



# The HE Policy environment and specialist social professions courses in Australia

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# This presentation

- Identifies how **contemporary policy and practice** hinders course viability
- Suggest possible **future policy and practice** directions
- OLT Fellowship: *Achieving economic sustainability for niche social profession courses in the Australian higher education sector - a nationwide collaborative strategy*



# Australian Government

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## Department of Education and Training

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# Policy context and small courses

- **Prior to 2012: central funding model:**
  - 1) institutions received subsidies for an agreed number of places for domestic students on each course, and
  - 2) allocation of funded places was capped –each degree had an allocation of government subsidised places
- **From 2012: ‘demand-driven’ model:**
  - 1) funding provided to universities follows student course preferences, and
  - 2) no caps on numbers of subsidised places available to domestic students
  - 3) Universities stopped offering less profitable course

# Central planning funding model

## Central planning

- Directed funding **according to social, cultural and economic need** (graduate employment, but also socio-cultural benefit)
- **Shaped degree mix** within universities and across the sector
- **Protected specialist courses** because (initially) places could not be transferred to more profitable courses

# Demand driven funding model

- **Aim:** universities become responsive to student preference and employer demand
- **Assumptions:**
  - **Market-driven:** market would determine university course-mix
  - **Information:** students would be well-informed
  - **Professional associations:** would monitor standards

# Demand driven funding model

- How it works
  - Courses allotted to **funding band** according to notional cost of provision
  - Student contribution assessed relative to **graduate incomes**
  - YW, disability, and gerontology allocated to **low band** – lower than other courses with practicum
  - Government *myuniversity* website (now QILT) informs students about employment outcomes/student satisfaction
  - Universities decide course-mix they offer
  - Special protection offered to some foreign languages

# Demand driven funding model

- Consequences
  - **No oversight** of sector-wide degree mix
  - No links to **socio-cultural or economic need**
  - Universities decide degree mix **in their best interests**
  - Profit motive favours large-enrolment **generic degrees** and **well-funded specialist** degrees
  - **Growth in university marketing**, *Myuniversity* website poorly used
  - **Reduced diversity** of courses and student choice
  - **Graduate unemployment exacerbated** by disconnect between graduate employment and courses offered
  - **Increased competition** between and within universities



# Cause and effect?

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

# Possible strategy

- **Policy reform** –modify demand driven funding
- **Cross-institutional collaboration** –extend course availability
- **Professional associations** and employers apply political pressure
- **Technical adjustment:** align funding for youth work, disability and social gerontology with “**allied health**” (university will then see courses as ‘profitable’)

# Policy option 1) Hybrid/market-based

- **Hybrid market/ centralised planning**
- Allocate additional funding **to support student places** in courses where there is a skills shortage or social or cultural need.
- **Cap places** in some courses
  - 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.

# Policy option 3) Technical adjustment

## Demand-driven funding (technical adjustments)

- Lobby to **change funding band** to *Allied Health* (would need strong support from professions/employers)
- Offer special support to **reduce student HECS payments** (as occurred with science and before that child care)
- Add a weighting for **social need and skill shortage**

# Other Policy option(s)

- Please suggest in discussions
- What can be learnt from NZ?

# For background and references

**Cooper, T.** (2018). Student choice and skill shortages: some effects of demand-driven funding. Paper presented at the *HERDSA Conference*, Adelaide, 2<sup>nd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> July 2018,

<http://www.herdsa.org.au/publications/conference-proceedings/research-and-development-higher-education-re-valuing-higher-2>

This paper won the best scholarly paper award.

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# Discussion

- Focus questions:
  - Potential for collaboration (barriers and opportunities).
  - how to build mutual support between profession bodies, universities and policy bodies (barriers and opportunities)
  - Local, and national commitments to action on policy and practice.
- Review SWOT analyses and amend/add
- Next steps –where to from here.