

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

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

Problem

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

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

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

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

Consequences

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

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

Causes of problems

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

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

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

Actions required by politicians and policy makers

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

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