



Declining availability of specialist courses in social professions: adverse effects of demand-driven funding

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This presentation

- Outlines **decline in specialist courses in social professions** and policy contribution in Australia
- Outlines **consequences** for student choice and skills shortages
- Identifies how **policy hinders** course viability
- Suggests **future policy directions**
- **Help needed:** next steps for Fellowship

OLT Fellowship

- My OLT Fellowship in 2016, to mitigate loss of courses through university collaboration
- *Achieving economic sustainability for niche social profession courses in the Australian higher education sector - a nationwide collaborative strategy*

Decline in courses

Courses examined

- HUMAN WELFARE STUDIES AND SERVICES 0905
- Youth Work (ASCED FoE 090505)
- Social Gerontology (ASCED FoE 090507)
- Disability (ASCED FoE 090509)



Method

1. Manual search of university websites and handbooks
2. Automated search on courses by ASCED code 2011-2015
3. Interviews with course leaders

Multiple methods used independently to check for consistency.



Snapshot: Course enrolments (unique individuals)

- Changes in enrolments in Courses 2011 to 2016

• Youth work 394  561

• Disability 293  150

• Social gerontology 32  0?



What is happening? Courses

Undergraduate courses

- More students are studying youth work -but in public universities only available in Victoria and WA, plus ECU, online
- Disability is disappearing as a specialism -UNE course as a double with primary education (also Flinders Developmental Disability and integration)
- Social gerontology has disappeared as a specialism



What is happening? Units

Undergraduate units

- Rise in Youth work course and unit numbers -more students doing youth work as a specialism.
- Rise in social gerontology unit numbers (sevenfold) non-specialist students in other courses (e.g. nursing, social work) picking up single units.
- Rise in disability unit numbers (50%) is non-specialist students picking up single units.



Consequences

- **Youth Work:** No national coverage for courses, but discipline is 'hanging on'.
- **Disability:** Very few specialist courses remain. Students in disability units less likely to be taught by disability specialists.
- **Social gerontology:** Probable total loss of social gerontology as a taught discipline in Australia. No distinct courses, despite strong growth in unit enrolments. Students unlikely to be taught by social gerontology specialists.



Why important?

- **Social need:** Australian Government social policy requires specialist graduates,
 - examples National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Domestic and Family Violence, Aging-in-place Age Care Policy, Closing the Gap; Youth Justice Reinvestment and Countering Violent Extremism
- **Imperfect market:** Unmet need for graduates in specialist social professions currently met by migration

Cause and effect?

- Centrally planned funding protected specialist courses
- Decline commenced prior to 2012, after place transfer permitted
- Rate of decline increased after 2012
- Outcomes predicted in the Lomax-Smith report (2011) –warned of risk of course loss if ‘price signals’ were wrong

Strategy

- Successful collaboration needs to be
 - embedded in the institutions and
 - supported at grass roots and
 - supported by senior management
- Grass roots support is easiest to achieve (but intra-university competition is problematic)
- At senior levels, the problem is acknowledged but no incentive to act
- Hence: loss of courses and expertise within universities sector (key staff already made redundant/ retired)

Analysis

- Demand driven policy competition hampers collaboration
- Loss of expertise has occurred and difficult to reverse –will affect future teaching and research
- Requires policy change to
 - rebalance provision of courses to meet social need,
 - provide incentive for support cross-institutional collaboration,
 - provide funding to recruit expertise

Summary

- Market not working
 - Mismatch between social need and graduate supply
 - Mechanisms to ensure a match between social need and courses offered too weak.
 - Competition unhelpful
- Reduced student choice, notwithstanding growth in total places.
- Changes in the policy drivers are needed

Policy option 1) Hybrid/market-based

- **Hybrid market/ centralised planning**
- Intervene to financially support student places in courses where there is a skills shortage or social or cultural need.
- Cap places in areas of low graduate employment, over supply of graduates and no cultural benefits.

Policy option 2) Supported collaboration

- **Government support for multi-institutional specialist teaching**
- Cooperative Teaching Centre (Modelled on CRC).
 - Seed money to support development of new shared courses,
 - Use online learning technologies and local support (UK Open University model)
- In market-based system would need incentives to ensure universities offered courses.

Next steps for Fellowship

- Road show –January/ February 2019
- I need suggestions about where this might be most effective
- Invites to institutions/networks

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