# Action plan for course coordinators

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

## Problem

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

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

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

This sheet provide an action plan for course coordinators.

## Consequences

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

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

## Causes of problems

The causes of some of these problems are no

- The **on-going struggle** to maintain the course arises from the underlying presumption that larger courses have more legitimacy, even though graduate employability and employer support can be much better for specialist courses than for generic courses.
- **Isolation** within the university will persist unless more staff are appointed.
- **Unreasonable threats/ demands** from others within the university to grow student numbers (without any additional funding) or face closure. This may be an example of **attributing blame to an individual for something that is a systemic problem** (for example if the course is not advertised effectively).
- **Stability of the programme must be prioritised** in planning, and university management need to understand and support this so succession-planning occurs and so that suitable and flexible arrangements can be made to cover staff absence (illness, leave) or crisis.

## Actions required by politicians and policy makers

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

- **On-going struggle to maintain the course:** can become less onerous if university management is supportive of the value and legitimacy of these specialist courses and if the course has strong professional and employer support. **This report** is one part of building the

support. Also necessary is active support from professional associations, policy advocacy groups and employers (these relationships take time to nurture).

- **Isolation:** within the university may be reduced through contact with similarly placed coordinators in other disciplines. Beyond the university, an outcome of this programme is **the working groups** that provide contacts with colleagues in the same discipline at other universities, with national and local professional associations, and with similarly placed coordinators in other disciplines.
- **Blaming individuals for a systemic problem**: the first step to managing this problem is to name the multiple causes of the problem and ask others to take responsibility for providing the supported that is needed. This report documents what kind of **support is needed from each stakeholder**.
- **Ensuring programme stability**: This may be something that the coordinator can achieve through mentoring staff and potential staff, but most likely it will require middle management support and development of a strategy to cover crises or unexpected absences. **Management flexibility is important.** This may require different arrangement from what would be provided to a large course.