

**Careers At The Coal-Face?
Community Services In South Australia:
Workforce Development**

A joint project by the University of South Australia Social Policy Research Group and
SACOSS

Condensed Report

To The Human Services Research Initiatives Program

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary iii

 Introduction iii

 Research Framework and Methodology iii

 Key Informant Interviews, Literature Search and Secondary Data Collection iii

 Workforce Survey iv

 Key results from Survey and Case Studies v

 Policy and Workforce Development Implications vi

Acknowledgements.....viii

1. The Context: Changes in Funding and Service Delivery 1

 Service Delivery and Funding Changes 1

 Integrated Service Delivery 2

 Individualised Service Delivery..... 3

 Implications for Community Services Sustainability and Development..... 4

2. Scoping the Issues: Key Informant Interviews 6

 Industrial Relations 6

 Ageing Workforce 7

 Imbalances in Training / Skills Development..... 7

 Issues for Investigation in the Coalface Survey 8

3. Scoping the Sector: The Coalface Survey 9

 Profiling and Surveying the Sector 9

4. Survey Results: Pressures on the Sector 12

 Competitive Funding and Sector Development..... 12

 Costs of Accountability and Standards Regimes 13

 Entrepreneurial vs Caring Values as Staff Motivators..... 14

 Service Delivery Models and Service Demands 14

 Implications of Caring Work Being Undervalued..... 15

5. Survey results: The Workforce..... 17

 Wages, Tenure and Role groups..... 17

6. Survey results: Labour market, Recruitment and Turnover..... 21

 State of the Labour Market 21

 Unfilled Vacancies 25

 Unwanted Voluntary Staff Turnover 26

7. Survey Results: Recruitment and Selection Strategies..... 32

 Training and Skills 34

8. Variation between sub-sectors: Summary of Case Studies 38

 Drivers for Organisational Change and Sector Development 38

 Future Workforce Scenarios..... 39



Tenure of Staff: Casual and Part-Time Employment.....	40
9. Options for Workforce Development	41
Workforce Development	42
Agency Level Strategies	43
The Need for Sector-Wide Strategies.....	44
A Common Nomenclature and Classification System.....	46
The Way Forward – Towards a Whole-of-Sector Approach.	48
Wages and Conditions	50
Cross Sector Approach to Reform.....	50
References.....	51



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This document constitutes the condensed final report on the Research Project undertaken by Professor Ed Carson, Christine Maher and Peter King of the Social Policy Research Group of the University of South Australia, funded through the Human Services Research and Innovation Program (HSRIP). The project was designed to profile the community services workforce in South Australia and to provide a detailed analysis of critical issues currently affecting the workforce in non-government community services agencies.

Research Framework and Methodology

The study has been organised in three phases –

- Literature Search, Secondary Data Collection and Key Informant Interviews
- Workforce Survey sent to approx 1000 community service organisations in SA
- Case Studies in 3 selected sub-sectors

Key Informant Interviews, Literature Search and Secondary Data Collection

In the first phase, we drew on research literature from a range of disciplines fields, including:

- Commentaries and analysis of public funding, service delivery and income support trends in response to fiscal imperatives
- Identification of historically changing models of government financial support for non profit organisations
- Current and future policy developments and key trends in specific policy fields
- Developments in specific labour markets related to community services
- Workforce development issues in community services.

Findings from the literature and the key informant consultations were consistent in highlighting that the community services sector is one of the fastest growing in Australia, and in South Australia – and bearing the greatest burden of change. ABS data reveals that in the late 1990s the community services sector overall grew by some 15%, with the number of government organisations in the sector remaining almost static (1.5% increase) while the not for profit (10%) and especially the for profit organisations (32%) have grown very strongly. The non-government sector expanded through contracting-out during the 1980s and 1990s and this is expected to continue, notwithstanding some recent reversal of that process in DFC, as well as in areas such as TAFE. During the period this forced growth in the sector took place, there has been insufficient attention paid to capacity building of the sector, and questions about resourcing and sustainability of workforce development have been left unanswered. That constitutes a critical gap in knowledge since labour costs constitute over 70% of expenditure in the sector.



Our statistical analysis is supplemented with labour market analysis based on official ABS statistics, including the Survey of Community Services (1999-2000), Labour Force and Enterprise based time series, and Census data, organised by:

- ANZIC industry
- ASCO occupational
- NCCS (various classifications relating to the community sector such as activity, ownership and function).

Workforce Survey

At the heart of this project was an industry wide survey designed to provide a snapshot of the workforce across all service types in the community services sector in SA, and to identify recruitment and retention issues for the sector. Rather than sampling from the agencies in the sector, a strength of this survey is that it has covered the sector fully by canvassing all (in scope) agencies, some 1000 organisations, followed by more intensive follow-up of key areas through case studies and interviews.

The industry research framework was designed to ensure collection control (consistency of approach across the sector, ensuring representation from all parts of the industry, handling follow-up and non response). The framework involved developing a database with details of each agency we needed to consult. Following consultations the results were entered into the framework for subsequent analysis.

Constructing the industry research framework involved:

- Defining and agreeing on the 'in-scope' industries activities and occupations
- Identifying sources of entities for inclusion in the industry consultations, including:
 - ABS register of businesses
 - CISA/Info search database
 - SACOSS membership database
 - ASU database
 - Ensuring industry coverage re size, industry sub groups, specialisations, client interests
 - Identifying and mapping sector peak bodies, advocacy groups and unions.

It became apparent from applying the definition of in-scope agencies for the Project to the database generated for the survey that the size of the population to be surveyed was approximately 1,000. This led to a considerably larger survey than was intended, since the original estimate of the number of agencies to be sampled and surveyed was approximately 400.

An on-line survey was distributed to all heads/managers of agencies, to gather workforce data in relation to all employees. Workforce data included: number of employees, tenure (permanent/casual), status (full-time /part-time), length of employment with agency, qualifications



required for position, credentials (professional qualifications, accredited training), award coverage, position function, number of volunteers, demographics, and vacancies.

Agencies were also requested to indicate willingness to participate in further case study/ in-depth interviews with a smaller self identified sample from the sector. Case studies were undertaken with four sub-sectors namely, Aged Care, Disability Services Agencies, Community and Neighbourhood Houses and community-managed Child Care agencies. This component of the study elaborated on the survey responses to indicate the way in which differences in context, history, and approach were shaping and constraining responses to workforce pressures across the sector.

Key results from Survey and Case Studies

Responses of Key Informant Interviews were used to assist with specifying the key issues to be canvassed in the survey, including:

- Nature of the work and the client base
- Security of employment
- Processes related to attracting and retaining qualified and experienced staff
- Training/ skills base
- Government policies and their implications
- Costs of doing business in more highly regulated competitive market
- Sector development and management in the sector

Many of the survey respondents took participation in the survey as an opportunity to highlight concerns about factors impinging on their agency, especially concerns about increased regulation and reduced resources that are familiar to analysts and practitioners in recent years. But their comments were not simply a list of perceived injustices or complaints about the sector not being resourced. As was the case with Key Informants, survey respondents were also able to present a balanced view of factors that had impinged on their agencies and to present positive aspects of the mechanisms put in place to deliver services in the new environment. Having said that, it is true that many of the strategies to cope with changed staffing and service delivery imperatives can be best described as 'paucity management'. These represent primarily short-term individual and local level coping strategies, more than might be appropriate in light of the policy drivers operating at a broad sectoral level.

A high proportion of survey respondents have embraced/ accepted the need to adapt and develop skills appropriate to modern service delivery styles. Similarly, a clear majority of respondents agreed that the sector needs to shift its attitude from 'helping the poor' to 'more of an outcomes focus' and that the change to individualised service delivery requires the development of new skills throughout the workforce.



Only a low proportion of respondents reported that they found it easy to attract qualified and experienced applicants for job vacancies. There was an indication that a majority of agencies often had to fill vacancies with candidates who were less qualified or experienced than ideal. And respondents observed that this was exacerbated by low pay rates and limited funding resources that make it difficult for workers and the employing agencies to arrange training to upgrade skills for the current workforce. That was true for agencies of all sizes. The level of resources available for training, and workforce development more generally, is a major concern for agencies of all sizes across the sector.

Part of the proposed strategy of respondents was to advocate for parity with public service conditions (both with respect to wages and for the purposes of raising the sector's profile). But workforce development also requires a more systematic approach to presenting the sector as an industry of choice for potential workers, in part by presenting it as an industry that is organised in terms of a systematic occupational classification and coherent training programs.

While licensing and accreditation requirements are generally agreed as driving the take-up of training, the need to continuously improve standards and upgrade skills across the workforce is widely recognised and supported across the sector. Yet training uptake across the sector has been highly variable, in part attributed to a lack of coordination of Industry Training needs. A majority of respondents reported that providing training to upgrade current workers skills was made more difficult by the lack of a coherent picture of content and applicability of the various training components on offer across the sector (eg the relationship/overlap between youth, aged care and child care qualifications at each level), the fact that training standards are seen to be variable between Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), and that training outcomes are not well understood by employers. This points strongly to the need to develop a sector wide occupational framework, linked to well publicised and respected training strategies.

Policy and Workforce Development Implications

This research has been designed to assess the impact of key policy, funding and social changes on the community services industry workforce. Findings are intended to: inform reforms to policy and planning processes within and between South Australian Government human services agencies and the non-government sector; facilitate work-force planning and capacity building within agencies across the sector; assist education and training; and promote an improved understanding of this distinctive and critical sector and its needs.

While SACOSS, and to a lesser extent other peaks such as COTA, YACSA, ANGOSA etc, provide leadership in the sector, the sector is so large and diverse it is difficult to organise it in a systematic way that positions agencies in the sector to deal with pressures for effective service delivery in a context of continual change. The Department for Families and Communities (DFC) has taken steps to redress some of the uncertainties and administrative burdens associated with



competitive tendering funding. Yet a recent history of short term, project based, funding arrangements have led to the adoption of insecure employment frameworks which militate against efforts of organisations to maintain, develop and grow their workforce in a planned way.

Even with new government procurement processes, there are still significant barriers to effective long term planning for service delivery and for sustainable wages and conditions across the sector. In the course of addressing these issues, SACOSS at the State Level, and the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council at the national level, are promoting improvements in wage levels and security for the community services workforce. Our assessment is that this needs to progress through the development of an integrated sector wide occupational framework through which to relate the claims for development in ways that can meet the challenges of the sector in the coming decades.



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1. THE CONTEXT: CHANGES IN FUNDING AND SERVICE DELIVERY¹

The community services sector is one of the fastest growing industry sectors in Australia, and bearing the greatest burden of change. The composition of the sector varies across the States, and the South Australian State budget underwent a larger structural change in favour of community services over the last five years than any other State, with the exception of Queensland. In South Australia's case, the growth in the budget share allocated to community services between 2000-01 and 2004-05 was a spectacular 6.0 per cent per annum. This was 5 times the average rate of increase in the share of aggregated State budgets spent on community services, but this was from a lower base than most other States.

ABS data indicate that in the late 1990s the community services sector overall grew by some 15%, with the number of government organisations in the sector remaining almost static (1.5% increase) while the not-for-profit (10%) and especially the for-profit organisations (32%) have grown very strongly (ABS 2006). Although there was dramatic growth in the number of for-profit agencies, at more than twice the rate for not-for-profit agencies, the not-for-profit sector organisations are on average getting bigger while on average the for-profit sector organisations are getting smaller. Total employment in the sector grew nationally by 12.4 per cent between 1995-96 and 1999-2000 (from one quarter of a million persons in 1995-96 to 282,000 persons in 1999-2000 – a rise of 31,000). All of this growth was accounted for by the not-for-profit sector employment, which rose by 37,000 persons. Offsetting this was a decline in total employment in the for-profit sector of 6,000 jobs.

The non-government components of the sector (both not-for-profit and for-profit organisations) are expected to continue to grow Australia-wide, and certainly in South Australia, notwithstanding some recent changes to tendering and contracting processes introduced by the SA Department for Families and Communities (DFC). During the period this rapid growth in the sector has been taking place, there has been insufficient attention paid to capacity building in the sector, and questions about resourcing and sustainability of agency and workforce development have been left unanswered. That constitutes a critical gap in knowledge since labour costs constitute over 70% of expenditure in the sector.

Service Delivery and Funding Changes

Changing Funding Models

The trends in funding mechanisms over recent years have been well documented elsewhere and we need not re-visit that discussion here. Moves to adopt a 'New Public Management' model around the globe in the 1980s and 1990s are widely recognised as being introduced with the intention of decoupling policy from service delivery, through managing outsourced public service provision via contrived markets. A useful caution, however, is to remember that unlike

¹ This chapter summarises chapters 1-4 of the Full Report of the "Careers at the Coalface: Community Services in South Australia" Project, from which this condensed report is extracted.



governments in other countries, such as the UK, at no time did the Australian Government provide much in the way of community services so that, with the exception of employment services, the growth in this area has not been caused as profoundly by privatisation as it has elsewhere in the world.

Nevertheless, as in other areas of government funding of programs, the funding regimes that have shaped the community services sector over the last two decades have been predicated on a competitive tendering model. This has been accompanied by an emphasis on efficiency and productivity, and increasing regulation of outputs through the accountability / efficiency / governance requirements common elsewhere in the outsourcing of Government services.

On the one hand, the ideas of the competitive market have impinged more deeply in community services than in other industries, emphasising the idea of citizens as consumers, able to choose from a range of service providers (Carson and Couch 1999). This has been reinforced by a strong push for agencies to deliver services to clients in the community as part of de-institutionalisation, which is ostensibly about improving quality of services for the clients and their families.

On the other hand, the trend towards increased contracting out of service delivery has emerged hand in hand with an increased emphasis on treating citizens as the government's customers. This has meant service targeting, by ever more tightly specified outputs being purchased by the government departments. Furthermore, the devolution of accountability and responsibility for implementing Government policies to contracted service providers has included requirements for agencies to monitor customer/client compliance with conditions of service.

On balance, though, this service delivery change manifests itself in changing service delivery patterns whereby services are 'joined up' to overcome functional and organisational silos. The effects are evident at both the organisational level (*integrated service delivery*) and at the level of interaction with the individual client (*individualised service delivery*). At the same time, there are challenges due to the geographic distribution and ageing of the population, ageing carers, and a projected rise in the demand for services — increasingly being delivered in a community setting. All of these combine to create difficulties in attracting and keeping skilled, experienced staff in the sector, particularly in the role of personal carers.

Integrated Service Delivery

At the organisational or whole-of-agency level the intention of changed service delivery models is to achieve efficiency and cost savings via an Integrated Service Delivery Model. "All of the available evidence points strongly towards the need for a paradigm shift in policy, funding and service delivery away from narrow single issue programs and towards 'broadbanding' of services" (NSW Dept of Community Services, 2005).



In practical terms this Integrated Service Delivery approach often involves integration by geographical location (involving regional planning authorities and community level projects) and integration of a variety of different services used by particular clientele (Fine, Pancharatnam and Thomson 2001). This holistic approach, it is argued by advocates, can create synergies leading to innovation and streamlining of service delivery through information and skill sharing. It increasingly takes the form of a “Partnerships “ approach, with private/ public/ community partnerships encouraged as a means of building social capital and enhancing community capacity (Carson and Kerr 2003). It can, however, be argued by critics that it is inconsistent with competitive tendering because of the importance of agency level commercial-in-confidence information and confidential client information.

Individualised Service Delivery

As a complementary process to the integration of agencies and creation of partnerships to deliver services, there has also been promotion of a client centred focus, intended to ensure a continuity and coordination of care planned to suit the needs of individual clients as consumers. All the variations of the model are underpinned by the concept of Individualised Service Delivery - described as working in partnership with the client, and by attempting to “fit the model to the individual/ family” rather than “fit the individual/ family into the model”.

These service provision arrangements and ways of working require different responses from within organisations and across organisational and traditional professional boundaries.

Trends in service delivery that are driven by social exclusion as an organising principle focus attention on particular client groups, such as the homeless or the disabled, across a range of jurisdictions. As a result, it is argued in some of the literature that different skill requirements are required in the community services sector (Disability Services Qld, 2001). For example, in the field of disability services, direct support staff who are experienced, creative and resourceful, who have a belief in the capacity of people with disability or disadvantage to learn and develop and who know how to work in a community context to actively address inclusion issues, are high in demand within the sector. (Disability Services Qld, 2001)

Similarly, the argument that the delivery of services to the homeless requires the development of special skills among workers continues to be a major point of contention. For example, commenting on the “rhetoric about services needing to be service user focused and placing clients in the centre of service planning and delivery, and focusing on outcomes for clients”, Oberin & Marchingo (2003) point out that there remain a number of cultural, philosophical and funding barriers to achieving this objective. Referring specifically to services for the homeless, they assert that these barriers are both internal/cultural and external/structural.

Despite even the best intentions, however, services are not only often hindered by their own ‘culture’ and philosophical underpinnings, but also by the rules and performance



indicators built into, and dictated by various government funding models” (Oberin & Marchingo 2003).

Implications for Community Services Sustainability and Development

An increasing number of researchers in Australia (Owen et al, 2001) (Spall & Zetlin, 2004) (Buchanan & Considine 2002) (Healy 2004) (Meagher & Healy 2003) (Wagner & Spence, 2003) have identified a range of serious challenges as a result of such changes in the community services, including:

- increased responsibilities (for organisations and their workers), with less funding
- a shift in the nature of funding
- competition for scarce resources
- a shortage of volunteers
- predominantly female employees constrained by heavy workloads, long hours, and high vulnerability to burnout due to low pay,
- workers’ talents and achievements not being well rewarded

and:

- highly regulated rule-bound jobs leaving little latitude for discretion and driving out the most entrepreneurial workers
- the education and training that workers receive not matching the roles and demands actually encountered on the job.

It is, of course, not a new perception that community services workers are deeply committed to helping clients, but are under-resourced, and under- appreciated. Onyx (1992) reported that the attraction to work in the community sector was often a values choice (commitment to social values/social change/ improving the client group’s lot, and/or personal self-development/personal growth). In sector and organisation terms, a dilemma for the community services sector is not just that there is evidence of under-resourcing and deprofessionalisation of the labour force, but that front line community service workers also perceive a “dissonance between their practice goals and the administrative goals” of the various Departments that fund them (Meagher & Healy 2003).

Nonetheless, there are increasing reporting and accountability requirements that do have workload and skills implications. The additional emphasis on operational efficiency, efficacy and fiscal control with ever-increasing burdens of paperwork and reporting on outcomes as a primary requirement by funders is in many cases an additional workload which is not taken into account in funding formulae. Social policy in recent years in Australia has rewarded minimal spending on operational costs and infrastructure, sometimes without appropriate reference to organisational and service delivery implications. This leads to managerial practices in non-profit organisations in the human services sector labelled by Wagner & Spence (2003 p.1) as paucity management:



“...that set of strategies used by managers and workers to operate effectively and ethically under conditions of resource poverty”.

Accordingly, in the present study we set out to assess if the funding and the accountability regimes of the past two decades have implications for agencies being able to deliver services in ways consistent with ongoing organisational development and workforce development in the sector.



2. SCOPING THE ISSUES: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS²

In order to make a preliminary assessment of the state of community services in South Australia, and to identify critical issues that warranted further investigation, we undertook some 30 interviews with managers and CEOs from a range of agencies and peak bodies representing the wide spread of services within the sector. They all had considerable experience in working within the sector, and in developing organisational strategies to address workforce issues.

Industrial Relations

Many of the key informants talked about the ways in which they as managers attempted to alleviate and counteract the negative effects of high work loads, stress, burnout, low wages, compliance regimes, and insecure and short term contracts. They talked consistently about the need to develop human resources strategies and workplace cultures where staff supported each other, functioned effectively as teams, and were enabled to develop skills and experience across work roles to enable this mutual work support to occur; where staff were encouraged to communicate with each other, were listened to and valued, and were recognised for their efforts; and where family friendly flexible work practices were practiced. The reported effect of these strategies is to maintain morale and motivation, and to attract and retain good staff, who have a sense of commitment to the agency and feel appreciation for what they do.

All key informants expressed a concern from a number of perspectives (eg, OHS, risk management, worker connectedness, service quality) that there is an increasing number of mobile employees and contracted suppliers, often but not always casually engaged, who are working without a set workplace, typically in clients' homes. This presents supervision, support, safety and liability issues. In some cases where the client is contributing to the cost of the service, and directing the elements of the work done, this can create tension and even conflict over who is actually the worker's employer.

In general key informants agreed that the industrial relations tools available to them to attract and reward a high quality workforce had some limitations due to the fragmented nature of the sector and its limited resource base. For example, one of the strategies available to counteract the disadvantage of the low wage structures in the sector is salary sacrificing. Salary sacrifice is limited, however, to organisations which can maintain or achieve PBI status, so interviewees reported that this advantage is principally limited to the larger and longer-established organisations among the not-for-profits in the sector.

Other issues that were nominated as making it difficult to achieve workforce stability included the limited availability of entitlements such as Long Service Leave and Annual Leave, due to the contractual nature of much employment and, where these were available to workers, their lack of

² This chapter summarises chapter 5 of the Full Report of the "Careers at the Coalface: Community Services in South Australia" Project, from which this condensed report is extracted.



portability within the sector. Issues such as these highlight the fragmented nature of the workforce, and the difficulties entailed in achieving a level of coherent industrial and human resources approaches across the sector.

Some key informants, although not all, perceived Enterprise Agreements to be difficult to achieve in the sector, mainly because of the time they took away from core activities in a resource poor staff situation, and a perception that the industrial knowledge and negotiation skills needed to achieve them were not available in smaller organisations. It is entirely possible that recent amendments to Industrial Relations Legislation will maintain rather than alleviate this fragmentation, and that over time other industries will experience effects of this, similar to the effects already experienced by the community services sector. .

Ageing Workforce

The community services workforce is generally recognised to be an older/ageing workforce. This was not identified by those who were interviewed to be an intrinsic problem for the quality of care or commitment to the work, but there was a general agreement that, unless addressed, this will pose a problem for the sustainability of the workforce in the future.

Various approaches were suggested, ranging from developing strategies to attract new graduates, and young trainee/ Apprentices, although attracting young people to work in the sector was reported to be difficult. The informants also discussed the need to develop strategies for attracting mature semi-retired and retired workers who may be interested in part time casual work and be interested in “giving back” to the community, as well as developing strategies designed to actively retain the skills of mature workers in the sector.

There were some who considered that older workers are not motivated to upskill/ re-skill to meet changing system demands, and that this poses a challenge when attempting to modernise practices, and that experienced mature staff do not have skills or time to undertake on the job training and/or mentoring with younger or less experienced entrants. Clearly this is a major issue for workforce development strategies in the sector in the near future.

Imbalances in Training / Skills Development

Training, licensing, accreditation and quality service standards were closely linked issues in the interviews. The Key Informants observed that variation in the levels of training uptake across the sector were in part attributable to licensing and accreditation requirements operating differently to drive training uptake in sub sectors (for example in Aged Care and Child Care).

Where there is less impetus to undertake training for accreditation purposes, the take up of formal training is patchy across the sector. In particular where there is no funding subsidy for the costs of training, the onus falls on the individual worker to both pay for training and find the time off the



job to undertake it. Low pay rates and funding resources are barriers that make it difficult for workers and employers to upgrade skills via formal training.

Key informants consistently recognised that the needs of both employed and voluntary staff, including Board members, were changing and increasing in all areas of professional, entrepreneurial and management skills. Larger organisations were seen to have the economies of scale and resourcing levels to meet these ongoing training needs in a range of ways, more easily than smaller organisations were able to.

Key informants further reported that training standards are variable between RTOs and that many employing agencies did not have a good understanding of the content and the differences in expected training outcomes for various training programs, which made it difficult for them to assess the relevance and value of the qualifications gained by applicants.

At the time the interviews were conducted, Industry Training Advisory Boards (ITABs) had not long been replaced by Industry Skills Boards, and the future of work which had been undertaken by the State Community Services and Health ITAB was not clear. .

Issues for Investigation in the Coalface Survey

On the basis of the key informant interviews, as well as literature searches, the range of questions asked in the survey covered issues including:

- the competitive funding market
- changing service delivery models & service demands
- nature of the work, wages and working conditions
- industrial relations
- ageing workforce
- workforce balance & diversity
- imbalances in training/ skills development.



3. SCOPING THE SECTOR: THE COALFACE SURVEY³

Profiling and Surveying the Sector

No integrated set of (ABS) statistical indicators exists for the community services sector at either the national or State level, and there is considerable variation in emphasis on the broad sub-sets of community services across the States. As one indication, South Australia spends only 40 per cent its community services budget on aged and disabled services while nationally the comparable figure is 57 per cent. Conversely, the percentage of the community services budget in South Australia allocated to homeless and general welfare is 36 per cent compared to the national average share of 21 per cent.

In view of the dearth of specific available data, to assess the state of community services in South Australia we were obliged to undertake an industry-wide survey in South Australia. As part of the development of that survey, an industry research framework was designed to ensure collection control (consistency of approach across the sector, ensuring representation from all parts of the industry, handling follow-up and non response).

Constructing the industry research framework involved:

- Defining and agreeing on the ‘in-scope’ industries activities and occupations
- Identifying sources of entities for inclusion in the industry consultations, including:
 - ABS register of businesses
 - CISA/Info search database
 - SACOSS membership database
 - ASU database
 - Ensuring industry coverage re size, industry sub groups, specialisations, client interests
 - Identifying and mapping sector peak bodies, advocacy groups and unions.

Full details of the creation of the “population frame” are available in the full report, but the point needs to be made that it was a complex task, at least as complex as actually administering the survey, because of the unreliable quality of data in existing databases, coupled with the fact that many agencies delivered services across more than one classification category. This complexity is indicated in the following table derived from the Community Information Strategies Australia (CISA) database.

³ This chapter summarises chapter 6 of the Full Report of the “Careers at the Coalface: Community Services in South Australia” Project, from which this condensed report is extracted.



Table 3.1
Incidence of multiple functions in the Coalface survey population
(as recorded on Infosearch), ranked by primary function's
contribution to the total

Primary category*	Number of organisations with.....:					Total
	1 function	2 functions	3 functions	4 functions	5 functions	
Personal & Family Support	107	41	49	97	9	303
Accommodation	130	3	26			159
Community Organisation & Development		1	118	9		128
Health	1	6	66	51		124
Education	6	21	67			94
Finance, Income, Business		17	44	1		62
Employment		22	31			53
Law & Justice		4	10	10		24
Material & Practical Needs			10		1	11
Transport	3		4			7
Citizenship, Nationality			5	1		6
Communication & Information Services			4			4
Public Safety	1	1				2
Total	248	116	434	169	10	977
Per cent of total	25.4%	11.9%	44.4%	17.3%	1.0%	100.0%
Cumulative per cent of total	25.4%	37.3%	81.7%	99.0%	100.0%	

Source: (CISA - Community Information Strategies Australia Inc.,2005)

* Using CISA Infosearch functional classification system.

In the event, after supplementing the CISA database with data from a number of other State and national sources, our scoping of the sector entailed an on-line survey, distributed to all heads/managers of community services agencies in the State. Rather than sampling from the agencies in the sector, a strength of this survey (partly borne out of necessity) is that it covered the sector fully by canvassing all (in scope) agencies, some 1000 organisations, followed by more intensive follow-up of key areas through case studies and interviews. Issues canvassed included assessment of the issues confronting the agency, and strategies to respond to those issues. We also gathered detailed workforce data including: number of employees, tenure (permanent/casual), status (full-time /part-time), length of employment with agency, qualifications required for position, credentials (professional qualifications, accredited training), award coverage, position function, number of volunteers, demographics, and vacancies.



There is insufficient space in this condensed report to detail the population and profile the respondents in detail (full details available in the full report), but Table 3.2 shows that the agency respondents to the survey, almost 300 out of 1000 contacted, were broadly representative of the estimated configuration of agency types and their workforce in South Australia. A Chi Square analysis shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the proportions of the population and the distribution of the survey findings⁴. The agencies that responded employed some 5,300 workers, across the four role sets we used to classify jobs, namely professionals, direct support, 'indirect support' and management. Again this is broadly representative of the 19,000 workers in the sector in South Australia.

Table 3.2:
Inscope Non Government Community Services Organisations
South Australia, 2005*, ranked by no. of agencies
compared to survey respondents

Function	No. of agencies In SA	Per cent	No. of agency respondents to survey	Per cent
Residential Care & Supported Accommodation	182	18.6%	43	14.4
Information Advice, Referral & Indiv Advocacy	137	14.0%	34	11.4
Child care	137	14.0%	32	10.7
Personal support and counselling	118	12.1%	40	13.4
Personal Services for Independent Daily Living Support	83	8.5%	26	9.0
Support for Carers, Families & Children	57	5.8%	23	7.7
Employment Services	54	5.5%	14	4.7
Community Centre	47	4.8%	17	5.7
Personal Services for Independent Community Living Support	46	4.7%	30	10.0
Transitional & Crisis accommodation - med to long term rental	46	4.7%	13	4.3
Community Development Social Action & Group Advocacy	33	3.4%	7	2.3
Financial & Material Assistance	16	1.6%	7	2.3
Peak Body	16	1.6%	11	3.7
Alternative/ Foster Care & Adoption Services	5	0.5%	1	0.3
Total	977	100.0%	298	100.0

Source: (CISA - Community Information Strategies Australia Inc.,2005)

⁴ [Z=0.14]< p[25.0] at 5 per cent level of significance and 15 degrees of freedom.



4. SURVEY RESULTS: PRESSURES ON THE SECTOR⁵

A full analysis of data from the 'Coalface Survey' is provided in the full report, but two broad strands of findings warrant discussion in this condensed report, first, issues associated with service delivery and funding that are confronting the sector and, second, labour market and workforce development issues.

Competitive Funding and Sector Development

"Win Tenders or Win the Lotto"

Short term and competitive funding environments have led to the adoption of precarious employment frameworks which militate against efforts of organisations to maintain, develop and grow their workforce in a planned way. Project based and fixed term funding arrangements have also made it difficult to attract and retain a loyal and experienced workforce. They have made it particularly difficult to remunerate staff at levels commensurate with remuneration in other industrial sectors.

In South Australia, the Department for Families and Communities recently (mid 2006) negotiated an exemption to the Government's procurement legislation and policies for its funding to non-profit agencies for the delivery of community services. The revision to service procurement protocols and procedures will thereby reduce the emphasis on contestable processes. Such a shift, to an approach based more on cooperation and collaboration than competition within the community service sector, promises the opportunity to strengthen the integration and effectiveness of the community services system in South Australia. It is a cause for optimism that such a shift is being declared, and provided it is implemented in accordance with the declared intent, this is an important step forward. It is a necessary - but not sufficient – condition of a more integrated and sustainable community services sector.

Even with new procurement processes, there are still significant barriers to wage and condition improvements across the sector, in spite of a requirement for increasing skill levels from workers and management to address complex client needs because in general fees for services are set by the purchaser, namely government funding bodies.

Many of our survey respondents took the opportunity to highlight concerns about factors impinging on their agency, especially concerns about increased regulation and reduced resources that are familiar to analysts and practitioners in recent years. But their comments were not simply a list of perceived injustices or complaints about the sector not being resourced. Survey respondents were able to present a balanced view of factors that had impinged on their agencies and to present positive aspects of the mechanisms put in place to deliver services in the new environment. Having said that, it is true that many of the strategies to cope with changed

⁵ This chapter summarises chapter 7 of the Full Report of the "Careers at the Coalface: Community Services in South Australia" Project, from which this condensed report is extracted.



staffing and service delivery imperatives can be best described as individual and local level coping strategies – more than might be predicted in light of the widespread recognition of policy drivers operating at a broad sectoral level.

Respondents were consistently critical of competitive funding mechanisms. In particular, the vast majority of respondents (85%) reported that competitive funding regimes had increased instability in the sector and also increased costs, due to the costs of tendering, administration and compliance regimes. This clearly has implications for effective workforce planning.

[Note, however, the arguments that funding regimes have contributed to polarisation between small specialised services and larger multi service agencies were not supported by variations in the responses of agencies in different situations (large/small, metro/non-metro, faith based/secular). For the most part the differences were not statistically significant, except where specifically indicated.]

While we observed above that competitive funding policies are reported by 85% of respondents as increasing instability in the sector and increasing costs, respondents from the child care sector reported significantly lower impact (60%) from this factor, as did residential care and crisis accommodation providers to a lesser extent. This may partly be explained by the extent of non-tender-based funding regimes applying in the child-care, aged, disability and crisis accommodation sub-sectors. It was especially evident with funding arrangements for child care, that is, being managed and administered as a tax based subsidy of fees paid to users of the services.

Costs of Accountability and Standards Regimes

While increased accountability and standards regimes are seen to yield improvements in service quality assurance, the increased costs involved in assuring high standards do not yield improved returns to organisations in the form of higher prices or new markets for services, as they would be expected to in an unregulated private market. In the absence of increased revenues or improving the ability of organisations to innovate quickly to respond to changing market demands, then quality standards and accountability present a challenge to long term financial sustainability.

These increased costs are imposed directly and indirectly – with one major indirect aspect being the increasing costs of employing staff with wider skill sets in business and management areas as well as in service delivery.

Sixty eight per cent of respondents were in agreement that the entrepreneurial corporate service style required under competitive funding regimes conflicts with the caring voluntary community managed human service tradition, and similarly that compliance regimes in a competitive market do not encourage innovation, reflective thinking and collaborative service improvement strategies in the sector.



It needs to be stressed that not all responses were pessimistic about the impact of recent funding regimes on the sector. In fact, just over half of valid responses (53%) supported the notion that competitive funding provides opportunities for agencies to grow and expand their range of services, and a large minority (43%) believed that competitive funding encouraged agencies in their sub-sector to develop innovative services. Innovations were born out of necessity, as case study discussions illustrated (details in full report), although this was not seen as sustainable in the long-term. Nevertheless, even where respondents stressed the extra work for the agency involved in meeting the accountability and compliance requirements of current funding arrangements, there was no sense that anyone was claiming that accountability *per se* was a bad thing.

Entrepreneurial vs Caring Values as Staff Motivators

Organisations are accepting the challenge to focus on moving from “charitable good works”, with staff who are motivated by caring for people more than by the money they earn doing so, to being sustainable organisations providing financially viable human services to clients. They are, however hamstrung by not being able to offer attractive remuneration and reward, as well as training and career progression for new and existing staff. Low pay rates are not commensurate with the expectations that staff will have entrepreneurial business abilities and aptitudes, - particularly, but not exclusively expected of managers - to be able to adapt to compete successfully in the market place.

There were statistically different responses between types of agencies on attitudes to entrepreneurial styles, and responses to the increase in for-profit agencies in the sector. For example 73% of small to medium size agencies (fewer than 50 staff) were critical of the new entrepreneurial styles as conflicting with voluntary, caring service traditions compared to just under half (48%) of the larger agencies agreeing with that observation.

Service Delivery Models and Service Demands

“They close the institutions, but the dollars don’t follow the clients into the community ”

Responses to questions regarding demand for services, and ability to meet that demand, showed that nearly all agencies were concerned about these issues. Respondents overwhelmingly (over 96% of valid responses across the relevant subset of questions) agreed that:

- demands on community service agencies had been increased by de-institutionalisation policies
- unmet client needs are increasing
- clients’ service needs are increasingly complex
- there is a shortage of carers to provide in-home, family, community support and personal care



Such strong expressions as this clearly indicate that the sector is under severe pressure in coping with service demands. Moreover, such comments cannot be interpreted as a product of resistance to changing ways of doing business within the sector, since a high proportion of respondents (89%) embraced/ accepted the need to adapt and develop skills appropriate to “modern” service delivery styles. Similarly, a clear majority of respondents agreed that the sector needs to shift its attitude from ‘helping the poor’ to ‘more of an outcomes focus’ (78%) and that the change to individualised service delivery requires the development of new skills throughout the workforce.

These sentiments were reiterated strongly in case study focus groups, where participants asserted that they are running small (and some not so small) businesses which are professional and accountable for outcomes, standards and funding, and that the new service delivery models require new skill sets from all involved. **“We might be warm but we aren’t fuzzy”**

Almost 100% of respondents reported the impact of de-institutionalisation as increasing demand for services, with an exception being those in supported employment services (85% in agreement). Similarly, almost 100% of respondents, with some exceptions in child care agencies, reported that there is a rising level of unmet need for personal care services. This is, of course, commensurate with other recent research findings on unmet need such as ACOSS (2006).

Implications of Caring Work Being Undervalued

As with the findings in the literature (Meagher & Healy 2003), there was strong general agreement among survey respondents that the work of caring is seen to be both complex and demanding (81%) and also undervalued (91%) and that the demands of high case loads, long waiting lists and the complexity of client needs were contributing to workforce burnout and staff turnover (93%). The strong conviction that the work of caring is undervalued is reinforced by the widespread observation (97% agreement) that wages and working conditions in the sector are lower than comparable private and public sector employment and, in particular, that employment in the sector is predominantly insecure due to short-term and casual employment contracts (91%).

The consistent theme reiterated by the key informants and in focus groups is well encapsulated by the survey respondents who wrote about the causes of workforce stress and burnout:

“...expectation that organisations will 'do more with less'...increased pressure on staff... exacerbated by the increasingly high and complex needs of clients ... There isn't a lot to motivate (you) if you don't have a strong personal commitment to working in this sector”

The impact of this issue was reinforced by the fact that only a low proportion of respondents reported that they found it easy to attract qualified and experienced applicants for job vacancies.



There was an indication that a majority of agencies often had to fill vacancies with candidates who were less qualified or experienced than ideal. Yet training uptake across the sector has been highly variable, in part attributed to a lack of coordination of Industry Training needs.



5. SURVEY RESULTS: THE WORKFORCE⁶

“There doesn't seem to be the next generation of workers”

The need to address the implications of an ageing workforce was identified as a concern of both key informants and survey respondents, with 96% of respondents agreeing that there is a need to develop strategies to retain the skills of mature workers as well as attract young people and recent graduates to the sector. (More on both of these points in the next section.) Yet the sense of frustration in the face of challenges to developing a workforce for the future is well expressed by the following quote from a survey respondent: *“everyone who ever wanted to work in aged care is already doing it”*.

Wages, Tenure and Role groups

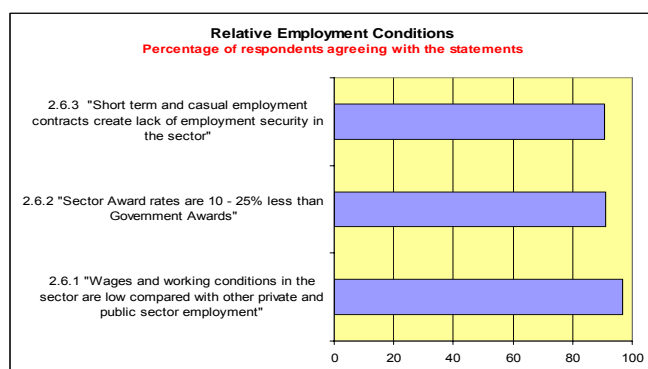
Lack of security and tenure of funding within the community services sector has been identified as a consequence of funding changes in the sector, and that insecurity is seen to be challenging the stability of the sector as a whole. In particular, agencies are often unable to offer more than short term employment as a consequence of funding contracts that often run for less than a year and specify that employment in programs funded by such contracts cannot be continuing employment. This was consistently identified by key informants as a constraint on the sector being seen as an employer of choice.

Low wages were also identified as a deterrent, with Award wages consistently reported to be 10–25% less than Government Award rates for similar positions, a factor which disadvantages the community services sector in competing with better paid Government agencies for prospective workers, and this is exacerbated when combined with low rates of employment security in the sector.

Figure 5.1 shows the high level of agreement that the wages and working conditions are relatively low and perceived to be insecure, compared with comparable employers.

⁶ This chapter summarises chapter 8 of the Full Report of the “Careers at the Coalface: Community Services in South Australia” Project, from which this condensed report is extracted.

Figure 5.1
Wages and Award Conditions



The survey questions sought to tease out this issue, asking information about tenure of employment around four levels of role groups relevant for workforce purposes – Direct Support, Indirect Support, Professional, and Management (as identified in Appendix 3 of the Full Report, in a discussion of workforce development in the Queensland Disability Sector).

Professional Roles

This includes Hands On roles, e.g. Occupational Therapist, Social Worker, Psychologist, Speech Therapist, Community Worker, Key Worker, Residential Program Officer; Indirect roles, e.g. Accountant, Business Manager, Senior Administrative Officer, Senior Project Officer. Advocate and Volunteer Co-Coordinator.

Direct Support Roles

Examples of Direct Support roles are: Support Workers, Personal Care Assistants, Residential Care Officers

Management Roles

Examples of Management roles [Direct and Indirect] are: Team Leader, Coordinator, Manager, Chief Executive Officer.

Indirect Support Roles

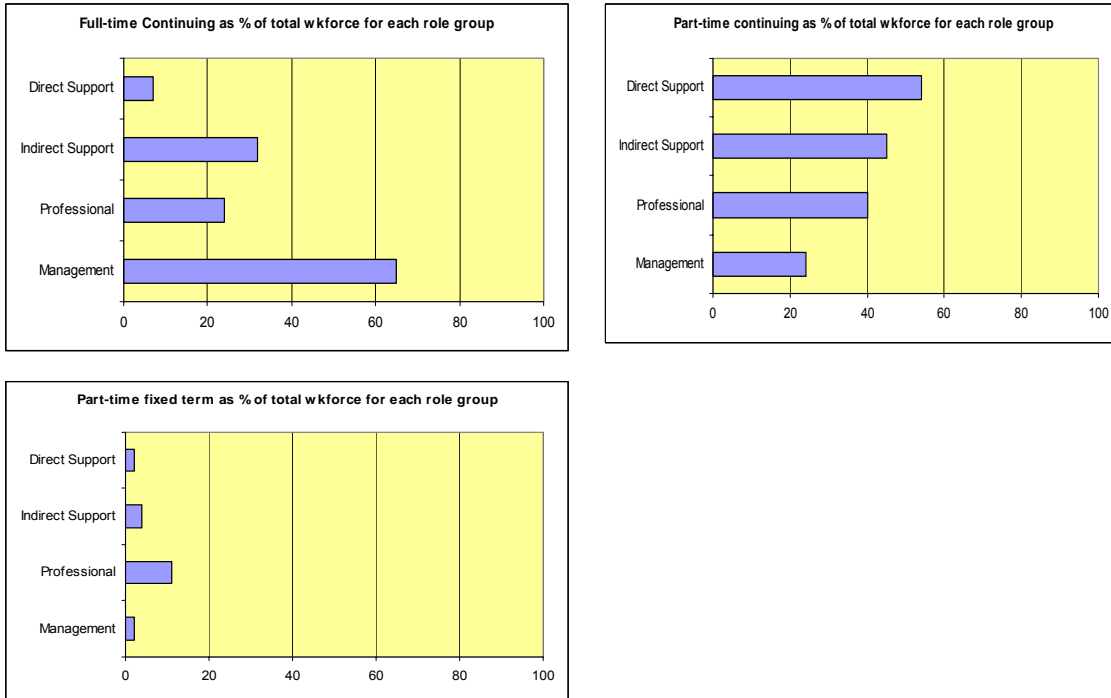
Examples of Indirect Support roles are: Clerical/Administrative, Receptionist, Booking Clerk, Maintenance Worker, Payroll Officer, Fundraiser, IT Systems Manager, Human Resources Coordinator

It is clear from the data shown in Figure 5.2 that positions classified within the Management role group are more likely to be full-time continuing positions than those within the other three groups, and less likely as a proportion of the whole to be part-time, compared with other role groups.



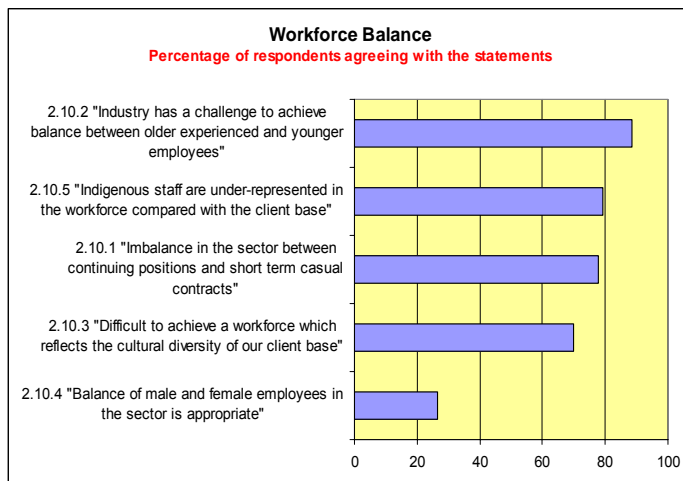
Positions in the Direct Support role group are more likely to be casualised or part-time than those in any other role group.

Figure 5.2
Profile of Employment Tenure by Role Groups



As might be expected, a majority of respondents (78%) believed that the balance of full-time and part-time positions in the sector was not appropriate. This was complemented by a majority view that the gender balance of the workforce is not appropriate (74% of responses) and that indigenous and culturally diverse staff are under-represented in the workforce (79% and 70% of responses respectively) (Figure 5.3).

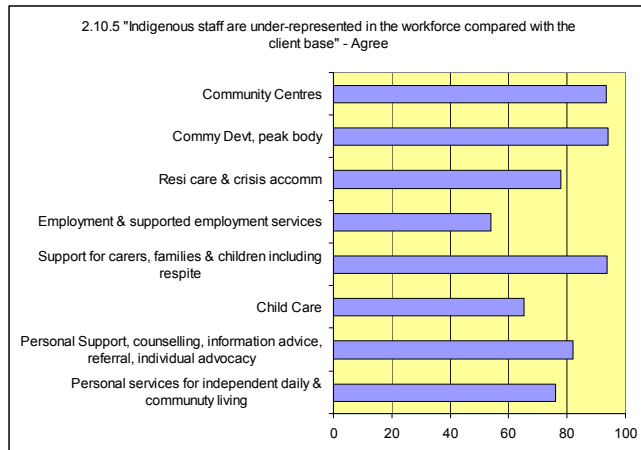
Figure 5.3
Workforce Balance





While there is a general view that there is an imbalance of indigenous staff compared to the client base, there are significant differences between respondents on this issue, with a lower proportion of respondents in employment and supported employment services (54%), and child care (65%) agreeing than those from community centres (93%) and peak bodies (94%) and family support / respite care services (94%) (Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4
Under-Representation of Indigenous Staff





6. SURVEY RESULTS: LABOUR MARKET, RECRUITMENT AND TURNOVER⁷

State of the Labour Market

A higher than desired rate of unfilled vacancies and high demand for skilled labour is typical of the current labour market in Australia in general, where the unemployment rate is currently at a 28 year low of 4.8% (ABS, August 2006). This has an impact on a diverse range of industries from mining and construction and manufacturing to health services sector, where concern regarding shortages of skilled labour is rising.

Two of the commonly accepted indicators of the state of the labour market within an industry are:

- the level of unwanted unfilled vacancies that exist within an industry
- the level of unwanted staff turnover—that is, how difficult it is to attract and retain suitably skilled people to the workforce in sufficient quantities when they are needed.

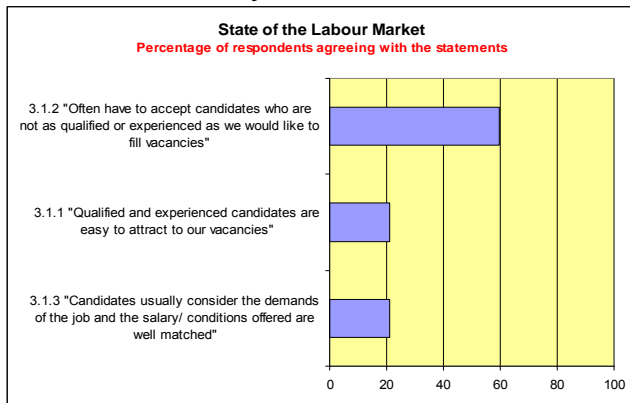
Both high levels of unwanted vacancies and staff turnover were reported by key informants. Consequently, the survey sought to document agency assessments of the situation across the sector in regard to these indicators, and to elaborate on measures such as tenure of employment, workforce balance, and recruitment practices within the four role groups identified above – Professional, Direct Support, Management and Indirect Support

As indicated in Figure 6.16 below, survey respondents reported that the community services labour market is tight, with only a low proportion of respondents (21%) reporting that they found it easy to attract qualified and experienced applicants for job vacancies. There was, moreover, an indication that a majority of agencies (60%) often had to fill vacancies with candidates who were less qualified or experienced than ideal.

That general sentiment broadly confirms the balance of opinion among key informants, although there was considerable variation found in the previous interviews with informants on this matter. The differing assessments of the availability of suitable job applicants was not a simple association with agency size, function or client group, since on this issue we received conflicting opinions from CEOs of agencies with similar profiles.

⁷ This chapter summarises chapter 9 of the Full Report of the “Careers at the Coalface: Community Services in South Australia” Project, from which this condensed report is extracted.

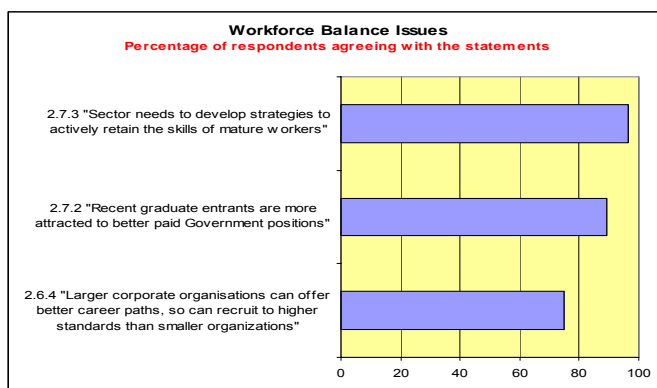
Figure 6.1
State of the Community Services Labour Market



One of the critical elements cited by the majority of respondents as contributing to the widespread difficulty of attracting qualified and experienced people to available positions was the relatively low level of pay, and insecure employment conditions prevailing in the sector (already presented in Figure 6.1 above). This is borne out by the large majority (79%) of respondents reporting that new staff, once in the job, considered that the salary and conditions were not well matched to the demands of the job.

Figure 6.2 below indicates that a majority (81%) agreed that it is difficult to attract young people to work in the sector, and 89% observed that recent graduate entrants are more attracted to better paid government positions. A majority of agencies (75%) held the view that larger corporate organisations can recruit to higher standards because they can offer better career paths for their workers. This perception of relative attractiveness is counteracted, however, by the fact that even the larger multi-site agencies reported concerns about competing with government agencies for suitable staff, and they reported difficulties in recruiting suitable trained staff as often as did smaller agencies.

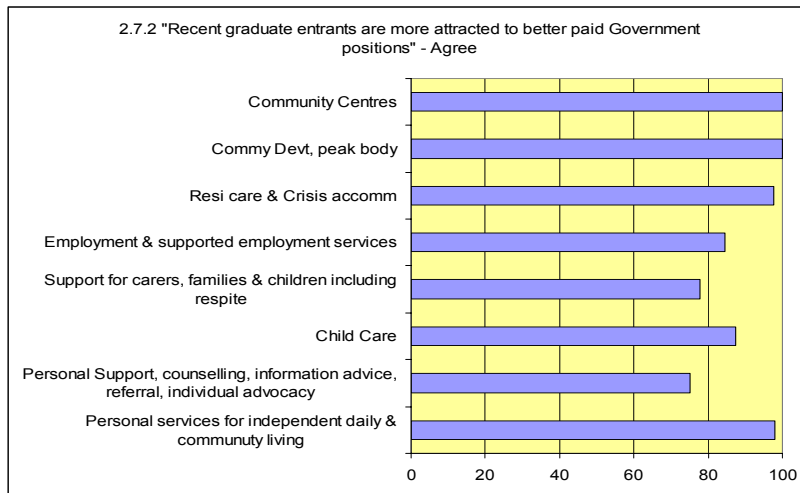
Figure 6.2
Workforce Balance Issues and Strategies





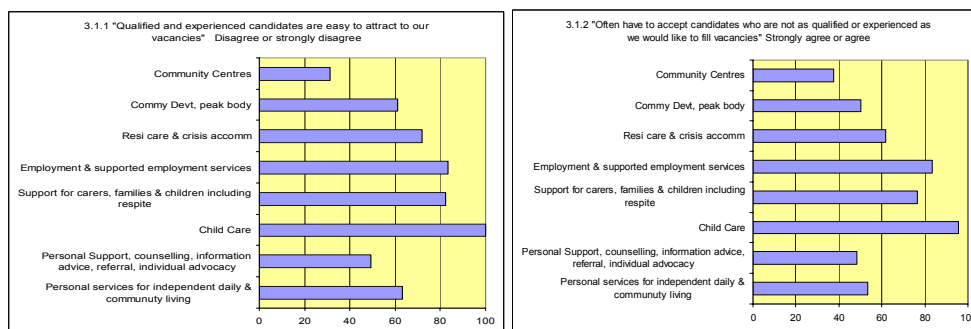
The difficulty of attracting recent graduates in competition with better paid Government positions was deemed highly important (88- 100%) by most services, but appears to be less important for services providing family support services, including respite care (78%), and personal support, counselling, referral and advocacy (75% agree) (Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3
Competition for Recent Graduates



All childcare centres reported that they find it more difficult than other agency types (49% to 83%) to attract qualified and experienced candidates to fill vacancies (Figure 6.4). Interestingly, community centres appear to have the least difficulty in attracting suitable candidates (31%) – although this may be a factor of smaller staffing size. Childcare centres (96%) and to a lesser extent employment & supported employment services (83%) also reported more often that they have to hire candidates who are not as qualified or experienced as they would like to fill vacancies than other respondents (38% to 77%).

Figure 6.4
Attracting Suitable Applicants to Vacancies



As a specification of the generally expressed concern about low wages in the sector, almost all agency types disagreed that applicants consider the demands of the job and the salary/ conditions offered to be well matched (Figure 6.5). Child care centres disagreed most often with that proposition (83%) The larger the size of the agency's professional staff, the less likely it was to express concern about the mis-match (Figure 6.6 below).

Figure 6.5
Matching of Job Demands with Salary and Conditions

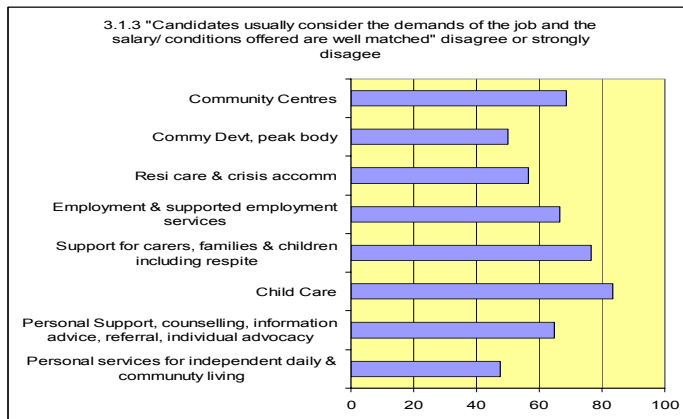
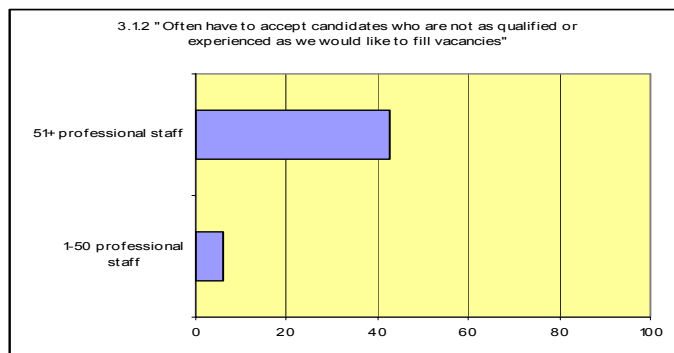


Figure 6.6
Size of Professional Staff Correlated With Ease of Attracting Suitably Qualified Staff



Comments from survey respondents, such as the following, shed further light on the difficulties of attracting and appropriately rewarding suitable workers:

"Aside from the issue of pay differentials there is a dearth of professionally trained staff which is an issue in recruitment. Positions often need to be readvertised before being successfully filled or remain vacant. Better involvement of community sector agencies in the coordination of student placements by the Universities would help NGO's recruitment. Increasing University professional training intakes



would also assist.”

“There is a great divide between professional roles and para professional roles. Para professional roles appear to be casual rather than permanent and are less attractive and low paid There is a huge discrepancy between Tertiary Degree & TAFE Certificate 3, with lack of permanency attached to Cert 3. Smaller Organisations are often not attached to award wages”

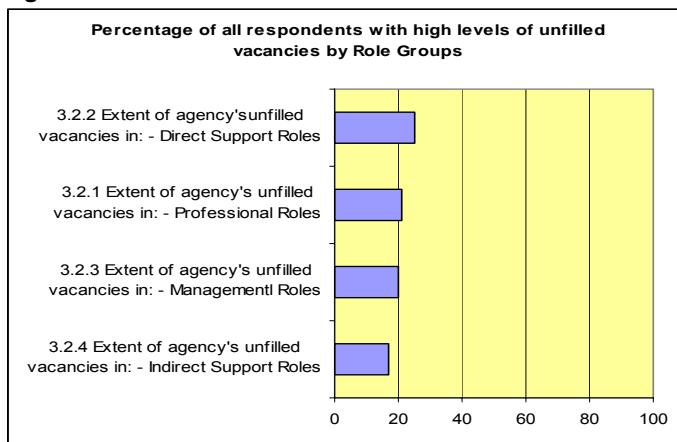
An interesting difference emerged from the data regarding the priority different types of agencies place on certain types of applicants when recruiting. The data indicates that faith based agencies appeared to place a greater emphasis on attracting recent graduate applicants than non-faith based agencies. No other statistically significant differences emerged from the data.

Unfilled Vacancies

“...we are advertising jobs at salary sacrifice pay rates instead of hourly pay rates to attract more candidates, but they often don't take up positions ...because of the real pay levels”

Between 16% and 25% of all respondents reported that high levels of unfilled vacancies were causing problems within their agency in the four employment role groups as indicated in Figure 6.7. High levels of unfilled vacancies in direct support roles were more frequently reported to be a problem for the agency.

Figure 6.7
High Levels of Unfilled Vacancies



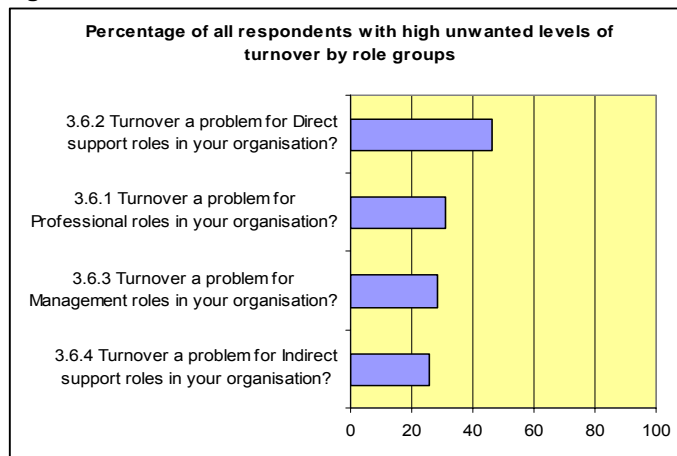
Unwanted Voluntary Staff Turnover

“...most people enjoy the job but can’t live on the wage we pay them so they have two jobs, so they leave for a higher paying job”

Unwanted voluntary staff turnover was reported to be a problem in all agencies to some extent across all four of the Role Groups we defined (Professionals, Direct Support Roles, Management Roles and Indirect Support Roles).

More respondents reported concern about turnover rates in direct support roles (46%) than in the other role groups, although between 26% and 31% reported concerns about turnover in the other three role groups, as indicated in Figure 6.8.

Figure 6.8
High Unwanted Levels of Staff Turnover



It was particularly in Direct Support roles that there was a notable difference in high levels of voluntary turnover between the metropolitan and non-metropolitan agencies, as shown in Figure 6.9. There was a belief that the most common reasons for voluntary turnover were directly related to salary and conditions being less favourable in not-for-profit community service agencies than in the public sector or for-profit organisations (although figure 6.12 below shows that the most common destination of leaving staff was another non-government agency).

Figure 6.9
Differential Turnover in Direct Support Roles

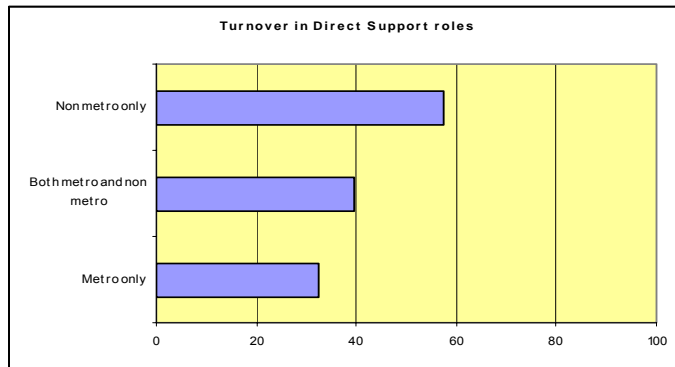


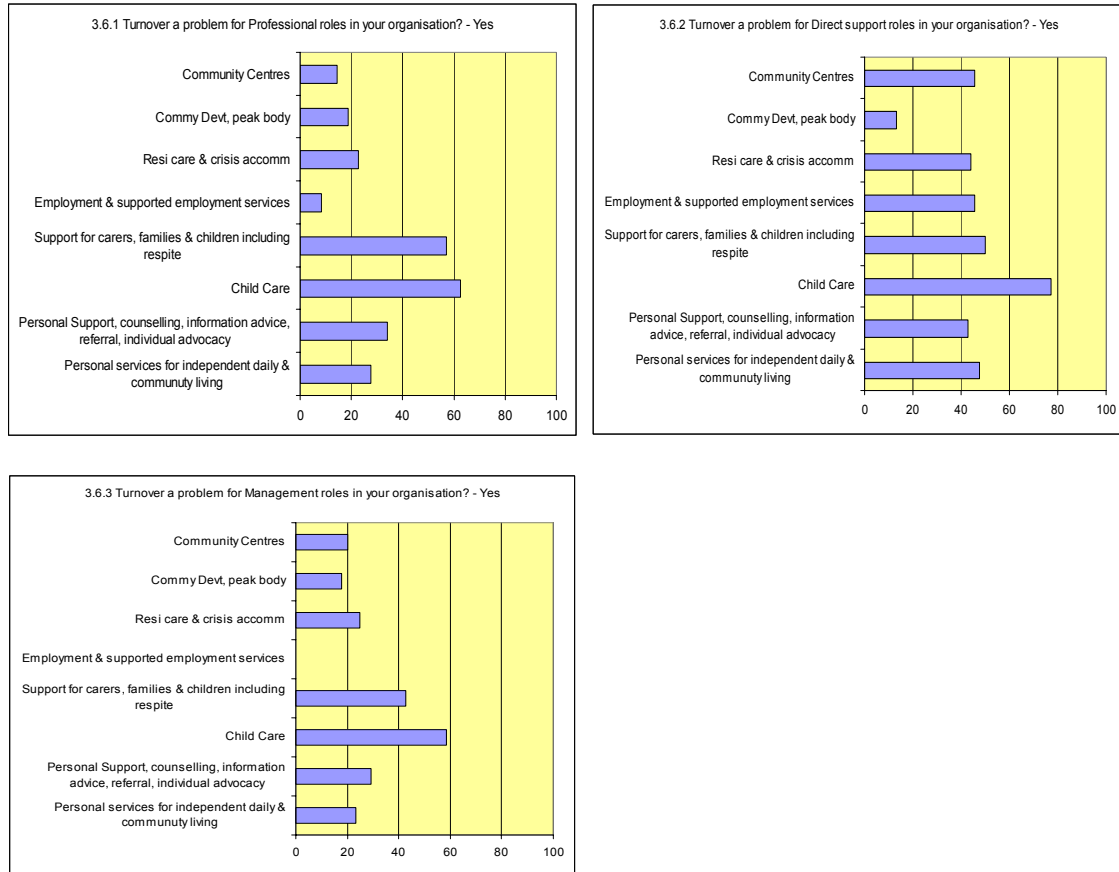
Figure 6.10 shows that low salaries was named as the reason for departures in 41% of all responses, (although 76% of child care respondents reported this as a factor). The demanding nature of the work was named in 39% of responses and insufficient opportunities for promotion and career development was named in 36% of responses. This picture is reinforced by the difference in responses from the child care sector regarding feelings of not being valued as a reason for staff exit (40%), compared with zero agreement with this from respondents providing support for carers, families & children including respite, and negligible rates of agreement (4%) from respondents providing personal services for independent daily & community living, and employment services.

Figure 6.10
Reasons for Voluntary Staff Exit



When the responses regarding unwanted turnover are analysed by agency type, a significant and consistently higher level of unwanted turnover is revealed among the Child Care Centre respondents for three of the four role groups (professional 63%, direct care 77% and management roles 58%) (Figure 6.11). The family support and respite services category also recorded significantly higher levels of unwanted turnover for professional staff (57%).

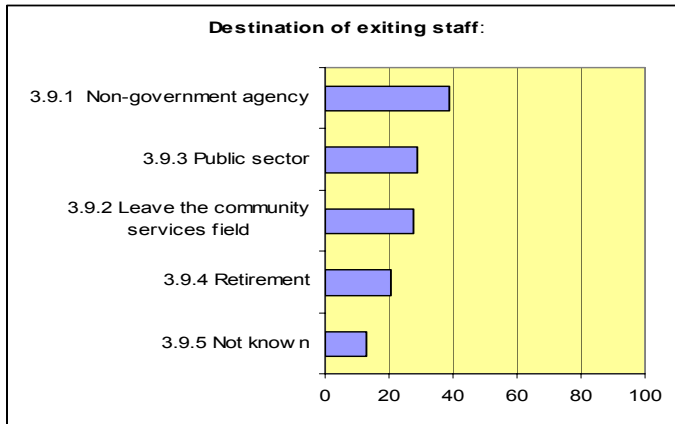
Figure 6.11
Levels of Unwanted turnover



Respondents were confident that they were aware of the destinations of departing staff (only 12.7% of respondents reported that they did not know, as Figure 6.12 shows). Overall, the single most common category of destination of staff who left voluntarily was to take up another job in a non-government agency (40%), and the next most common was to take up a job in the public sector (29%), or to leave the community services sector altogether (27.4%).

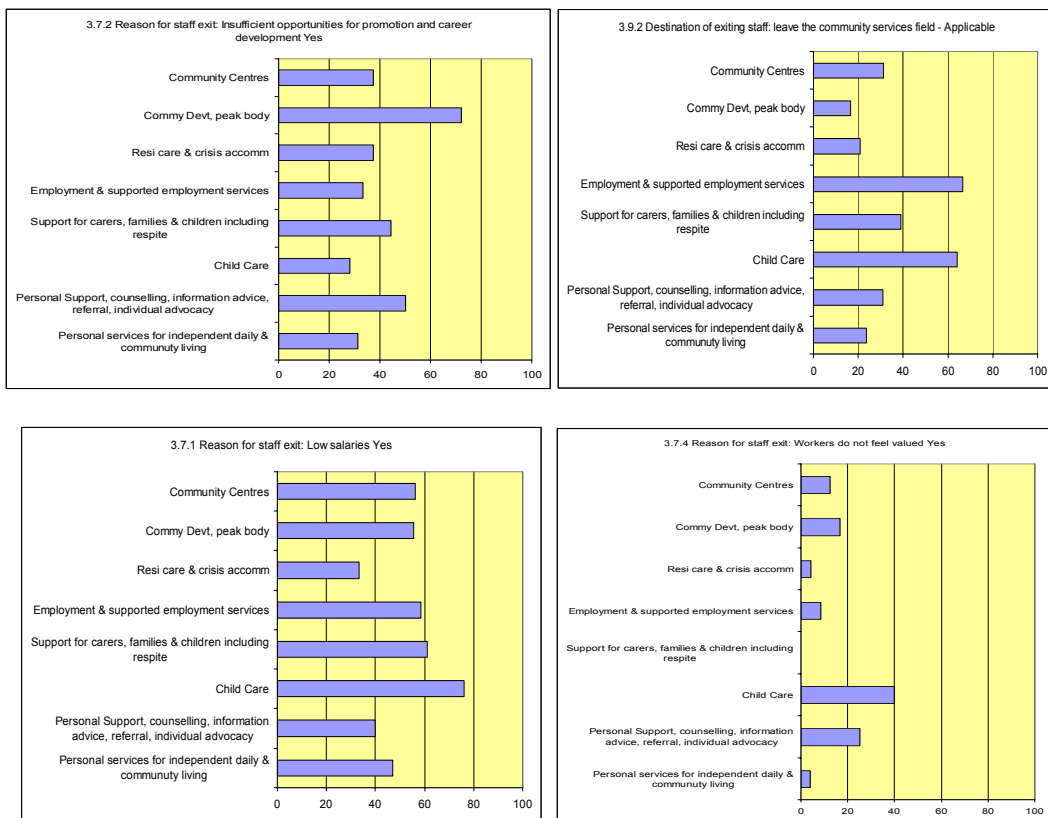


Figure 6.12
Destinations of Leaving Staff



Employment & supported employment services (67%), and child care services (64%) reported that their staff members are more likely to be leaving the community services sector altogether when they leave employment with their organisations (Figure 6.13). Community centres (44%) are facing more of an issue from retirement than other service types.

Figure 6.13
Staff Exit Reasons





This finding suggests that while there is a substantial level of circulation of workers within the sector there is also a considerable leakage of workers from the non-Government sector, to the public service, other sectors, and to retirement. These points need to be considered in turn.

First, the circulation of workers from one community sector agency to another suggests both negative and positive factors. A negative factor is that there were repeated instances of workers having to move as project funding came to an end, to be re-employed in similar circumstances but with loss of continuity in employment. A positive factor is that the skills developed in a job in one agency in the sector can be seen to be valued by another, reinforcing the argument that generic skills appropriate to the community services could be the basis of a more integrated sector wide recognition of prior learning.

Second, with respect to those who left to take a job in a government department, due to a combination of a pull (to better jobs) and a push (from agencies/jobs where the funding finished) further work is warranted to determine what strategies can be developed to reduce that proportion. In a context of increasing demand for services, there is recruitment in the sector because of such leakages but insufficient recruitment for growth even if it is sufficient for replacement. A critical part of developing retention and recruitment strategies, including recognition of prior learning, is that improving the level of qualifications among those workers requires the increased funding to pay them if the strategy is to be sustainable and not just short term.

Comments provided by respondents about staff members' reasons for leaving elicited a further range of responses which in the main focussed on:

- lifestyle and family reasons - eg parenting/family care, illness, partner re-deployment, moving to urban from rural areas, education, overseas travel
- contractual/ agency reasons – eg the contract or traineeship ended, funding ran out, redundancy/ restructuring
- career moves - eg, moving from casual to part time or full time work, escaping shift work, seeking better payment, move to full time from part time work on graduation from study, seeking new challenges/ experience.

Respondents' comments ranged from the extremes of stability to instability as the following quotes from the survey indicate:

“Turnover has been minimal over the 15 years. Turnover has been attributed to other management/ geographical opportunities closer to where the worker resides.”

“We target 3rd-4th year students, who work part time until they



have finished their studies. They then seek full time permanent positions in Government. There is also a fair portion of workers who travel overseas, particularly the UK, once they have their qualifications”

“We have survived the last eight years on short-term, one-off project money - and paltry sums at that. This means we have only been able to offer staff part-time, temporary and poorly paid work. We have experienced massive staff turnover as a result. Most workers can't stay longer than six months and those that can often don't want to.”



7. SURVEY RESULTS: RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION STRATEGIES⁸

In a tight labour market, where the supply of skilled workers is insufficient to meet the demand, the conditions of employment become more critical, as do the recruitment strategies adopted by agencies. The survey sought information on the mix of applicants' skills, qualifications, experience and personal attributes the agencies sought when selecting applicants for particular roles. This enabled an assessment of preferred skill sets and the implications of recruitment practices in each of the four role groups used for the survey (Professionals, Direct Support Roles, Management Roles and Indirect Support Roles).

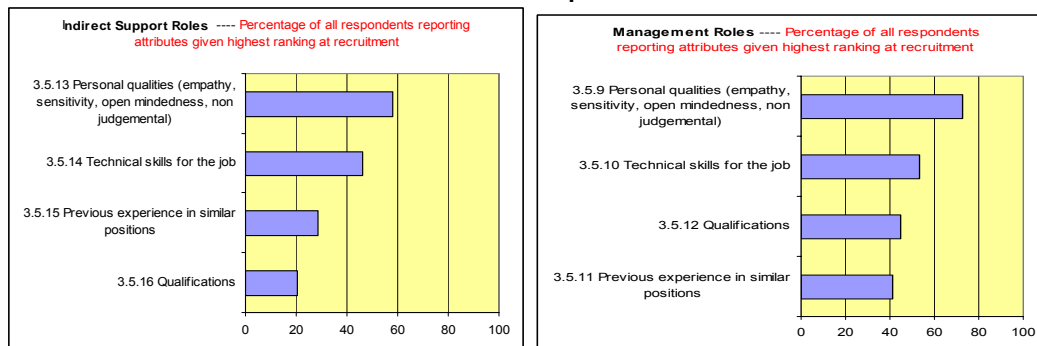
Across all four of the role groups used for the survey, personal qualities were valued particularly highly and, for the most part, more highly than technical skills relevant to the job, previous experience in a similar position, or qualifications. For example, with respect to Professional Roles, personal qualities were valued highly (95%), and more highly than technical skills relevant to the job (77%), previous experience in a similar position (74%) or qualifications (70%) (Figure 7.1).

That pattern of relative importance was somewhat different for Management Roles, with personal qualities (94%), and technical skills valued very highly (89%), as were experience in a similar position (82%) and qualifications (78%).

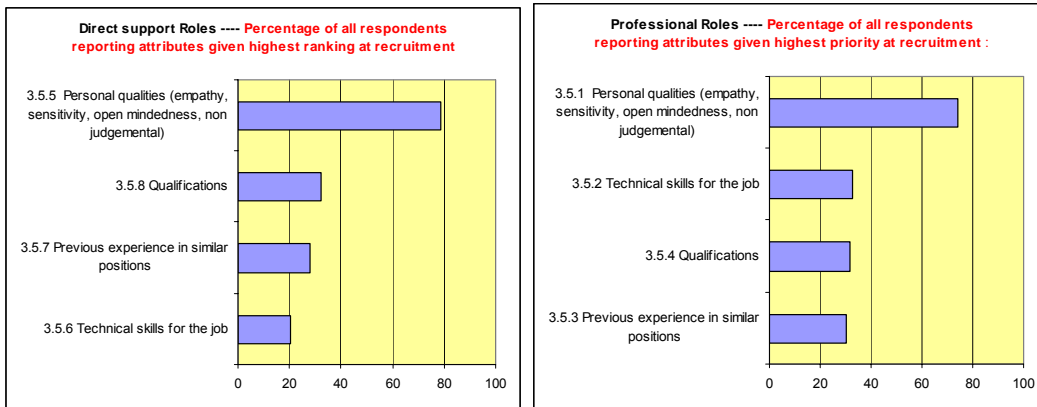
In relation to Direct Support Roles, personal skills were rated as of supreme importance, with qualifications and previous experience rated predictably lower, at 62% and 49% respectively, although technical skills were rated relatively highly at 70%.

Only with respect to Indirect Support Roles did the technical skills rate as more important than personal qualities (87% compared to 83%), although even in the responses about these role groups, personal qualities were valued more than previous experience in a similar position (70%) or qualifications (54%).

Figure 7.1
Skill-Set Preferences in Recruitment to Role Groups



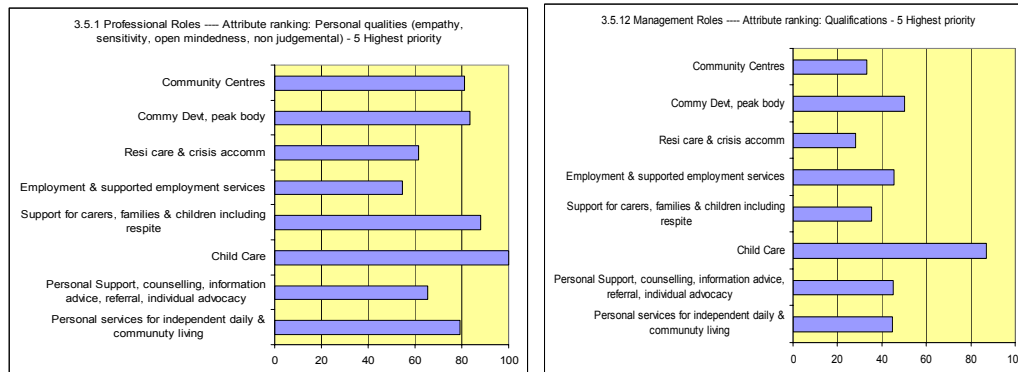
⁸ This chapter summarises chapter 10 of the Full Report of the “Careers at the Coalface: Community Services in South Australia” Project, from which this condensed report is extracted.



Put another way, all respondents value personal qualities of empathy, sensitivity etc for all role groups (58% - 79%), with these qualities valued most highly for direct support staff, and somewhat less so for indirect support staff. For recruitment of Management and Indirect staff roles there is little variation in the priority placed by various types of agencies—technical qualifications are valued. Qualifications are valued more highly for management roles than for indirect staff, where previous experience is particularly sought. For recruitment of staff with the most client contact, namely professional and direct support staff, the attributes sought differed, in that qualifications were more highly ranked for direct support staff and technical skills were most sought after for professional staff. This is not surprising given that a basic level of qualifications is a pre-requisite for employment as a professional and does not represent a potentially distinguishing criterion.

All respondents ranked both qualifications and personal qualities highly for professional and management staff but there were significant differences in the preferences for these qualities for both roles in recruitment practices between child care centres and other services. Child care centres reported placing a higher emphasis (100%) on personal qualities (empathy, sensitivity, open mindedness, non judgemental) when selecting for professional roles, and also reported placing a higher emphasis on qualifications (87%) when selecting for management roles than other respondents (28% – 45%) (Figure 7.2).

Figure 7.2
Selection Criteria



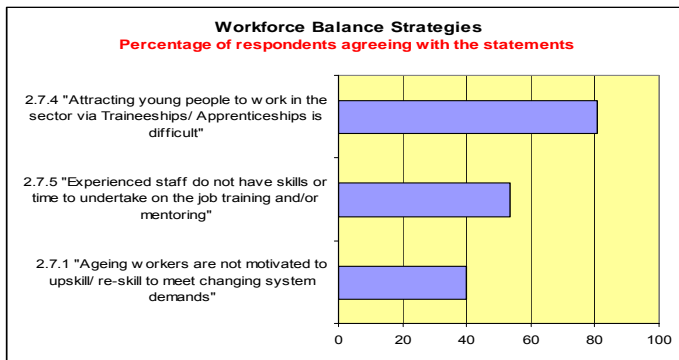
While it might be tempting to attribute the pattern of emphasis on personal qualities to the 'helping' and 'caring' orientation of work in the sector, it should be noted that similar patterns are also evident in other industries (Carson and Corkindale 2004). Nevertheless, the significance of the responses lies in the overwhelming emphasis of respondents valuing personal qualities so highly. Such an emphasis has been associated in the workforce development literature with employer recognition of the importance of team work and flexible working arrangements (Carson et al 2004), and reinforces the awareness of our key informants of the need for workforce flexibility in the in the face of new service delivery models and funding constraints.

Training and Skills

A key aspect of the infrastructure that underpins any Workforce Development strategy – whether agency, sector or industry based - is skills development and training.

Respondents' views were almost evenly split on the question of whether experienced staff have the skills or the time to undertake on-the-job-training for themselves, or engage in a mentoring program to support less experienced workers in the agency (54% of respondents agreed with the proposition that they do not) (Figure 7.3). Figure 7.3 also indicates that respondents were optimistic about the prospects of upskilling ageing workers, with a majority (60%) disagreeing that ageing workers are not motivated to upskill to meet changing system demands. There was no statistically significant variation on this issue between agencies of different sizes.

Figure 7.3
Up-skilling New and Continuing staff

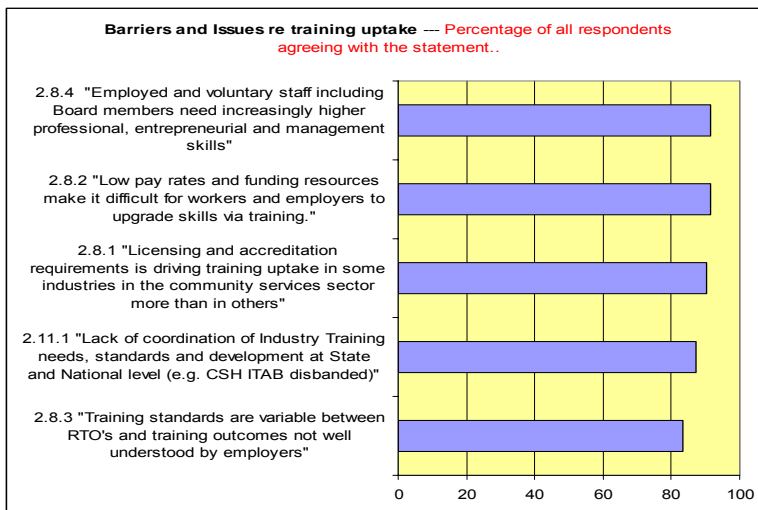


While the view may be rightly held that an ageing workforce is capable of and willing to participate in skills development, this begs the question of whether such training and upskilling is possible and available.

Low pay rates and limited funding resources were generally agreed to constitute barriers to the application of training strategies both on and off the job. Equally important, however, was the assessment that access to suitable training providers, affordability of training, and reliable standards of training are all key factors in effective Workforce Development and Planning – and not all of these are under the control of employers.

Agencies recognised the need to continually increase their staff skill levels through accredited training but feel hampered by: the requirements to fund the training activity; the need to cover for staff undertaking training; and the subsequent higher pay for workers where appropriate (Figure 7.4). If major sector wide strategies are to be promoted to train and retain staff there are funding implications that cannot be ignored.

Figure 7.4
Barriers to Training





The point previously made by key industry informants, that the sector experienced a high level of tension over competing imperatives in relation to skills development, was reiterated by a clear majority of survey respondents (77%), who observed that the level of resources available for training is a major concern for agencies of all sizes across the sector.

The dilemma of limited funding available for workforce development was summed up by one respondent who commented:

“funding bodies don't fund workforce development, only fund outputs based on direct client service provision”

Others commented:

“Short-term contracts make it difficult for employer to give time off for development which will benefit another employer”

“We have a 600km return trip to Adelaide to attend any relevant training. Also the costs are prohibitive and there isn't the funding in the budget. All our money is consumed providing the service. There is no allocation of money by HACC to provide extra funding for training.”

While licensing and accreditation requirements are generally agreed as driving the take-up of training, the need to continuously improve standards and upgrade skills across the workforce is widely recognised and supported across the sector (92%). Ninety per cent of respondents observe, however, that differing requirements by various major funding bodies has meant that training uptake across the sector has been highly variable.

This issue is allied with a more general concern that there is a lack of coordination of Industry Training needs, as well as strategies to meet these needs across the sector. A clear majority (87%) of survey respondents indicated they felt a lack of coordination of industry training needs, standards and development at the State and National level. This was exacerbated by recent changes to ANTA, and to the reconfiguration of National and State Industry Skills Boards.

Eighty three per cent of respondents also reported that providing training to upgrade current workers' skills was made more difficult by the fact that training standards are seen to be variable between Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), and that training outcomes are not well understood by employers. This served to reiterate the points made in key informant interviews, where it was argued that selecting applicants on the basis of training qualifications was made more difficult by the variability of training outcomes from different providers, and the lack of a coherent picture of content and applicability of the various training components on offer across

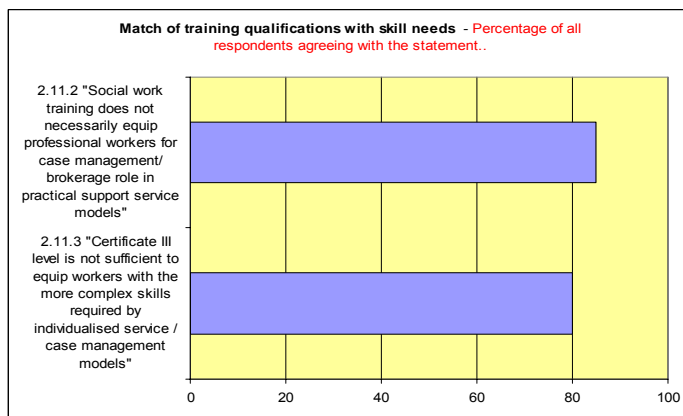


the sector (eg the relationship/overlap between youth, aged care and child care qualifications at each level).

The overwhelming majority of respondents (92%) are aware that the new service delivery and funding models require new and different skills from the workforce at all levels – management, professionals and volunteers.

Respondents also indicated, however, that the training and professional qualifications currently on offer from Training Providers and Tertiary Institutions have not yet caught up with the needs of a workforce which operates within the new service delivery models. As indicated in Figure 7.5, 85% of respondents felt that social work training does not necessarily equip professional workers for case management /brokerage roles in current service delivery models, and 80% indicated that Certificate III standard does not necessarily equip workers with the more complex skills required by individualised service/case management models.

Figure 7.5
Mismatch of Skills Needed and Training Offered





8. VARIATION BETWEEN SUB-SECTORS: SUMMARY OF CASE STUDIES⁹

It is clear from the responses to the survey that a common range of workforce issues are having an impact across the whole sector. At the same time, it is also clear that there were differences between types of community service agencies with respect to both the impact of drivers on their area and also the approaches that are taken within each sub sector to deal with these issues.

Accordingly, focus groups were undertaken to explore the different approaches and problems of four selected sub sectors, Aged Care, Disability Services Agencies, Community and Neighbourhood Houses and community-managed Child Care agencies, and to provide a richer picture of the way these differences operated for people managing and working “at the coalface”. This component of the study elaborated on the survey responses to indicate the way in which differences in context, history, and approach were shaping and constraining responses to workforce pressures across the sector.

Drivers for Organisational Change and Sector Development

All of the Focus Groups saw government policy and funding regimes as a key external driver of service and sector changes. All four community services sub sectors reported that their organisations were experiencing many of the stresses that could be associated with growth, competition and change in any sector, whether externally or internally driven.

The way these external policy and funding drivers are experienced and responded to is quite different across the four sub sectors investigated. The critical issue highlighted by the focus group discussions was the difference between the sub sectors in the capacity of typical agencies to respond proactively to these external drivers.

Aged Care

The tenor of aged care participant’s responses in the focus groups was that of organisations responding positively to the challenge of growth and recent change in their environment. They perceived that they had some degree of agency at the organisational level, both in the way in they have chosen to respond in the past and position for the future. Moreover, although there are private providers in Aged Care, as there are in Child Care, this was not seen to be as problematic for the not-for-profit Aged Care Agencies as was the case in Child Care, as will be reported presently.

Disability Services

The tenor of disability services participants’ responses in the focus groups was one of organisations in a context of growth, responding positively to the challenge of that growth and change which has occurred in the past 20 years and which is likely to accelerate in pace.

⁹ This chapter summarises chapter 11 of the Full Report of the “Careers at the Coalface: Community Services in South Australia” Project, from which this condensed report is extracted.

**Community and Neighbourhood Houses**

Community and Neighbourhood House focus group participants reported that their organisations had, of necessity, diversified and broadened their services (with subsequent workforce training) whilst limiting other activities due to insurance requirements and costs. Organisations had begun running as a business with an increased strategic focus, to become self-sustainable in the face of funding volatility and competition. And policy changes had caused the neighbourhood community houses to become involved in partnerships to deliver services in a range of areas - eg health, day care, and early intervention programs, which had ramifications for workforce attributes. As one participant said. “*We get involved in whatever services are driven by the Government of the day*”.

Child Care Centres

Child Care participants see their organisations as businesses, –whether private or not. They are required to operate within a strict budget but focus on maintaining high standards of service and care, with an emphasis on continuous improvement. These focus group participants reported an ‘expansion though necessity’ strategy as a key driver of organisational change. Government policy and funding changes, increased demand for services, competition from corporate entrants to the market and the implications of quality and accreditation regimes in increasing costs were cited as influencing the way community child care centres are now managed. They reported different external pressures to other sub sectors, with the effect of restricting and hampering the adoption of proactive strategies for growth and change.

Future Workforce Scenarios

All four focus groups indicated that in the view of the participants:

- experienced people are leaving the industry,
- it is difficult to recruit new entrants to replace them,
- this will continue in the future not only as a workforce shortage but as a developing skills shortage.

All four Groups were concerned that the difficulty in attracting new people to fill vacancies currently applied at the Direct Care worker level in particular, and to a lesser extent at the experienced team leader/ manager level.

None of the Groups saw this scenario changing in the future, without improved wages and conditions in the industry, and a concerted effort to market the whole community services industry to a wider recruitment pool than it has traditionally attracted, in order to compete with “sexier” and better paid employment options. All four groups were adamant that the community services industry, the caring work that it does, and the people who work in it, need to be valued more highly, and to be recompensed accordingly. Moreover, all participants thought that a prerequisite,



and perhaps a consequence, of achieving this was the development of a greater level of assertiveness in the community services sector and its workforce.

It is particularly notable that none of the respondents on the four sub-sectors presented an argument for perpetuating a funding and staffing regime that was predicated on the “caring ethos” of staff. All respondents talked openly and candidly about the tension between being caring human service providers and the need to run agencies as a business. All were adamant that they were running businesses efficiently, but all recognised that the funding for wages and training were not commensurate with their aspirations. They also recognised that the image of the sector was not sufficiently attractive to encourage potential workers to apply for jobs or undertake the necessary training that would deliver quality services and also help project the professional image that the sector needs.

Tenure of Staff: Casual and Part-Time Employment

One of the most notable variations in the responses of Focus Group participants was in the area of tenure of staff, particularly staff in direct service roles. In contrast to the expressed preference for casual employees by the Aged Care focus group participants, for example, Disability Services participants reported creating as many permanent part time positions as possible because “people like tenure, and casual work is unpredictable”.



9. OPTIONS FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT¹⁰

In brief, it is clear that even though the recent growth in funding for community services in South Australia outstrips the national all-State average growth rate, it is now only at parity with the national expenditure pattern. Consequently, almost all agencies in the sector in SA have been constrained by under-funding and insecurity of funding over the past two decades. In light of the fact that there will be increased demand for community services in the next two decades, with an associated need to grow the workforce to meet this demand, the sector and its constituent agencies face considerable workforce development challenges in the short-term and medium term future.

The tension between the imposition of entrepreneurial business-like approaches to contracting, tendering, and organisational management, and the expectation that people employed in the sector will be motivated by dedication to the well-being of others, was fully and articulately expressed by key informants and survey respondents alike. However when agencies were asked to name the significant factors confronting the agency they typically nominated sector wide issues, whereas when they were asked to nominate strategies to address those issues, the strategies were predominantly agency-specific coping strategies, rather than sector level initiatives that addressed the recognised policy drivers operating at a broad sectoral level.

Our respondents observed that attracting workers to the sector was exacerbated by low pay rates and limited funding resources that make it difficult for workers and the employing agencies to arrange training to upgrade skills for the current workforce. The level of resources available for training, and workforce development more generally, was a major concern for agencies of all sizes across the sector. Part of the proposed strategy of respondents was to advocate for parity with public service conditions, both with respect to wages and for the purposes of raising the sector's profile. But the strategies that were presented in response to our survey questions indicated that agencies were too fully preoccupied with local level coping strategies to embrace sector wide strategies to coordinate employment conditions and promote the sector as an industry of choice.

The poor availability of data on the sector outlined in detail in the full report is but a symptom of a broader lack of an integrating discourse for the community services sector. There is, nevertheless, recognition by many people in the sector that for the community services in South Australia to deliver services effectively into the future, via a robust and high quality workforce, there needs to be a coordinated sector-wide approach taken to workforce development. Key themes that begin to address that shortcoming are outlined below.

¹⁰ This chapter summarises chapter 12 of the Full Report of the “Careers at the Coalface: Community Services in South Australia” Project, from which this condensed report is extracted.



Workforce Development

At the outset, we foreshadowed a need for change at organisational and system levels to ensure sustainability, including:

- strategic and operational planning;
- management and leadership skills;
- governance;
- recruitment and induction of new staff;
- performance management and review;
- professional supervision, and mentoring;
- team building and peer support;
- identification of training needs, professional development and the development of a learning organisation.

ANTA, in its National Industry Skills Report (ANTA, 2004), has identified a mix of skill requirements, with task-specific and 'soft' or generic skills complementing each other. Similarly, a list of employability skills has been created by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and the Business Council of Australia.

It has been argued that similar lists have existed for 10 years, under the rubric of Key Competencies (Finn, 1991) yet this new ANTA list of generic skills is important in that it emphasises personal attributes believed to contribute to successful participation in the workplace. Community service employers seek both types of skills in varying mixes. Nevertheless, it is clear that not all agencies operate with a clearly articulated recruitment strategy, distinguishing position descriptions and associated skill specifications. This would seem to be a prerequisite for a systematic workforce development agenda for the sector.

Such a framework would be expected to link with and consolidate training requirements across the sector. Agencies in the sector are giving a strong and consistent message that training has been poorly served by the existing training frameworks, and the present configuration of the Universities, TAFE and RTOs. Because of some of the general concern about the problematic nature of New Apprenticeships generally, and School Based New Apprenticeships in particular, employers in the community service industry, as elsewhere, have poor opinions of such training arrangements, particularly in aged care. The message was that the results of training were variable to the point that there was little confidence in a systematic training mechanism unless the agency had prior experience with the particular arrangement and specific trainers.

Predictions for a rapid growth of 30,000 new jobs per annum in the sector Australia-wide over the next 5 years mean that recruitment and skilling are critical. But we observed that where task specific skills are seen to be closely aligned with generic soft skills, there is less impetus to train



in what are considered everyday communication skills. The reluctance to train young workers is even more problematic, at exactly the time when the sector needs to be promoting the value of skills acquisition, and the image of the sector as containing highly skilled workers.

Criticisms of ineffective training are common, with the result that small community based organisations with little extra time, and few resources to otherwise assist people to engage with the sector, are reluctant to participate more fully in training arrangements.

Agency Level Strategies

Coping within Constraint at the Local and Organisational level

The overwhelming message from the study is that agencies across the sector are acutely aware of the challenges that they face.

Management and Boards of small and large organisations are for the most part consciously and consistently involved in adopting the strategies available to them to combat these challenges. The strategies available to them range from organisational strategic change, to attempts to broaden their workforce recruitment base, to adoption of flexible work practices, and internally resourced training and development strategies. These methods are, however, in most cases constrained by resource limitations. And limited term funding carries the risk that agencies will adopt reactive measures rather than proactive measures which might be less costly in the long term.

Inevitably, organisational change strategies in response to the situation, while relevant, are limited in their emphasis to agency-level coping strategies. By this we mean that it appears that agencies are for the most part forced of necessity to focus on the strategies that enable each one to survive and cope on an individual basis, from contract to contract.

Key industry informants reported a high level of tension over competing imperatives experienced by the sector in relation to skills development. And this was reiterated in chapter 6 by a clear majority of survey respondents, who observed that low pay rates and limited funding resources make it difficult for workers and the employing agencies to arrange training to upgrade skills. That was true for agencies of all sizes. The level of resources available for training is a major concern for agencies of all sizes across the sector. Larger agencies may be able to be more sustainable by developing a larger geographic or service scope and by working on longer time frames, but they too are also essentially adapting and evolving as organisations, and seeking to develop workforce strategies to match individual agency needs.

While this is what a well managed agency should be doing, it leaves little time, energy or opportunity for sector members to effectively be involved in working on the wider issues and long term solutions required to address the workforce crisis in the community services sector as a whole.



Such a sector wide approach is often considered as including three prongs of attack:

- wages and working conditions
- training
- marketing the industry as an attractive employment option

We would argue that none of these strategies will be successful unless they are also accompanied by a concerted effort to develop a consolidated, transparent framework of career structures and known pathways of entry and progression across the sector – with a consistent picture of career pathways and employment frameworks to match up with required training and experience for new and existing employees, and across union/ Award, employer and practice or sub-sector boundaries.

The Need for Sector-Wide Strategies

With such significant and common workforce challenges being experienced by the majority of agencies in the sector it was observed by many of the survey respondents and focus group participants that there is a need to act in an integrated way across the sector to address these urgent workforce development problems. It has been argued often that a competitive funding context has increased fragmentation in the sector to the extent that agencies are be constrained in collaborating and sharing information; as well as contributing to some degree of polarisation between large and small agencies. In fact, while there is some evidence of limits to collaboration in the sector, and some polarisation in access to resources dependent on the size of the agencies, for the most part, our primary data do not support this assertion as much as was hypothesised.

More to the point, there are in fact significant parts of the sector aiming to develop integrated workforce development strategies for their sub-sector – including child care, aged care and disability services – at both State and National levels (refer to Appendix 3 of the Full Report). This is appropriate, as each of these sub-sectors has specific problems and has differences in the most urgent priorities they face, as demonstrated by the survey responses and the findings from the focus groups conducted in this study.

There are also, however, aspects of the sector's workforce development issues which are common to the whole sector and will be most successfully addressed at a whole of sector level. Compared, for example, with other industrial sectors, such as retail or hospitality, the community services sector appears less transparent and accessible to potential workers, and entry points to it are less clear. Retail and hospitality sectors are in fact quite fragmented, made up of varying and different levels of workplace size and structure. Each are essentially providing services in communities, via small to large organisations, ranging from family to large corporate employers, throughout cities and rural areas, and can involve not for profit involvement and yet, each of these competing sectors has achieved a far more structured training and employment framework over



the past twenty years than has been achieved by the community services sector. While not by any means established in the same way, each of these sectors nevertheless competes with the community services sector for workforce recruits.

Whole-of-sector marketing and communications to attract potential workers and create recruitment pools, pools that have clearly communicated training frameworks to match a clearly articulated and integrated frameworks for career pathways across the sector, can be best addressed at the whole-of-sector level. This issue is partly addressed by the information generated through Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council about the Community Services and Health Training packages, but that approach is not sufficient for two reasons:

- it starts with, and is necessarily focussed on, training rather than on the employment opportunities to which that training is addressed.
- it can do nothing to address the fact that there is not an integrated job classification system in the sector.

We consider that a broader approach is relevant because the major competitors for staff are public sector employers. From this study, it would seem that the competitive benefits of the public service are:

- higher rates of pay
- security of employment
- transparent career structures and known pathways of entry and progression

In the non-Government community services industry, individual agencies as well as peak bodies, including SACOSS, have sought to confront the first two of these challenges, but across the sector there is less attention to the equally difficult task of addressing the third factor. Workers in community services are employed to do a wide range of differing jobs in differing employment conditions, but there is not yet an overarching classification framework for comparing and contrasting jobs and their requirements. Such a framework would offer benefits to new applicants, existing employees and employers in that it would assist them to evaluate required credentials, skills and experience with remuneration expectations on a consistent basis, and enable better matching with training offerings.

At present, the community services sector does not offer prospective recruits a clear and consistent picture of career pathways and employment frameworks to match with required training and experience. Instead, the best approximation in the sector of providing a simple picture of entry and progression frameworks is via information presented in conjunction with the Community Services & Health and other Training/ Qualifications Packages. These packages provide an excellent context for understanding and applying the qualifications framework which applies to the broad sector. Yet while we would argue that this information is useful, it is at best a fragment of the picture required to provide a framework for workforce development and marketing of the sector as a viable career option.



The sector needs to be able to address the advantages offered by competing industries, and to communicate coherently both externally and internally with prospective new applicants and those on the move within the sector regarding career advancement structures it can offer, and to have a more coherent framework for assessing experience and relating it to recruitment needs between organisations and indeed between sub-sectors of the organisations. A key aspect of the task is to develop an integrated classification system or employment framework for jobs across the whole sector, to match the qualifications framework and put it into an applicable framework to enable people to visualise a career path in community services and to encourage them to more readily consider a career in the sector

A diagram setting out a summary of training qualifications and employment areas, as per the CSHISC website (2006), compared with the range of applicable sector Industrial Awards is attached.

A Common Nomenclature and Classification System

Not only does each of the five Industrial Awards operating in the sector use different classifications and nomenclature, each of the organisations in the sector can and do use different terms for the positions they offer staff. For example, a team leader position in one organisation may well not be the same in job content, level of responsibility, require the same training or experience, or offer the same remuneration levels as a team leader in an another organisation, or in another sub-sector.

The potentially confusing range of job titles currently used can be demonstrated by the results of a recent scan of two job advertisement sites for community services sector vacancies which yielded the following range of positions titles on offer:

Community Support Leader	Case Manager	Youth worker
Community Support Worker	Project officer	Care Worker
Team Leader	Development Administrator	Advisor
Key Worker	Service Manager	Counsellor
Co-ordinator	Support Worker	
Consultant	Community Co-ordinator	
Group worker	Program Co-ordinator	
Case worker	Manager	

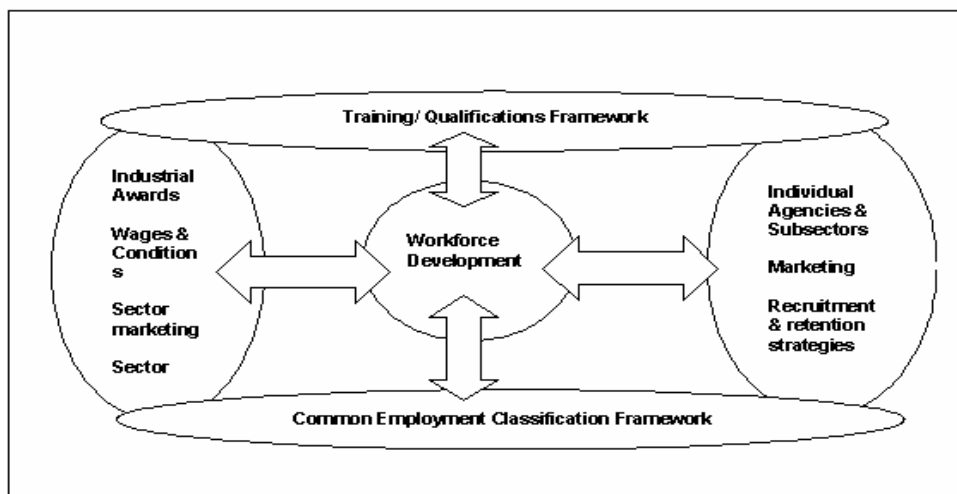
None of the positions was declared as being at an employment level or related to a common classification system as they would have been if advertised as public service positions. Nor could they be, as there is no common classification system or nomenclature applicable.

Other Industries such as tourism and retail have benefited from a whole of industry approach to workforce development – including the development of consistent and coherent employment frameworks, as well as appropriate training elements. We would argue that this is what is required for the community services sector in SA.

In much the same way as the sector has suffered from a lack of consistent nomenclature for its services and clients, which is currently being addressed, a fragmented approach to workforce classification and nomenclature is itself part of the challenge to effective workforce analysis and strategic planning for the sector.

Such an integrated framework of employment categories across the sector, matched to training access points, could underpin a campaign to promote both career development across the sector. It could also improve the feasibility of the sector as an employment option for both young people and current working age people who are looking to re-enter the labour market. It would also open up issues of RPL as well as assessing the relationship of training to sector standardisation needs. This could help address the strong and consistent message from our respondents in the key informant interviews, the survey and the focus groups, that training was not well served by the existing configuration of the Universities, TAFE and RTOs. The message was that the results of training were variable to the point that there was little confidence in any particular training program.

We would argue that this is what is required for the community services sector in SA. That is, a more consolidated approach to broader sector wide integrated workforce classification systems as an essential contributor to workforce development strategies. A diagrammatic representation of this whole of sector strategy is set out below





The Way Forward – Towards a Whole-of-Sector Approach.

A skills shortage as is currently being experienced in the sector can be approached by a focus on training and up skilling existing employees, and attempting to target and attract particular parts of the population who are currently not in the recruitment “frame”, such as semi retired aged men, or young people. Another approach is to advocate for public service conditions parity (both wages and profile raising). This approach requires more data than has previously been available in SA on the size and scope of the sector and the workforce challenges it is currently experiencing. This study provides some of the data that can inform these discussions.

Each of these approaches encompasses useful, relevant and adaptive sector based strategies. Each is valuable, but they are insufficient without an integrated framework because there is a likelihood that the fragmented situation will continue.

There are two current efforts to introduce a sector wide approach in SA. One is the SACOSS initiative regarding advocacy and policy negotiations with the State Government. Another is the State CS Industry Skills Advisory Body project to undertake a skills audit and scope workforce needs and VET options for the sector.

The newly established SA Health & Community Services Skills Board Incorporated has adopted a three year strategic plan which aims to highlight important workforce development and skills issues facing the Health and Community Services industries. This will entail:

- identifying the emerging industry skill
- developing workforce and skill development strategies for both new entrants and those currently in the workforce
- Promoting training & careers in the sector
- Collating & communicating industry intelligence

The Board has commenced action to map the health & community services industries and develop links with key industry organisations and stakeholders. The sector mapping will be published on-line in late 2006 and will inform future workforce development activity of the Board. The Board has core funding from DFEEST.

SACOSS is currently coordinating a group comprising representatives from employer groups, the Association of Major Community Organisations (AMCO), the Australian Services Union (ASU) and the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (LHMU) to address the issues that are threatening the sector’s future capacity. The purpose of the group is to work cooperatively, employers and unions alike, to pursue reform in the sector. It has identified the issues of staff attraction and retention, with an initial focus on salaries and workforce development, as the most significant barriers to ongoing viability currently facing the sector. The group has agreed to a range of eleven core principles that have and will continue to guide the goals and objectives of



the group. These principles recognise that the ability to offer secure employment (predicated on more secure funding) creates a stronger, more cohesive sector.

Of these eleven principles:

The following four specifically relate to aims associated with achieving improved **wages and working conditions** within the sector:

- jobs to be offered on a permanent or long-term contract basis.
- jobs must be decent jobs and come with fair wages.
- workers should be provided minimum guaranteed hours, with upward flexibility and reasonable workloads.
- provide structures that distinguish differing modes of employment (e.g. working from home).

Five of the remaining six principles are focused on a developing an integrated cross-sector **strategy to attract and retain quality staff**, by identifying and facilitating career paths which are both attractive and recognized by new entrants and which facilitate retention of high quality workers within the sector:

- the sector needs to develop an attraction and retention strategy.
- the sector should provide structured career paths and development programs.
- workers should be able to develop career paths that recognise their skills and experience.
- the sector needs to develop facilitative structures that allow mobility throughout the sector for workers.
- ensure that job classification structures match the work performed.

The final principle refers to the need for **skills training** appropriate to equip the workforce for the business of high quality service delivery:

- the sector needs to deliver a well-trained workforce, to maximise the quality of services to clients.

Overall, the SACOSS reform agenda identifies its first priority as identifying the basis for a potential industry-wide framework or agreement covering basic salaries and conditions. In the light of the findings of this study, these principles are appropriate.

The fact that the Department for Families and Communities is at present in the process of revising its funding procedures and service procurement protocols to reduce the emphasis on contestable processes is clearly an important development. There is a need to go much further, however, to complement the new funding regime with the development of a sector wide position classification system such as we are proposing here.



Wages and Conditions

Notwithstanding substantial increases of funding of the sector in SA in recent years to bring the State expenditure in line with other States' expenditure on community services (as described in Appendix 1 of the Full Report), this study has identified increased funding levels earmarked for improved wages and conditions as a high priority across the sector. We found that poor wages and conditions are seen by a wide range of representatives of agencies in the sector as a major barrier to workforce attraction and retention, and thereby as a barrier to sector development. Operating as they do in a Government-funded and controlled market place, the capacity of many organisations to offer increased wages and conditions to compete for a sustainable workforce is limited by prospects for growth in Government funding.

As the SACOSS reform agenda says, "*funding is not indexed to keep up with the additional accountability costs being placed on the sector through compliance reporting regimes, let alone to enable organisations to maintain pace with the salaries and training and development opportunities being offered in other sectors. Should this situation not change, funding bodies risk exposure to a diminished capacity on the part of the sector to meet funding obligations and continue to accept funding contracts*".

This study certainly indicates that wage increases across the board in all sectors are a major challenge, and that funding increases and/or indexation levels which allow for wage increases are clearly needed across the sector.

Cross Sector Approach to Reform

In addition to devising a sector wide occupational framework, the sector needs to:

- adopt a proactive whole of sector approach to the reforms necessary to achieve a sustainable workforce.
- agree to a framework for future collaboration that ensures the ongoing viability of the sector

We would argue that this second priority is just as critical as it is clear from this study that the issues involved in reform for workforce sustainability cannot continue to be tackled on a piecemeal organisation by organisation basis.

Each organisation has differing resources, and each sub-sector also varies in the level of challenge it faces, and the degree of flexibility available to it to address these issues. Nevertheless, there is general agreement that the scope of the problems of workforce development, and the key strategies needed to address them, cannot be addressed by any one organisation alone, or even by any one sub-sector alone. The community services sector in South Australia needs to take a lead from other areas of employment to adopt an integrated and consistent employment framework across the sector as a priority for addressing its workforce development and training needs.



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