establishment of a national approach to a framework for un-registered professions.

The first option has limited impact as the AASW does not represent all social workers and the profile of child protection social workers has never been high within it. The AASW might strengthen its value to employers and consumers with a register but the limits of membership remain a critical factor.

The second option of mandatory registration through the current national authority appears to remain attractive to the AASW despite the fact that NRAS focusses on health and not community services which poses difficulties for those professions such as social work which straddle several sectors. While COAG has not made a definitive statement excluding social work from AHPRA there appears to be limited enthusiasm for an expanded role in compulsory registration in this format.

The third option introducing more formal and national arrangements for non-registered professions is gaining increasing interest. Models in NSW, Queensland and South Australia give health or health and community services complaints commissioner’s power to investigate and make orders about unregistered practitioners. The effectiveness of this option does depend on the level of State and if this is seen as a relevant option it may well be useful for some direction to be given by the current Royal Commission. If this option is endorsed there is a need to review the jurisdictional parameters as much focus it within the context of allied health (although the exception is in SA where the commissioner has jurisdiction for health and community services).

Whatever direction emerges from the current dynamic environment of regulation it is critical to recognise the range of occupational groups that engage in child protection work. Some of those professions are already regulated but the focus is on their primary professional tasks and within their institutional base (e.g. psychology). Consideration needs to be given to the specifics of practice in child protection across professional and occupational groupings if there are to be standards of practice that can be endorsed and enforced.
Professional development in Social Work

Opportunities for post graduate education
A number of universities offer post graduate courses and some initiatives have been made in the area of child protection. Such offerings can be fee based specific training without degree standing or might be constructed as a Graduate Certificate or Diploma. If the latter strategy applies it is often recognised and can be credit for other post graduate studies such as course work Masters. Professor Scott in her submission mentions the joint training offered through a number of Victorian Universities and there are other examples. Some practitioners do not want to proceed to a full Master program but are interested in Post Graduate Certificates.

There are a number of issues about Universities developing post graduate education opportunities for social workers. Firstly these are fees that may prohibit some social workers from enrolling. Salary levels in social work are relatively low compared to other professional groups. Secondly the availability of study leave provisions and flexibility in working conditions may affect the decision to study. Thirdly the reach of access to study venues limits options and this is particularly relevant for regional and rural practitioners. Fourthly there may be no incentives from the workplace to undertake additional study. Unlike nursing as an example, social work has not been a profession where credentials have been linked to professional standing and employment recognition.

It could be argued that factors such the nature of social work as a female dominated profession focussed on a caring role, lower salary structures and in a non-competitive professional framework mitigate the drive to pursue or demand professional development opportunities. Organisational cultures have not traditionally emphasised the importance of learning, practice research and evidence-based practices. And in times of economic constraint it is often the training and professional development costs that are easiest to target in organisation budgets.

Opportunities for professional development through the AASW
Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is promoted by the AASW as a critical element of professional practice. The publicity from the AASW declares that members are expected to maintain, improve and broaden their skills, knowledge, expertise and qualities required for professional practice. Members of the AASW are responsible for their own CPD and the Association provides CPD activities and endorses external providers. CPD opportunities are available on-line and this is a critical service for remote or rural based practitioners. The online platform is SWOT and provides a significant range of courses, recordings and networking forums.

AASW members are expected to record their CPD activities through the Member Centre on the AASW website. Members who meet the minimum CPD requirements each financial year are eligible for formal accreditation as either Accredited Social Workers or Accredited Mental Health Social Workers. The significance of this accreditation is difficult to assess as there seem to be few employers setting this as a criterion for employment. The professional body promotes accredited social workers to use the protected trade mark logo on CV’s and other identifying markers.

AASW Branches offer local CPD activities. In the second half of 2015 the following events were showing on the website: Western Region Evening Networking session meeting; Berri CPD program Workshop; A Hypothetical in Ethical Decision Making with a child protection focus; Strengths –Based Supervision: That Sparkles! Workshop; Field Practitioners-Setting up an Integrated Learning Framework 1-day workshop Endorsed CPD; Diploma of Clinical Hypnosis in Psychotherapy Endorsed
CPD-Diploma; Treating Complex Trauma with Dr Leah Giarratano focus on child abuse and neglect. It is difficult to gauge the level of interest from members and the wider professional community from AASW publicity. However, it is clear that the AASW endorses ongoing education.

**Opportunities for professional development provided by industry or organisations**

It is interesting to note that the AASW state based CPD programs do not generally provide alerts to related professional programs that might be relevant to social work practitioners. Social workers with connection with other professional groups might make use of these related professional development opportunities. The law society, psychological/medical/legal associations, council of administrative tribunals, health associations and professional development programs as well as a range of conferences around social issues and policy are also used.

The extent of professional development offered through industry varies. Training in organisations is often fit for purpose, that is, it focuses on the needs of the organisation to meet funding requirements. When Sue Vardon returned to child protection in SA she introduced a virtual college for government agencies. The goal was to provide broad education and training across the public service as well as specific training needs in areas such as child protection. The concept was ambitious and potentially valuable but was limited by its multi-purpose agenda for the public service, TAFE level training approach and internally focused training expertise.

One of the critical elements of professional development in industry is the induction of new staff and the development nature of that induction. All too often in the human services induction is generated as an orientation with no follow up processes. In ideal terms induction is a graduated process allowing for immediate induction and education about the workplace, a structured entry program and critical review of progress within the first phase of employment. And induction is even less evident when employers engage students after graduation as initially with contracts following a placement in the agency. In these circumstances the agency views the placement as orientation and neglects the development of a future staff member and strategies for quality service delivery.

As noted in our own research around case management training (Gursansky, Harvey, Kennedy 2003, 164) the level at which training is pitched is often unsuitable for the backgrounds and experience of the staff involved and inadequately integrated with their previous formal education. This results in elementary training. In addition there is rarely no credit for the employment based training because there is no articulation between sponsors of work based training and educational providers. Again in a later book we point out that human service agencies have limited resources to commit to training and may lack the management knowledge and skills necessary to contract discerningly for appropriate training (2013, 41-4). The worker feedback on the roll out of a single practice framework for Families SA under the leadership of David Waterford and Tony Kemp through a ‘train the trainer’ model and via the college structure illustrates the limitations of these approaches to professional development and workforce training.

**The meaning of supervision in professional practice and its veracity in the workplace**

Supervision has long held a central role in professional social work practice. The profession has an emphasis on reflective practice and supervision is a critical medium for such work. The literature has been consistent about the importance of supervision in social work and the concept remains relatively uncontested. Kadushin is one of the recognised academics who have developed a conceptual framework
for supervision in the workplace. Writing as early as the 1980’s Kadushin (1985, 24) stated that ‘a supervisor performs administrative, educational and supportive functions in interaction with the supervisee in the context of a positive relationship. The supervisor’s ultimate objective is to deliver to agency clients the best possible service, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in accordance with agency policy and procedures’. While different models of supervision have been developed these three elements of the role remain.

However there is debate about the criteria for determining ‘good or effective’ supervision. There is limited recognition for the importance of learning to be an effective supervisor or how to use supervision as a supervisee. Frequently a practitioner moves into a supervisory role with no training and is left to draw on the experience of supervision to guide this undertaking. In addition there is limited attention to the varying needs in supervision at different stages of careers and level of professional development. The needs of a beginning social worker are not the same as those of a more experienced practitioner. The ongoing supervision of senior staff is often neglected. The presumption that one form of supervision (and the dominant concept is one to one supervision) will adequately address the needs of practitioners and may limit their access to learning opportunities such as peer review, interrogation of practice challenges, external specialist supervision, interdisciplinary exchange, professional development, formal study, collaborative practice research, conference presentation and project tasks.

All too often supervision is focused on administrative or organisational accountability and not on the development of professional skills, professional care, ethical and practice dilemmas and the encouragement of new learning. Social work practice is relationship based and engagement in such business demands capacity to use oneself as a medium for the development of a professional relationship with a client and to establish the basis for assessment and planned intervention.

Supervision itself is a sophisticated skill. Supervision incorporates elements of accountability for professional practice, personal and professional development, learning and reflection. It is traditionally a one to one process and it is presumed that the skill naturally evolves with experience or job specification.

There is evidence that increasingly work based supervision is around the organisational accountability for practice and decisions. In the recent ‘usual practice’ project undertaken for the Royal Commission it was evident that supervision or consultation notes, when noted in the files, were more about decisions to close files or take a particular action than around professional issues in the given case or for a practitioner. The general impression is that supervision is marginal rather than central in child protection work. The literature stresses that all functions of supervision need to be addressed, that is the management of staff, educating, supporting and learning. The practice suggests a very different picture.

Effective supervision requires time to be set aside. The breadth of supervision across a given period will cover many elements. These include such issues as professional development which is driven by aspirations of individual workers, specific both to their current job and to their future career development; organisational requirements for workers’ development to reflect the remit of the organisation, enabling them to be as efficient and effective as possible in the context of their present job, future opportunities within the organisation; external circumstances such as changes to professional qualifications or legislative mandate. To address such issues, a range of supervision strategies may be needed.

Supervisors connect practitioners to their organisation. Supervisors connect practitioners with their professional orientation and imperatives. Supervisors build the capacity of a workforce to strengthen
service delivery to clients and identify practice deficits that can be addressed through varying strategies. In supervision there can be feedback on performance. But if feedback is to be of value it has to be built within a relationship, informed by knowledge of effective practice and reflect understanding of the practitioner’s work. Supervision cannot address all development needs of the practitioner. However in this demanding profession and in the practice world of child protection the professional challenges are real, the complexity is a given and poor decision making or inaction leads to serious negative outcomes for children, young people and families.

When workers are not well supported the damage for all parties is potentially high. Some practitioners will pay for external supervision to meet unmet needs but this is still an exceptional response. Many social workers feel unsupported and vulnerable in the face of challenging and high risk work and this is particularly true for the front line worker in child protection who is often the newest and least confident graduate.
Source material for discussion paper

Australian Association of Social Workers Education and Accreditation Standards (AASWEAS), 2012, revised January 2015.

Australian Association of Social Workers website [https://www.aasw.asn.au/](https://www.aasw.asn.au/)


Lesley Cooper and Lynne Briggs (eds) field work in the human services: theory and practice for field educators, practice teachers and supervisors, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest NSW.


Submissions to the Royal Commission from Professor Dorothy Scott, Professor Lesley Cooper and Dr Mary Hood.

WORKER PROFILE

- Human Services indicate a wide range of health and community based services, provided by a large number of workers across a wide domain of expertise.

- In 2011 there were 755,400 paid workers in community services occupations representing 8% of all workers in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community services industries</th>
<th>Other industries</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>310,568 people employed in community services occupations (e.g. child care workers in the child care services industry)</td>
<td>438,021 people employed in community services occupations in other industries (e.g. counsellors in education industry)</td>
<td>755,371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131,691 people employed in other occupations in community services industries (e.g. administrators and accountants in the aged care residential services industry)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>446,539</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes
1. Totals include those for whom occupation or industry was inadequately described or not stated.

*Figure 1: People employed in community service occupations and community service industries, 2011 – Source: Australia’s Welfare 2013, p. 359.*

- In 2011:
  - Within community services industries, the largest occupational group was aged and disabled care workers (86,300), followed by child care workers (80,600), nursing support and personal care workers (43,000) and registered nurses (31,600) (Australian Institute for Health and Welfare, 2013, p. 360).
  - Across all industries, the largest community services occupational group was registered nurses, with 206,900 workers, however, only 15% were employed in community services industries (Australian Institute for Health and Welfare, 2013, p. 360).
  - The majority, some 87%, of workers in community services occupations were women; just over half (57%) worked part time (Australian Institute for Health and Welfare, 2013, p. 352).
  - Of all community services workers, 3% identified as being from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, compared with 1% for other occupations. The community services occupations with the
highest proportion of Indigenous workers were special care workers (9%) and welfare support workers (7%). Less than 1% of registered nurses and psychologists identified as being Indigenous and less than 1 in 20 (3%) identified as being from an Indigenous background (Australian Institute for Health and Welfare, 2013, p. 352).

- 20% of the community services workforce was aged 55 and over compared with 16% in 2006, while 29% were aged under 35 in both 2006 and 2011. The average age of the workforce increased from 42 to 43 years over that period (Australian Institute for Health and Welfare, 2013, p. 352).

![Figure 2: People employed in selected community service occupations, all industries, 2011 – Source: Australia’s Welfare 2013, p. 362.](image)

- The proportion of female workers in community services occupations was highest among early childhood (pre-primary school) teachers (98%), child care workers (96%) and child care centre managers (92%).

- The proportion of community services workers in the older age groups has increased over time, with 20% of the workforce aged 55 and over in 2011, up from 16% in 2006.

- More than half (57%) of all community services staff worked part-time hours in 2011, a higher proportion than other occupations (34%).
JOB GROWTH

- The demand for Human Services has been and continues to increase over time with concomitant changes in service demand and delivery, which impacts on the size and skill mix requirements of the workforce.

- Employment in the Human Services has grown by 3.8% each year over the last ten years, compared to 2% across all industries (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014).

- It is currently estimated that 258,000 new jobs will be created in the Human Services (Health Care and Social Assistance) sector over the next five years (Department of Employment, 2015).

![Figure 3: Projected employment growth, industry share (% of total growth) – Source: Australia's Welfare 2013, p. 362.](image)

- The demand has been driven by an ageing population, recent policy developments that champion consumer-directed care in the aged care and disability sectors plus the recent focus on child protection and domestic violence.

![Figure 4: Projected Employment Growth by Industry, 2013 – 2018 – Source: Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, 2015, p. 12.](image)

- It is expected that one in every four new jobs created between 2013 and 2018 will be in the Community Services and Health industry (Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, 2015, p. 4).
The demand for growth is expected to continue over time and is characteristic of Australia’s transformation to a service based economy (Department of Industry, 2014).

**FUTURE WORKER PROFILE**

- A ‘comprehensive workforce development plan incorporating recruitment, training and retention strategies’ is recorded as a priority of the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009-2020.
- The qualification profile of the community services and health workforce is changing.
- Between 2006 and 2011, the proportion of workers with a Certificate III or (Yu, et al., 2013) higher increased, while the proportion of workers with no qualification decreased (Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, 2015, p. 13).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest qualification achieved</th>
<th>2006 n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>2011 n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Change in share, 2006-2011 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None (unqualified)</td>
<td>210,954</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>218,211</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>-4.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Certificate I &amp; II</td>
<td>12,972</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>14,915</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>-0.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Certificate III &amp; IV</td>
<td>125,620</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>181,590</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advanced Diploma/Diploma</td>
<td>138,677</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>180,281</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>288,957</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
<td>371,625</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>94,459</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>140,042</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>871,639</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>1,106,664</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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</table>

*Figure 5: Human Services Workforce by highest level of qualification 2006 and 2011 – Source: Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, 2015, p. 14.*

- These changes are independent of workforce growth, which suggests that the Human Services workforce is becoming more qualified (Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, 2015, p. 15).
- Rising labour costs and historical shortages of university-qualified workers have prompted providers to increase workforce capacity by introducing new assistant level roles or by expanding the scope of existing assistant roles (Yu, et al., 2013).
- For example, nurse’s assistant trials in Victoria, increased use of allied health assistants (community and ambulatory care) in Victoria and allied health assistants in specific clinical and geographical areas (especially rural and remote regions) examining the use of physician assistants in Queensland.
References


<table>
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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</table>
| ACT   | Australian Catholic University | • Bachelor of Social Work (1995)  
      |                              | • Bachelor of Social Work (Honours) (1995)  
      |                              | • Bachelor of Theology/Bachelor of Social Work (2002)  
      |                              | • Bachelor of Arts (ANU)/Bachelor of Social Work (2002)  
      |                              | • Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Social Work (1995)  
      |                              | • Master of Social Work (Qualifying) (2009)  
      |                              | • Bachelor of Social Work / Bachelor of Social Work (Hons) * provisionally accredited 2014. |
| NSW   | Charles Sturt University     | • Bachelor of Social Work (1992)  
      |                              | • Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Social Work (1992)  
      |                              | • Bachelor of Arts (Honours)/Bachelor of Social Work (1992)  
      |                              | • Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Social Work (Honours) (1992)  
      |                              | • Master of Social Work (Qualifying) (2008) |
|       | University of New England    | • Bachelor of Social Work (2008)  
      |                              | • Master of Social Work (Qualifying) (2011) |
|       | University of New South Wales | • Bachelor of Social Work (1963)  
      |                              | • Bachelor of Social Work/Bachelor of Law (1963)  
      |                              | • Bachelor of Social Work/Bachelor of Arts (1963)  
      |                              | • Bachelor of Social Work/Bachelor of Social Science (1963) |
|       | University of Newcastle      | • Bachelor of Social Work (1991) |
|       | University of Sydney         | • Bachelor of Social Work (1970)  
      |                              | • Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Social Work (1970)  
      |                              | • Master of Social Work (Qualifying) (2011) |
|       | University of Western Sydney | • Bachelor of Social Work (1996) |
|       | Australian Catholic University | • Bachelor of Social Work (2004)  
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<td><strong>Australian College of Applied Psychology (ACAP)</strong></td>
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<td>NT</td>
<td><strong>Charles Darwin University</strong></td>
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<td><strong>University of the Sunshine Coast</strong></td>
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| SA cont. | **University of South Australia** | • Bachelor of Social Work (1975)  
• Bachelor of Social Work/Bachelor of Arts (International Studies) (1975)  
• Bachelor of Social Work/Bachelor of Arts (Aboriginal Studies) (1975)  
• Master of Social Work (Qualifying) (2009) |
| TAS | **University of Tasmania** | • Bachelor of Social Work (1984)  
• Bachelor of Social Work (Honours) (1984)  
• Master of Social Work (Qualifying) - Provisionally Accredited* (2010) |
| VIC | **Deakin University** | • Bachelor of Social Work (1994)  
• Bachelor of Social Work (Honours) (1994)  
• Master of Social Work (Qualifying) - (2009) |
| | **La Trobe University** | • Bachelor of Social Work (1974)  
• Bachelor of Social Work (Honours) (1974)  
• Bachelor of Social Work/Bachelor of Health Sciences (2002)  
• Bachelor of Social Work/Bachelor of Arts (2002)  
• Master of Social Work (Qualifying) (2009) |
| | **RMIT University** | • Bachelor of Social Work (Honours) (1976)  
• Bachelor of Social Work (Honours)/Bachelor of Social Science (Psychology) (1976)  
• Master of Social Work (Qualifying) (2006) |
| | **University of Melbourne** | • Master of Social Work (Qualifying) (2008) |
| | **Federation University** | • Master of Social Work (Qualifying)*  
Provisionally accredited 2014 |
| | **Victoria University** | • Bachelor of Social Work (1990) |
| WA | **Curtin University of Technology** | • Bachelor of Social Work (1982) |
| | **Edith Cowan University** | • Bachelor of Social Work (1998)  
• Bachelor of Social Work (Honours) (1998) |
| | **University of Western Australia** | • Bachelor of Social Work (1974)  
• Master of Social Work (Qualifying) (2009) |

Provisionally Accredited* = Program is newly accredited. Graduates have same eligibility and standing as graduates of all other AASW accredited degrees.

**SOURCE:**  
Courses available on-line:

Undergraduate:

Central Queensland University:

**Bachelor of Social Work - ATAR 52.30 (Semester 1, 2015)**

Four years of equivalent full time study – required to successfully complete 28 courses. Honours graduates are required to complete a total of 28 courses including 25 core courses, one elective course and two honours courses.

Three-day, on-campus residential school per term.

Combination of face-to-face learning and regular online activities.

Charles Darwin University:

**Bachelor of Social Work - ATAR 60 (or higher – standard requirement across all degrees)**

Four years of equivalent full time study - 320 credit points of core, common and elective units.

Mixed mode course.

All students are required to attend compulsory intensive workshops.

Charles Darwin University also offers a Bachelor of Social Work Honours. The honours program is only available to students enrolled in the Bachelor of Social Work. Prior to commencing the final year, students with a GPA of credit or above will be eligible to apply for transfer to the Bachelor of Social Work Honours.

Charles Sturt University:

**Bachelor of Social Work - ATAR 65 (Indicative)**

Four years of equivalent full time study - 256 credit points of core, common and elective units (272 credit points for Honours).

Distance Education.

All students are required to attend compulsory intensive workshops.

There are 1000 hours of field education in this degree. This meets the requirement set by AASW.

Students may apply to enter the Honours program on completion of the third year (full-time equivalent) of the Bachelor of Social Work and have demonstrated both academic and practice competence. Students should have completed 56 subject points towards the degree at a Credit average, or grade point average (GPA) of 5 or better.

Edith Cowan University:

**Bachelor of Social Work – ATAR 55 (Indicative)**

Four years of equivalent full time study - 480 credit points of core, common and elective units.

Distance Education.
Students who elect to study online will be required to attend on-campus activities for a minimum of 5 days per semester in order to meet the accreditation requirements of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW).

Students who have achieved a Weighted Average Mark (WAM) of 70 per cent of higher in the first five semesters may be invited to undertake Honours by transferring to the Bachelor of Social Work Honours.

**University of New England:**

**Bachelor of Social Work – ATAR 72.55 (2014)**

Four years of equivalent full time study

To qualify for the award, a candidate must pass units to the value of 192 credit points as follows:

(a) 168-174 credit points including a total of 42 credit points of fieldwork; and

(b) 18 credit points Elective Units; or

(c) 24 credit points Honours units.

The Bachelor of Social Work is available to students to study either on campus, off campus or mixed mode.

To be eligible for membership with the AASW, social work students are required to undertake a minimum of 980 hours (140 x 7 hour days) practical fieldwork during their training, with a minimum placement being 40 days, 2 days per week with a block of at least 2 x 5 day weeks. The AASW also require 5 face-to-face teaching days for every FTE trimester a student undertakes. Therefore a 5 day mandatory intensive school will be attended during fieldwork placements.

UNE requires that all students undertake 1000 hours of fieldwork during their degree, over two placements.

Students who complete the Honours Pathway may be awarded the degree of Bachelor of Social Work with Honours. To be admitted to the Honours Pathway students must have completed 96 credit points (including HS265 and HSSW310) towards the degree with a grade point average of 5.5 or better

**Postgraduate:**

**Charles Sturt University:**

**Master of Social Work (Professional Qualifying)**

2 years of equivalent full time study – 128 credit points.

Distance Education.

All students are required to attend compulsory intensive workshops.

This is an Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW)-accredited qualification. It is an entry qualification into the social work profession and has been determined to meet the Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS).

Pre-requisites for admission:

1. Successfully completed a recognised degree or equivalent
   INCLUDING
2. The successful completion of a subject in each of the following areas:
   - Human development or life span psychology; and,
   - Sociology/anthropology/social theory; and,
   - Australian Government and politics and/or welfare politics, social policy and social philosophy, economics, and/or Australian economic and social history; and,
   - Research/research methods.

Subjects that are not satisfied in these pre-requisites will need to be completed prior to graduation as either single session subjects or as part of the Graduate Certificate in Human Services.

**Master of Social Work (Advanced Practice)**

1 year of equivalent full time study – 64 credit points.

Distance Education.

All students are required to attend compulsory intensive workshops.

Applicants must have an undergraduate degree in Social Work.

Students of the Master of Social Work (Advanced Practice) will acquire knowledge and skills that are required to enhance the quality of their practice.

The course prepares practitioners for management, policy and practice leadership roles, while developing a better understanding of contemporary issues and challenges, and future directions in social work practice and profession.

**Flinders University:**

**Master of Social Work (Graduate Entry)**

2 years of equivalent full time study – 72 credit points.

Distance Education.

All students are required to attend compulsory intensive workshops.

Applicants must hold an undergraduate degree.

Applicants who have completed a Bachelor’s degree other than in Social Work are eligible to apply for entry.

Graduates of the Master of Social Work (Graduate Entry) are eligible to join the Australian Association of Social Workers.

**University of New England:**

**Master of Social Work (Professional Qualifying)**

2 years of equivalent full time study – 96 credit points.

Distance Education.

All students are required to attend compulsory intensive workshops.

Applicants must hold an AQF Level 7 three year undergraduate degree in a discipline other than social work from a recognised university, which includes 36 credit points (6 units or equivalent) being:
a) at least 12 credit points (2 units or equivalent) of studies in Psychology; and
b) at least 12 credit points (2 units or equivalent) of studies in Sociology; and
c) at least 6 credit points (1 unit or equivalent) of studies in Political systems in Australia; and
d) at least 6 credit points (1 unit or equivalent) of studies in Research Methods; or
e) 36 credit points deemed by the course coordinator to be an equivalent and relevant combination of 1(a), 1(b), 1(c) and 1(d) in line with accreditation requirements of the Australian Association of social workers.

Graduates of the Master of Social Work (Professional Qualifying) are eligible to join the Australian Association of Social Workers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>AUTHOR</th>
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<th>ABSTRACT</th>
<th>JOURNAL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Healey, K. Meagher, G.</td>
<td>Social Workers’ Preparation for Child Protection: Revisiting the Question of Specialisation</td>
<td>Child welfare work is a key field of practice for social work graduates and for graduates of a growing range of disciplines. In the present paper, the authors drew on a survey of 208 child welfare workers and interviews with 28 senior personnel in child and family welfare agencies to analyse perceptions of the educational preparation of social workers and other human science graduates for this field of practice. The findings indicated that child welfare workers and employers are ambivalent about the value of social work and other generic social science and human services programmes as preparation for tertiary or statutory child protection practice, which involves investigation, assessment, and intervention in child abuse and neglect. The authors argue that the social work profession must better balance generic and specialist aspects to prepare graduates for practice in specialist fields of high social work involvement, particularly in tertiary child protection work.</td>
<td>Australian Social Work Vol. 60, No. 3, September 2007, pp. 321–335.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Agliias, K.</td>
<td>Student to Practitioner: A Study of Preparedness for Social Work Practice</td>
<td>Australian social work graduates face an increasingly complex work environment where the role of the social worker is often overlooked or misunderstood. In order to examine the anticipated and concrete practice reality for social workers, this qualitative study examined the expectations of social work students preparing to enter the workforce (n=29) and the experiences of new social work graduates in the workplace (n=9). Findings suggest that undergraduates have a realistic understanding of the challenges they would encounter in practice, including anticipated value and ethical conflicts, and allied professions’ conceptions of the social work role. They did not anticipate the busyness of the workplace or the level of supervision offered.</td>
<td>Australian Social Work Vol. 63, No. 3, September 2010, pp. 345-360.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Kelly, L. Jackson, S.</td>
<td>Fit for Purpose? Post-Qualifying Social Work Education in Child Protection in Scotland</td>
<td>Recommendations for post-qualifying training and education in child protection social work consistently form part of the political response to child abuse scandals. The influence of child abuse politics upon the push towards post-qualifying training and education has been consistent across the United Kingdom. Within Scotland educators have been quick to respond to the market demand for programme provision and there is now a growing number of academic programmes being offered by higher education institutions. Yet despite post-qualifying training and education achieving the status of ‘panacea’ there is little in the way of a national dialogue about what post-qualifying training and education in social work child protection should look like. The parameters of this have not been subject to any kind of national debate and the Scottish academic community has not entered into a professional dialogue on these issues.</td>
<td>Social Work Education Vol. 30, No. 5, August 2011, pp. 480–496.</td>
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<td>More crucially, educators have not engaged in any level of identifiable evaluation of their provision and there is an absence of engagement with the scholarship of teaching child protection at the post-qualifying level. This paper connects with these issues to question whether the post-qualifying training and education delivered by Scotland’s universities can be considered fit for purpose.</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>Lonne, B. Harries, M. Lantz, S.</td>
<td>Workforce Development: A Pathway to Reforming Child Protection Systems in Australia</td>
<td>The Australian child protection system is struggling to successfully address voluminous child protection notifications, increasing numbers of children in state care, decreasing foster-carers and chronic workforce issues. In this paper, we argue that the capacity of statutory child protection agencies to achieve their social policy objectives is severely hampered by their failure to acknowledge or challenge the competing ideologies that underpin contemporary child protection practices. This failure means that the individuals who work in this area experience contradictory demands that compromise their capacity to work effectively and often render their work conditions intolerable, amidst the ongoing threat of media criticism that they are failing. Meanwhile, children and families in need experience risk assessment and interventions often reported to be debilitating and traumatising. This paper highlights many of the problems experienced by people working in and for child protection services in Australia and advocates for urgent reform. To build more sustainable and high-quality child protection services, we argue, workforce development must be central to institutional and organisational reform. In order to achieve necessary change, improve workforce retention and the quality of work, we posit that workforce development strategies must include the reconceptualisation of underpinning ideologies and current approaches practice.</td>
<td>British Journal of Social Work Published online 22 May 2012. Vol. 43, No. 8, 2013, pp. 1630-1648.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Hay, K. Franklin, L. Hardyment, A.</td>
<td>From student to employee: A conversation about transition and readiness for practice in a statutory social work organisation</td>
<td>Statutory social work organisations are a key site of practice learning and for the “construction and development of knowledge and worker expertise” (Noble, Heycox, O’Sullivan &amp; Bartlett, 2007, p.25). This learning primarily occurs during supervised placements and employment. Placements, a core component of social work education, are critical for the development of students as beginning practitioners (Chilvers &amp; Hay, 2011; Noble, 2011). The transition from student to employee is a unique point in the development of a new practitioner that has been little examined in the social work context in Aotearoa New Zealand. New graduates may face several challenges as they undertake this transition.</td>
<td>Social Work Now. June 2012, pp. 2-9.</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>Cortis, N.</td>
<td>Social Work Education as Preparation for Practice: Evidence from a Survey of the New South Wales Community Sector</td>
<td>The flexibility of student life disappears, pressure to perform and manage multiple tasks increases and supports that were in place for a student may no longer be provided (Seden &amp; McCormick, 2011; Walker, Crawford &amp; Parker, 2008). There may also be considerable expectations on new graduates to immediately have knowledge of the organisational structure, social work role and daily tasks. Less time is usually available for reflective practice due to the demands of the daily work (Aglias, 2010). Graduates who have previously been on placement within the employing organisation may have further expectations placed upon them due to their student practice experience. Readiness for this transition may be affected by the graduate’s academic ability, practice skills, placement experience, training and personality attributes.</td>
<td>Australian Social Work.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Meagher, G.</td>
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<td>Social work faces increasing competition from other post school qualifications, which offer pathways into social and community services in Australia. This has prompted debate about what kinds of qualifications should be required in the sector, and about the relationship between social work and other educational programs. This article presents new empirical evidence about social work compared with other human service qualifications as preparation for practice. Based on data from a large survey of nongovernment sector workers in New South Wales (n=661), multivariate analysis indicated that any level of qualification in a human service field improved employee self-ratings of preparedness. However, having a Bachelor level degree or higher in social work had the greatest effect, improving preparedness more than any other individual, job, or organisational characteristic. The findings renew support for social work as the key foundation for practice roles in the nongovernment sector.</td>
<td>Vol. 65, No. 3, September 2012, pp. 295-310.</td>
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<td>2013</td>
<td>Wilson, G.</td>
<td>Preparing Social Workers for Practice: Re-evaluating Student Learning Needs</td>
<td>Among the key developmental priorities that have been identified in the current process of reform taking place in social work in the UK is the need to improve social work students’ preparedness to meet the challenges they will encounter in practice. This paper contributes to the current debate about this issue by reporting a research study that focused on final year undergraduates’ experience of academic and practice learning and considered the impact of demographic factors, including age, gender, disability, previous experience and qualifications, on their perceptions of preparedness. The results indicate that students were satisfied with most aspects of preparatory teaching and learning. However, the findings also highlight areas in which students’ preparation could be further enhanced, including their skills in dealing with conflict and managing risk.</td>
<td>Social Work Education, 2013.</td>
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<td>2013</td>
<td>Bates, A. Bates, L.</td>
<td>Work-integrated learning courses: an essential component for preparing students to work in statutory child protection?</td>
<td>The results suggest that social work programmes should not overly depend on practice learning to prepare students to address the challenges presented by increasingly complex working environments and that educators need to work closely in collaboration with employing partners to ensure that the curriculum keeps up to date with the changing learning needs of practitioners.</td>
<td>Asia - Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education. Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 45-58.</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>Charles, G. Oliver, C.</td>
<td>Strengths-based practice in child protection – Technical Report</td>
<td>Undergraduate programs can play an important role in the development of individuals wanting professional employment within statutory child protection agencies: both the coursework and the work integrated learning (WIL) components of degrees have a role in this process. This paper uses a collective case study methodology to examine the perceptions and experiences of first year practitioners within a specific statutory child protection agency in order to identify if they felt prepared for their current role. The sample of 20 participants came from a range of discipline backgrounds with just over half of the sample (55 per cent) completing a WIL placement as part of their undergraduate studies. The results indicate that while some participants were able to identify and articulate specific benefits from their undergraduate coursework studies all participants who had undertaken a WIL placement as part of their degree believed the WIL placement was beneficial for their current work.</td>
<td>School of Social Work, University of British Columbia. February 2014.</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>Moriarty, J. Manthorpe, J.</td>
<td>Controversy in the Curriculum: What Do We Know About the Content of the Social Work Qualifying Curriculum in England?</td>
<td>Since 2008 all frontline child protection workers within British Columbia’s Ministry for Children and Family Development have been required to use a strengths-based approach with their clients. Strengths-based practice (SBP) has been promoted as a preferred approach for child protection work throughout North America, Australia and Europe. There are early indications that this way of working is effective and that clients value being treated in a strengths-based way. However, workers have been accused of paying lip-service to the approach and struggling to incorporate strengths-based values and practices into their daily work and professional identity. In this study all fully delegated child protection workers employed directly by the British Columbia Ministry for Children and Family Development were invited to share their views on what is needed to make SBP work in the child protection field.</td>
<td>Social Work Education. Vol. 33, No. 1, 2014, pp. 77–90.</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>Tham, P. Lynch, D.</td>
<td>Prepared for Practice? Graduating Social Work Students’ Reflections on Their Education, Competence and Skills</td>
<td>In particular, most material dated from the early years of the social work degree and did not appear to have been replicated more recently to see if the original findings held true. Other subjects, such as how students are taught about older people’s human development, had been considered by researchers but were not addressed by the Task Force and the Reform Board. The implications of this are that, while the content of the social work qualifying curriculum needs to adapt to reflect changing professional contexts, there is a need for greater consensus and clarity about what should be taught and how.</td>
<td>Social Work Education. Vol. 33, No. 6, 2014, pp. 704–717.</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>Zuchowski, I. Hudson, C. Bartlett, B. Diamandi, S.</td>
<td>Social Work Field Education in Australia: Sharing Practice Wisdom and Reflection.</td>
<td>This paper highlights current issues relevant for Australian social work field education preparation and delivery, and shares some of the challenges that impact on schools of social work in rural, regional and urban settings. Topics discussed include the neoliberal context of social work education, its impact, and issues for rural and remote, international and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student placements. The paper explores some existing models that have emerged as responses to current challenges and environments. It also stresses that, despite economic rationalism and the neoliberal context, Australian social work educators still need to provide quality experiences for social work students, their field educator and the field. The importance of engagement in discussions about the future of Australian social work field education is emphasised.</td>
<td>Advances in Social Work &amp; Welfare Education. Volume 16, No.1, 2014, pp. 67-80.</td>
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<td>2015</td>
<td>Zufferey, C. Gibson, C. Buchanan, F.</td>
<td>Collaborating to Focus on Children in Australian Social Work Education</td>
<td>Social work educators across the world are engaged in developing a curriculum that prepares students to be effective practitioners in a range of settings that involve working with children. This paper reflects on collaborative strategies and research that have influenced the child wellbeing content of social work courses in Australia. It presents a critical analysis of the tensions and challenges that can occur in (this) collaborative work. It then discusses an outcome of this advocacy to influence the child wellbeing content of social work education, an undergraduate module aimed at increasing students’ knowledge and skills in communicating with children. This paper argues that Indigenous children (such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children) are over-represented in child protection systems and out-of-home care services, and that this needs to be acknowledged and given increased attention in the education of social work students internationally.</td>
<td>Social Work Education. Vol. 34, No. 1, 2015, pp. 32–45.</td>
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<td>2015</td>
<td>Beddoe, L.</td>
<td>Continuing education, registration and professional identity in New Zealand social work</td>
<td>This article draws on a study of New Zealand social workers’ experiences of continuing professional education (CPE) during the first two years following the advent of limited statutory registration. A qualitative study demonstrates strong links between social workers’ educational aspirations and beliefs about the status of the profession. Social workers in the study perceived continuing education in part as a tool to achieve greater professional standing for social work in contested spaces. At a time when registration legislation is likely to be strengthened, this article contributes to the somewhat neglected scholarship of continuing education in an increasingly regulated social work profession.</td>
<td>International Social Work. Vol. 58, No. 1, 2015, pp. 165 –174.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Zufferey, C. Gibson, C.</td>
<td>Social Work Education and Children</td>
<td>It is well documented that social work graduates feel unprepared for work with vulnerable children, especially those involved with child protection systems. Initiatives of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) emphasise the importance of including a focus on children within the Australian social work curricula. This article considered whether social work education was preparing graduates to respond more effectively to children by examining current online evidence of the courses provided in Australian social work programs in 2011. It builds on previous research conducted by the Australian Centre for Child Protection. Some implications for practice, research, and the future education of social work graduates are discussed.</td>
<td>Australian Social Work. Vol. 66, No. 3, 2013, pp. 391-401.</td>
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Social work education prepares people to practice as social workers, and also a social institution incorporating university and social agency interests. It creates practitioners’ professional identities, bringing together academic learning with practice and life experience. Distinctive models of social work education exist in English-speaking, European and resource-poor countries. Attempts to create global standards for curricula and organization of social work education are contested. Practice experience in social agencies uses supervision linking administrative checking of actions, education, and personal support. Practice experience generates tensions between universities and social agencies about social work educations’ aims.
References


