

That Old Chestnut!

The Professionalisation of youth work in Victoria
A discussion paper



youthaffairs
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The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body representing the youth sector. YACVic provides a means through which the youth sector and young people voice their opinions and concerns in regard to issues and policies affecting them. YACVic works with and makes representations to government and serves as an advocate for the interests of young people, workers with young people and organisations that provide direct services to young people. YACVic also promotes and supports the participation of young people in debate and policy development in areas that most affect them.

YACVic welcomes responses to this discussion paper.

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Contents

Executive Summary	5
Introduction	9
Why focus on this issue now?	10
Interim working group	11
YACVic's role in this process	12
Next steps	12
Working with young people in Victoria	13
What is the youth sector?	13
Youth workers	13
Workers with young people	15
Youth work as a profession – the socio/political context	16
A brief history of youth work in Victoria	16
Is youth work a profession?	17
The impact of public sector policies	18
The impact of competency-based training	19
Trust and ethical standards	20
The professionalisation of youth work	23
The case for	23
The case against	24
Professional associations	25
What is a professional association?	25
What about YACVic?	25
Professional Association models	26
Industrial relations model	26
Community and Youth Workers Union UK	26
The Police Association of Victoria	27
Victorian Psychologists Association and Medical Scientists Association of Victoria	28
Professional development model	29
Australian Association of Social Workers	29

Australasian Housing Institute	30
Victorian Institute of Teaching	31
VISTA – Association of VET Professionals	32
Industrial Relations/Professional Development model	33
National Youth Agency UK	33
Australian Medical Association	34
A model for Victoria	35
An industrial relations model	35
A professional development model	36
A combined model	38
Key issues underpinning these models	40
What are the alternatives?	41
Key questions for discussion/feedback	42
Conclusion	43
Feedback	44

Executive Summary

Background

Given the diverse range of work, training and expertise in the youth work field, it is difficult to arrive at a simple definition of youth work but there are at least three factors that make youth work unique:

- The young person is the primary client of the youth worker.
- Young people are seen in their social context.
- Youth work is holistic – it takes into account the whole person.

However, commentators tend to agree that youth work does not currently have the status of a profession. As a result youth workers may be marginalised in professional teams because their professional standing is not recognised by other professionals.

Workers with young people are seeking greater recognition for the unique role they play, further opportunities for professional development and a means to voice workforce issues. A potential way to address these needs is to establish a professional association for youth workers. The main purpose of professional associations is to represent workers, help ensure the professional status and integrity of the profession and to meet the professional needs of members.

There have been ongoing debates about the need for the professionalisation of the youth sector and the establishment of a professional association in Victoria. Arguments for greater professionalism typically revolve around the need for greater recognition of the role of youth worker, improved youth work practice, enhanced working conditions and remuneration and more specialised training. Arguments against professionalism centre on the possible loss of the idiosyncratic nature of youth work.

To move the debate forward, an open forum was held in Melbourne in August 2003 to discuss the development of a professional association for youth professionals. Around 70 people attended the forum and participants resolved that an interim working group should be formed to further investigate the establishment of a professional association.

YACVic is working with the interim working group to resource this investigation. YACVic has written this discussion paper with input from the working group and it aims to provide an overview of some of the issues related to the professionalisation of youth work and the establishment of a professional association. This paper does not present a view in favour of or against the establishment of a professional body but rather provides an outline of the issues to

stimulate an informed discussion throughout the youth sector and with other key stakeholders in Victoria.

The paper considers:

- The nature of the youth sector and youth work.
- The socio-political context of professionalisation.
- The arguments for and against professionalisation.
- Models of Australian and international professional associations.
- Three models of professional associations for Victoria.

A Professional Association for Victoria

In general professional associations aim to:

- Promote and build on the professional status of its members and recognise the expertise and proficiency of those it represents.
- Work closely with training bodies and tertiary institutions to ensure that qualifications provide the skills needed in the industry.
- Provide a forum for networking between workers and the exchange of information and ideas.
- Develop models of best practice.
- Advocate on industrial issues such as pay.
- Be a voice in the media about worker issues.
- Provide professional development opportunities.

Typically professional associations fall into one of three categories: those with an industrial relations focus, those with a professional development focus and those which combine the two roles. YACVic's paper presents three models of a professional association for Victoria and outlines the key functions and characteristics of each model. Following is a summary of the possible objectives and functions of each model.

	Key Objectives	Key Functions
Industrial relations	<p>To represent the industrial relation interests of members.</p> <p>To improve the conditions of employment and salaries of Victorian youth professionals.</p> <p>To protect the occupational health and safety rights of members.</p> <p>To support members and provide legal assistance on employment related issues.</p>	<p>Provide representation when negotiating an award, enterprise agreement or contract.</p> <p>Ensure that members know their entitlements.</p> <p>Represent members in any disciplinary matters.</p> <p>Assist with specialist industrial advice and legal representation.</p> <p>Arrange workplace inspections in relation to occupation, health and safety (OH&S) matters.</p>
Professional development	<p>To promote the profession of youth work.</p>	<p>Provide ongoing professional development opportunities.</p> <p>Offer professional support on issues affecting youth</p>

	<p>To promote professional standards and good practice in the youth sector.</p> <p>To foster opportunities for professional advancement.</p>	<p>professionals.</p> <p>Make statements to the media on service and professional issues.</p> <p>Organise professional seminars, workshops and conferences.</p> <p>Work with tertiary institutions to determine curriculum and accreditation.</p> <p>May regulate training and accredit courses.</p> <p>Develop a code of ethics/conduct that reflects the value base of the profession and provides guidance for practitioners.</p> <p>Deal with complaints relating to ethics and professional practice.</p> <p>May carry out police or Working with Children checks.</p>
Combined model	<p>To coordinate activity on professional and industrial relations issues affecting youth work professionals.</p> <p>To promote the profession of youth work.</p> <p>To establish, monitor and improve practice standards.</p> <p>To preserve the legal and industrial interests of practitioners.</p> <p>To promote ethical behaviour in the youth sector.</p>	<p>Provide ongoing professional development opportunities.</p> <p>Make statements to the media on service and professional issues.</p> <p>Organise professional seminars, workshops and conferences.</p> <p>Work with tertiary institutions to determine curriculum and accreditation.</p> <p>May regulate training and accredit courses.</p> <p>Develop a code of ethics/conduct that reflects the value base of the profession and provides guidance for practitioners.</p> <p>Deal with complaints relating to ethics and professional practice.</p> <p>May carry out police or Working with Children checks.</p> <p>Work with relevant unions and support workers when negotiating an award, enterprise agreement or contract.</p> <p>Ensure that members know their entitlements.</p> <p>Assist with specialist industrial advice and legal representation.</p> <p>Promote good practice in relation to occupation, health and safety (OH&S) matters.</p>

Key questions

1. Do you believe that a professional association for youth workers should be established in Victoria?
2. If so, which model (industrial, professional development or combination) is your preferred model?
3. Who should be eligible for membership? Should members be required to hold a minimum level of qualification? Should experience be taken into account?
4. How should a professional association be resourced?
5. What are the alternatives to establishing a professional association? What would happen if a professional association was not established in Victoria?

Feedback

YACVic welcomes responses to this discussion paper which will be incorporated into future discussions.

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Introduction

What is youth work? Is there a difference between a youth worker and a worker with young people? Is youth work recognised as a profession? Does youth work training and practice need to be improved and if so, how? How can the youth sector achieve greater recognition and improved workforce conditions?

Over the years there have been a variety of responses to these questions resulting in open-ended debates with no clear resolution. Although there may be a range of responses to these issues, it is fair to say that workers with young people in Victoria are seeking greater recognition for the role they play, further opportunities for professional development and a means to voice workforce issues. So how can these needs be met?

One possibility is establishing a professional association for youth workers. While professional associations for youth workers have been set up in countries such as South Africa and the UK, no such body exists in Australia.¹ Yet, many fields such as medicine, law, education and social work do have professional associations. The fundamental purpose of these bodies is to represent the practitioners of the profession, help ensure the professional status and integrity of the profession and meet the professional needs of members.

There have been ongoing debates about the need for a professional youth workers association in Victoria. For example, the issue was raised at YACVic's 'Beyond Louts and Legends' conference in 1995 and participants were divided in their opinion about the need for a professional body.² The issue resurfaced at a recent forum in Melbourne that brought together around 70 people from the youth sector.³ Participants resolved to further investigate the establishment of a professional association, providing the impetus for this discussion paper.

This paper aims to provide an overview of some of the issues related to the professionalisation of youth work and the establishment of a professional association. This paper does not present a view in favour of or against the establishment of a professional body but rather provides an outline of the issues to stimulate an informed discussion throughout the youth sector and with other key stakeholders in Victoria.

¹ Maunders, D. (1999) 'Professional lions and multi-skilled kangaroos: youth work professionalism in South Africa and Australia', *Youth Studies Australia*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 37-42; National Youth Agency UK see www.nya.org.uk.

² Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (1996) 'The Great Debate', *Youth Issues Forum Winter 1996* pp. 22-24.

³ The development of a professional association for youth and welfare professionals: an open forum for youth and welfare professionals, 1 August 2003, RMIT, Melbourne.

This paper considers:

- The nature of the youth sector and youth work.
- The socio-political context of professionalisation.
- The arguments for and against professionalisation.
- Models of Australian and international professional associations.
- Three models of professional associations for Victoria.

Why focus on this issue now?

'For many years the task of being a worker with young people has become increasingly complex... Workers with young people are quite often at the forefront of practise with regard to a range of issues, including those associated with ethnicity, gender, social justice, criminal justice, law reform and many others. Put simply we are expected to be highly skilled and well informed on a wide range of breaking areas'.⁴

This statement provides an understanding as to why many workers in the youth sector were calling for a professional association a decade ago. Other issues have gained prominence over the last few years which has led to the more recent call.

Those working in the youth sector are aware of growing challenges within this industry. The effects of the compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) era are still being felt. Job insecurity, uncertainty about funding and levels of resourcing, increasing workloads, changes to training policies and the diminished role of unions have arguably all had a significant impact on the youth sector.⁵

Workforce issues are of paramount concern to some. In a consultation with workers in rural and regional Victoria in 2001, the recruitment and retention of workers was identified as a major issue in many rural communities. Similar issues have been identified by their urban counterparts. The main reason for these difficulties included:

- Prevalence of short-term 12-month contracts which are an insufficient incentive to attract workers.
- Difficulty providing support structures for workers e.g. supervision.
- Lack of local formal youth work training.
- Lack of qualified youth workers attracted to rural positions.
- Lack of professional development for youth workers and lack of career paths.

⁴ Wilson, C. (1995) 'A Professional Association of Youth Workers', *Youth Issues Forum*, YACVic, Spring 1995.

⁵ Bessant, J. (1997) 'Free market economics and new directions for youth workers', *Youth Studies Australia*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 34-40.

- Low pay and professional standing for youth workers who are expected to have multiple and generic skills particularly in rural areas (for example be able to drive a bus, have information technology skills, basic mechanical skills, knowledge of gambling, drug and alcohol, Centrelink etc).⁶

In addition, there are increasing calls for enhancements to the professional conduct of people working with young people. This can be seen in the State Government's commitment to introduce a Working with Children Check, a check to determine whether a person is suitable to work with children and young people. The creation of the Australian Council for Children and Youth Organisations (ACCYO) also indicates a call for enhanced standards.⁷ Although these specific initiatives have not been supported by everyone in the youth sector, these moves do indicate increasing awareness of the importance of professional standards and conduct. It's important that the youth sector takes the lead in this discussion.

These issues provide the background to the current conversation.

Interim working group

In August 2003, an open forum was held in Melbourne to discuss the development of a professional association for youth and welfare professionals. The forum was organised by the Women in the Youth Sector Network and followed the 'Women in the Youth Sector' conference.⁸ Around 70 people attended the forum and participants resolved that an interim working group should be formed to further investigate the establishment of a professional association for youth workers in Victoria. The group agreed to report the findings of the investigation back to the sector in six months. The role of the interim working party is not to consult with the sector but to present relevant information for sector consideration.

The Terms of Reference for the group are:

- To investigate the establishment of a professional association for youth professionals.
- To provide the sector with models of a professional association with a view to establishing an association.

The interim working group comprises:

- Jodie Belyea – Mission Australia

⁶ Youth Affairs Council & Centre for Adolescent Health (2001) *Rural Life of Us: young people and workers with young people in country Victoria*, YACVic.

⁷ ACCYO was established in 2001 with the support of several philanthropic organisations with the goal of developing standards and an accreditation process for organisations working with children and young people. See www.accyo.org.au

⁸ The Women in the Youth Sector network is a network of professional women in the youth sector which aims to engage, strengthen, support and foster the professional development and capacity of women to influence their career and the broader youth sector.

- Robyn Broadbent – Victoria University
- Tim Corney - Incolink
- Georgie Ferrari – YACVic
- Denise Francisco – City of Melbourne
- Paula Grogan – YACVic
- Jacinta Lucas – Inner Northern LLEN
- Mirium Manintveld - Batforce
- Peter Newling – YMCA
- Bernadette Rowland– City of Greater Dandenong
- Kemal Sedick – Chisholm Institute

YACVic's role in this process

YACVic is working with the interim working group to resource this investigation. As the peak body in Victoria, we want to make sure our members and other key stakeholders are informed about this issue and have a chance to feed into this discussion. However, any recommendation to form a professional association must come from the sector.

This discussion paper has been written by YACVic with input from the working group. While the interim working group has decided it is not the group's role to consult with the sector at this stage, YACVic believes that it's important that we provide an opportunity for members and others to feed into this discussion and we will be distributing this paper widely through our networks. YACVic also welcomes any feedback to this discussion paper. We will incorporate this feedback into future discussions and will publish a summary of responses. We hope this feedback will help identify the perceived need for a professional association, the level of interest amongst key stakeholders in establishing a professional body and the ideal model of a professional association if one were to be established.

The role of YACVic in relation to a professional association is discussed later in this paper.

Next steps

The paper will be distributed throughout Victoria using YACVic's networks in the first instance. YACVic welcomes feedback to this paper which will be relayed to the interim working group.

The interim working group will hold an open forum in April to present the 'findings' of this investigation and will make recommendations regarding the establishment of a professional association.

Working with young people in Victoria

Before discussing the debate about the professionalisation of youth work in Victoria, it's necessary to clarify the terms 'youth sector', 'youth worker' and 'workers with young people'.

What is the youth sector?

The youth sector is a part of the social and community services industry. It comprises those agencies, organisations, programs and workers, government and non-government, paid and unpaid, who work with or to the benefit of young people as a significant part of their work. It includes management, service delivery, research, evaluation and policy formation.⁹ Those working in the youth sector possess a variety of skills, experiences and qualifications and the sector includes, but is not confined to, professionals who have formally trained in youth work. Most importantly, a significant proportion of the sector's work involves working with or to the benefit of young people.¹⁰

It is important to clarify the roles of those working in the youth sector as this issue underpins the discussion around the development and membership of a professional body. The following section considers the distinction between youth workers and workers with young people.

Youth workers

Youth workers work in a wide variety of settings: in church organisations, for local governments, for government departments, for schools, for small community organisations and for large charities.¹¹ As mentioned youth workers may undertake a range of service delivery functions as well as ancillary work such as research and management.

In Victoria there are a variety of courses from certificates to degrees (at graduate and postgraduate level) that can lead to youth work offered by Universities, TAFE and Registered Training providers. The following provides a snapshot of current courses (not all are listed):

- Bachelor of Social Science (Youth Studies) - Australian Catholic University
- Bachelor of Arts (Youth Studies) – Victoria University
- Bachelor of Social Science (Youth Work) - Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology

⁹ Australian Federation of Youth Sector Training Councils (1993) *Youth Sector Training Strategy*, p. 11.

¹⁰ National Community Services and Health Industry Training Advocacy Board and Australian Federation of Youth Sector Training Councils (1993) *Draft National Competency Standards for the Youth Sector*, National Youth Sector Training Unit, Canberra.

¹¹ Sercombe, H. (1997) 'The Youth Work Contract: Professionalism and ethics', *Youth Studies Australia*, Vol. 16, No.4, pp. 17-21.

- Graduate Certificate/Diploma in Adolescent Health and Welfare, Master of Youth Health and Education Management, Postgraduate Programs in Adolescent Health and Welfare - University of Melbourne
- Advanced Diploma of Community Services (Youth Work)
- Certificate III in Community Services (Youth Work)
- Certificate III in Youth Work
- Certificate IV in Community Services (Youth Work)
- Certificate IV in Youth Work
- Certificate IV in Youth Work (Juvenile Justice)
- Diploma of Community Services (Youth Work)
- Diploma of Youth Work.¹²

Some people may argue that youth work is dependent upon qualification as a youth worker. However, currently a number of people employed as youth workers are not vocationally trained as youth workers and many have no formal training. Therefore, youth workers are either trained as youth workers or they practice youth work.

Given the diverse range of work, training and expertise in the youth work field, it is difficult to arrive at a simple definition of youth work. However, there are at least three factors that make youth work unique:

- Youth work is the only profession with a discreet focus on the age 12-25. Youth workers must have a specialist knowledge of the developmental characteristics of adolescence.
- Youth work considers youth in the context of broader issues and is not narrowly problem focused.
- Youth work considers the development of the whole person. Youth workers have a range of knowledge of generic and specialist community services such as law, health, schooling, recreation etc.¹³

Thus, there are principles underpinning youth work which are specific to youth work practice:

- The young person is the primary client of the youth worker.
- Young people are seen in their social context.
- Youth work is holistic – it takes into account the whole person.

There are also values that are quite specific to youth work. The Commonwealth Youth Programme outlines the key values as:

- Enabling: creating the conditions in which young people can act on their own behalf and on their own terms rather than relying on others to do things for them.

¹² See National Training Information Service for more information www.ntis.gov.au

¹³ Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (1994) *Submission to the Ministerial Review of Youth Work Training*, pp. 3-4.

- Ensuring: operating in accordance with value systems that give a sense of purpose and meaning to how young people use their skills and knowledge.
- Empowering: putting democratic principles into practice so that young people can play an assertive and constructive part in the decision-making that affects them.¹⁴

Workers with young people

As WA academic, Howard Sercombe, notes 'school teachers, parents, sporting coaches, police, doctors and prison officers also work with young people, to say nothing of sport shop owners, managers of fast food outlets and music shops'.¹⁵ However, he goes on to argue that 'important as much of their work with young people is, it isn't youth work'.¹⁶ This is mainly because young people are not the primary client:

'The roles of teacher, lawyer, social worker, priest, police officer and doctor are legitimate and important. It is quite legitimate that in some of these practices the young person is not the primary client, and that the interests of the community or the institution may need to be enforced against the interests of the young person where interests conflict. It is important for youth workers to have working relationships with other professions, and to be able to refer when appropriate. But while a youth worker is free to refuse to take on a client, we do not believe that the youth worker may take on a client and then act against them'.¹⁷

In summary a worker with young people might be described as a person who works with or for young people as one of several target groups of responsibility.¹⁸ The young person is not the primary client.

¹⁴ Maunders, D. (2003) 'Forming a profession: the role of the Diploma in Youth in development work in the South Pacific', *Commonwealth Youth Development*, Vol.1, No 1. pp. 8-28.

¹⁵ Sercombe (1997) op cit.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ Outten, G. (1991) 'Key Concepts in the debates', *Ethics and standards in youth work practice Conference Report*, Youth Sector Training Council of South Australia, Adelaide.

Youth work as a profession – the socio/political context

A brief history of youth work in Victoria

It's important to consider some of the key milestones in the history of youth work as these underpin current developments.

1944-7	One year certificate course run by the social studies department at the University of Melbourne.
1947-63	Two year YMCA course located in Sydney. Moved to Melbourne in 1964.
1965	Two year diploma of Youth Leadership offered at the Institute for Social Welfare, Hawthorn.
1967	Youth Worker's Association established.
1971	Myer Foundation grant to research youth worker education. Elery Hamilton-Smith and Donna Brownell publish <i>Youth Workers and their Education</i> . Their report recommended locating youth worker education in the mainstream tertiary system.
1972	The Youth Leadership course lengthened to a three-year course.
1974	Youth Leadership course moved to the newly formed Community Welfare Training Institute in Watsonia. The course name changed to Youth Work.
1974	YMCA course extended to three years.
1977	YMCA course transferred to state College Coburg as Diploma of Youth Work.
1978	Youth Worker's Association achieves the establishment of a Youth Work Award - youth work recognised as an occupation with a pay scale and conditions that reflect training and experience.
1980	Coburg Graduate Diploma in Youth Work offered part-time.
1982	Bachelor of Arts (Youth Affairs) offered at Phillip Institute of Technology (PIT), Coburg.
1986	Youth Sector Training Councils established.
1987	PIT Diploma discontinued. <i>Time for Training</i> produced by the Victorian Youth Sector Training Unit. National Association of Youth Work Trainers established. Advanced Certificate in Residential and Community Services (Child and Youth care) offered at Victorian TAFE colleges. Associate Diploma later offered.
1986	Youth Policy Development Council publish the <i>Future Directions for Youth Services and the Youth Affairs Sector</i> report arguing education and training of youth workers is vital to effective youth affairs.
1989	The Victorian Social and Community Services Industry Training Board publishes a <i>Training Plan</i> discussion paper. Youth work considered part of Social and Community Services Industry.
1992	Social and Community Services Competency based training policy released.
1995	Ministerial Review of Training of Youth Workers in Victoria undertaken and recommends a higher proportion of paid staff with a youth work specific qualification (diploma or degree).
1996	Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) develops a national industry training packages policy. Industry Training Advisory Boards (ITAB) to develop competency standards and industry implementation guidelines. National Youth Work Competency Standards endorsed by the ITAB. National Youth Work Training Project undertaken to develop competency based training materials.
1997	Community Services and Health Training Australia funded to develop a Community Services Industry Training Package.

1998	Victoria University Bachelor of Arts - Youth Studies course established Australian Catholic University Bachelor of Social Science (Youth Studies) course established.
2001	Community Services Industry Training Package reviewed.
2002	Community Services Industry Training Package endorsed (next review due 2005).

Is youth work a profession?

The debate around greater recognition of youth workers and the establishment of a professional association centres on the professionalisation of youth work. The Australian Council of Professions defines a profession as:

‘A disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards and uphold themselves to, and are accepted by the public as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognised body of learning derived from research, education and training at a high level, and who are prepared to exercise this knowledge and these skills in the interest of others’.¹⁹

Youth work once exhibited the hallmarks of a profession. By the mid 1980s youth work in Victoria had developed many of the attributes of a profession: the establishment of the Youth Workers Association, a degree level qualification, and a Youth Work Award that recognised expertise were all indicative of the professionalisation of youth work.²⁰

However, commentators tend to agree that youth work does not currently have the status of a profession. As a result it’s been argued that ‘youth workers continue to be marginalised in professional teams, in professional consultations, or case management panels because their professional standing is not recognised by other professionals. Their knowledge and expertise is frequently dismissed, limiting their capacity to advocate effectively for their clients’.²¹

Why has youth work apparently lost its professional status? There have been a variety of reasons given over the years including:

- ‘A spasmodic development and tangential growth (of the youth sector) has inhibited the development of any sense of professional identity’.²²
- This lack of homogeneity makes it very difficult to address the needs of the sector, particularly in relation to training.²³

¹⁹ Australian Council of Professions, see www.austprofessions.com.au.

²⁰ Irving, T., Maunders, D. & Sherington, G. (1995) *Youth in Australia: Policy, administration and politics*, p. 184.

²¹ Sercombe, H. (2000) ‘*Disciplining Youth Work: the professionalisation dilemma*’, Paper presented at the Youth Affairs Conference, ‘You, Me, We: Celebrating Culture’, Pinjarra Western Australia 25-27 October 2000.

²² Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (1994) op cit, p. 11.

²³ Ibid., p 11.

- The provision of professional-level training specific to youth work has been insufficient.²⁴
- Quality of service and effectiveness can be variable.²⁵
- There is no body to set up and monitor professional standards, determine training requirements and regulate membership.²⁶

It has also been argued that there has been a decline in the professionalism of youth work largely due to changes in public policy and industry restructuring in the 1980s and 1990s.²⁷ The following sections briefly explore these issues.

The impact of public sector policies

Youth work has been significantly affected by changes to public sector policy since the 1980s. Key changes include:

- Privatisation – the transfer of public sector responsibilities to the private sector resulting in the reduction of government funded service provision. Community agencies may not receive funding for services unless they win tenders or access other sources of private funding. Privatisation is based on the belief that market forces will determine supply and demand.
- Competitive tendering – the contracting out of public services. This had a significant impact on youth agencies during the amalgamation of services in the 1990's and it increased competition between services for available funding. Competition is seen to have fragmented a once unified sector as competition undermined collaboration.
- Casualisation of the workforce – the contracting out of services limited the capacity of organisations to offer workers permanent positions. This has led to an increase in casual positions and compounds staff retention issues faced by organisations.
- Managerialism – the adoption of private sector management practices and language. For example, the application of performance indicators, short term contracts for managers, a focus on product output rather than people or service, the introduction of terms such as 'throughput' and 'targets'. The focus is on minimising costs and maximising efficiency. Generic skills assume greater value than intimate knowledge of or experience in an area.²⁸

These policy changes sit uneasily with the values underpinning youth work. While the focus is on efficiency, cost effectiveness and accountability, little attention may be paid to the nature and quality of services offered to young people.²⁹ Judith Bessant suggests that the 'emphasis on the effectiveness of agencies and workers has come to mean agencies and workers are judged

²⁴ Report of the Ministerial Review of the Training of Youth Workers in Victoria (1995), p. 66.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 66.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 66.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 66.

²⁸ Bessant, J. (1997) 'Free Market Economies and new directions for youth workers', *Youth Studies Australia*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 34-40.

²⁹ Irving et al, op cit, p. 305.

according to their ability to meet certain performance measurements, rather than their ability to contribute to broader social change'.³⁰

It is also difficult to reduce the key aspects of youth work to quantifiable terms. For example, the time taken to establish rapport with young people is not measurable. Bessant suggests that 'although youth work activities... are in most cases vital to effective practice, they are not usually quantifiable, are not given weighting, and are therefore not valued. If less tangible work is to remain part of the youth service to young people, it will be pushed between other activities like submission writing, tendering, administration and the actual delivery of services'.³¹ As a result, Bessant suggests that 'there is evidence of increasing workloads, mounting pressure on services and increasing concern that some young people do not get the quality of service they need'.³²

The impact of competency-based training

Education and training are an integral component of professionalisation:

'We trust expert systems principally because they have an expertise and authority that results from a specific knowledge and skill base that had been approved and certified by formal educational and training credentials'.³³

The importance of training was recognised as part of the Victorian Ministerial Review of the Training of Youth Workers in 1995. Indeed, the Review recommended that by 2005 half of those employed in youth work should have undergone specific training for youth work and will have a formal qualification in youth work'.³⁴

However, the development of a competency based approach to training as part of the Commonwealth's National Training Reform Agenda has been cited as undermining the unique status of youth work.³⁵

The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) sets the strategic directions and funding arrangements for the delivery of vocational education and training in Australia. The National Training Framework Committee of ANTA has the responsibility of endorsing training packages developed by different industries. Each industry has its own Industry Training Advisory Board

³⁰ Bessant, op cit, p. 39

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 39.

³² *ibid.*, p. 40.

³³ Bessant, J. (2003) '*Professional Credibility and public trust in those working with young people*', Paper presented at YAPA NSW Youth Work Conference, 19-21 August 2003, Sydney.

³⁴ *Report of the Ministerial Review of the Training of Youth Workers in Victoria* (1995), p. 3.

³⁵ Irving et al, op cit, p. 303

(ITAB) which advise the Government on their specific industry needs. Youth work is part of the Social and Community Services Industry. Other sectors that are part of the Community Services Industry include Child Care, Juvenile Justice, Mental Health, Disability and Drug and Alcohol.

In 1996 ANTA developed a national vocational industry training packages policy which required the ITABs to develop the competency standards and industry implementation guidelines for their specific industry. Competencies set out the skills and knowledge required to perform a job and the acceptable performance standards. They are also the means by which industry expresses its education and training requirements for entry into a profession. There are common competencies which are identified as common across the industry and competency standards which are specialist to the sector.

Youth Work developed Competency Standards following extensive sector consultation that were endorsed by the ITAB in 1996. However, these Competency Standards have been revised, with no consultation, as part of the Industry Training Package development and there is concern that these competencies are too generic and promote multi-skilling rather than sector specialisation.³⁶ While competencies are useful in helping to specify the standards expected in employment, a key problem is that competencies define specific learnable tasks but do not highlight the core values of youth work practice.

While this change may benefit employers because of more cost effective training and assessment and enhanced capacity for skills transfer, there is a concern that the changes will produce generic workers rather than specialised youth workers and deskill the youth work profession. Robyn Broadbent asks 'in the final analysis is training as a Juvenile Justice professional the same as training as a Youth Worker? The individual essence of the profession, it would seem, will be lost to the generic core'.³⁷

Trust and ethical standards

According to the definition of a profession, professionals adhere to ethical standards. Is youth work in Victoria a profession given there is no agreed set of ethical or professional standards?

This discussion links to the issue of training. It has been suggested that 'restoring and building public trust in those working professionally with young people requires the systematic improvement of their intellectual and professional education... Their professional credibility can only be trusted if the education of its members is taken seriously'.³⁸ Bessant argues that 'youth

³⁶ Broadbent, R. (1998) *The Community Services Training Package – Is it good for Industry?* Victoria University Institute for Youth, Education and Community, p. 4.

³⁷ Broadbent, *ibid.*, p. 16.

³⁸ Bessant, 2003, *op cit.*

workers and our young people need much more than competency based training models with a focus on 'skill development'. Graduates require a vocabulary of ethical insight, skills and attributes to be a competent youth worker'.³⁹ There is concern that 'further diversifying the training base of youth work will dissipate the drive for any universal ethical code in youth work' compounding the youth sector's lack of professional identity.⁴⁰

Trust is a key element of this debate. Youth workers are placed in a significant position of trust because of their unique work with young people. Disclosures of improper practices can undermine public trust in the role of workers.⁴¹ Research suggests that improper or unprofessional conduct is more likely to occur in organisations that exhibit the following characteristics:

- Limited resources.
- Poor coordination and consistency.
- Gaps between policy and practice.
- Inadequate guidelines.
- Lack of specialised skills.
- Limited staff support.
- Unwillingness to listen to the child or young person.
- Lack of information.⁴²

It could therefore be argued that the development of a privatised, competitive and managerial approach to youth work practice has serious implications for the professional capacity of workers. Professional conduct can be enhanced through effective governance procedures, improved accountability and monitoring strategies and effective staff training but overarching public sector policies may undermine the capacity of workers and organisations to implement these processes.

Over the years there have been calls for the introduction of a code of conduct or ethical standards in Victoria but no concrete plans made to introduce one. A code of ethics has been described as 'a set of norms based on the belief systems or values of a group of people who

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Broadbent, *op cit.*, p. 17.

⁴¹ Bessant, 2003, *op cit.*

⁴² Cashmore, J., Dolby, R. & Brennan, D. (1994) *System Abuse – Problems and Solutions: a report of the NSW Child Protection Council*. Cited in McMenamin, B. & Fitzgerald, P. (2001) *Choose with Care – A Handbook to Build Safer Organisations for Children*, p. 14.

agree to adhere to commonly held philosophical principles'.⁴³ They provide guiding principles about practice. A code of ethics may also provide a degree of accountability. Bessant writes that:

While not suggesting that professional integrity can be enforced through a code of conduct, it does none-the-less enable some disciplinary procedures to be realised. It also offers an accountability mechanism for 'service users' and the public more generally, and it has, albeit a limited, role in preventing misconduct on the part of workers.⁴⁴

There have been moves in other states to introduce a code of ethics. For example, the membership of the Youth Affairs Council of WA have voted in favour of adopting a code of ethics for youth workers in Western Australia. The code of ethics is voluntary at present. YACWA has set an 18-month period to trial the voluntary code and undertake an evaluation on its feedback. Peaks in NSW and the ACT have also facilitated debates about the introduction of a code of ethics.

Can there be consensus about a code given the diverse group of workers within the youth sector and how would a code be regulated?

Bessant suggests that a code of ethics would have 'serious limitations unless accompanied by specific mechanisms to give it material effect. To be successful, codes need to be regulatory and enforceable by an organisation that adjudicates complaints of breaches of the code. Without the backing of legislative mandating, and proper sanctions (including the power to strike off practitioners for misconduct), the effectiveness of a code of conduct can only be minimal'.⁴⁵

So what organisation would develop and enforce a code of conduct in Victoria? Is this the role of the peak body, as in Western Australia, or some other body and, if so, which one? This leads to the discussion about a professional association of youth workers.

⁴³ Outten, op cit, p. 8.

⁴⁴ Bessant, 2003, op cit.

⁴⁵ Bessant, 2003, op cit.

The professionalisation of youth work

The key characteristics of a profession include:

- A level of specialised knowledge and skills.
- A period of intensive training or educational requirements.
- Members adhering to a code of conduct.
- Legal and or stated regulations for admission to practice.
- A mechanism for investigating and sanctioning misconduct.
- Continual renewal and educational updating.
- A professional association which unifies the field.⁴⁶

So should youth work be a profession with a code of ethics, mandatory training, professional registration and deregistration? Will workers be considered as professionals given enhanced training, adherence to a code of conduct and membership of a professional association?

As mentioned earlier, the issue of the professionalisation of youth work and, more specifically, the establishment of a professional association of youth workers, has been debated for many years eliciting a range of responses including support, ambivalence and opposition.⁴⁷ The following section details some of the key arguments for and against the professionalisation of youth work.

The case for

Arguments for greater professionalism typically revolve around the need for greater recognition of the role of youth worker, improved youth work practice, enhanced working conditions and remuneration and more specialised training:

- Youth work requires specific knowledge and skill. Youth workers receive specific training and this should be recognised professionally and with respect to salaries.
- Young people deserve ethical and effective practice. Examples of unethical practice continue to filter through and must be addressed. There is currently no uniform process for dealing with poor practice or grievances.
- Youth workers should be committed to an ethical code of conduct and held accountable to this.
- A professional body may have considerable political clout. This could have implications for improved wages and conditions and the quality of youth work education.

⁴⁶ Denholm, C. J. (1990) 'Canadian child and Youth care 1979-89: Implications for the Australian profession', *Youth Studies*, May 1990, p. 56

⁴⁷ See for example Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (1996) op cit, *Report of the Ministerial Review of the Training of Youth Workers in Victoria*, op cit.

- A professional association can help determine issues such as student staff ratios and training curriculum in educational institutions.

The case against

Sercombe suggests that 'youth work is, in the best sense, 'undisciplined'. It has been this innovative, spontaneous aspect of the trade that has made it effective in work with difficult situations at the local level'.⁴⁸ Arguments against professionalism centre on the possible loss of the 'idiosyncratic and unorthodox'⁴⁹ nature of youth work:

- Professionals work in the best interests of professionals. The focus is on the workers not the young person.
- The necessity for formal training and qualifications may exclude many unqualified and voluntary youth workers. Current practitioners may lose their jobs.
- Professionals take on the role of the expert rather than involving young people in decisions.
- Professionals protect each other by closing ranks when complaints are made against their members.
- A professional association potentially competes with or duplicates the role of training bodies and peak bodies. Why stretch already limited resources by introducing a new structure?

⁴⁸ Sercombe, H. (2003) *The Youth Work Contract*, Youth Coalition of the ACT, p. 2.

⁴⁹ Sercombe (2000) op cit.

Professional associations

What is a professional association?

A typical characteristic of a profession is the existence of a professional body that represents the interests of members. All professional associations have specific aims related to the profession. However, in general professional associations aim to:

- Promote and build on the professional status of its members and recognise the expertise and proficiency of those it represents.
- Work closely with training bodies and tertiary institutions to ensure that qualifications provide the skills needed in the industry.
- Provide a forum for networking between workers and the exchange of information and ideas.
- Develop models of best practice.
- Advocate on industrial issues such as pay.
- Be a voice in the media about worker issues.
- Provide professional development opportunities.

What about YACVic?

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body representing the youth sector. YACVic provides a means through which the youth sector and young people voice their opinions and concerns in regard to issues and policies affecting them. YACVic works with and makes representations to government and serves as an advocate for the interests of young people, workers with young people and organisations that provide direct services to young people. YACVic also promotes and supports the participation of young people in debate and policy development in areas that most affect them. YACVic's resources are primarily directed towards policy analysis/development, research and consultation and to meeting the information and networking needs of its constituency.

While a professional association could complement YACVic, the role of each body is quite distinct. For example:

- YACVic does not solely represent worker issues. YACVic's diverse membership is made up of individuals and organisations. Members represent both employers, employees and volunteers and importantly young people.
- YACVic considers a range of issues affecting employers and employees and young people.
- YACVic is not a regulatory or accrediting body. The key focus is advocacy.
- YACVic cannot specifically focus on industrial issues as this would be a conflict of interest between different members (i.e. employers and employees).

However, if a professional association were to be established in Victoria, it is expected that YACVic would work with that body on shared agendas to ensure there is no duplication of roles.

Professional Association models

Generally speaking, professional associations fall into one of three categories: those with an industrial relations focus, those with a professional development focus and those which combine the two roles. This section briefly outlines some models of existing associations both in Australia and nationally. Where possible, models relate to youth work or work in the community services industry. Some examples fall outside these sectors but have been used to illustrate the models.

Industrial relations model

Key characteristics

- Affiliated with relevant Trades Councils. In Australia, these professional associations are members of all or one of the following: The Victorian Trades Hall Council, the Australian Council of Trade Unions or the Australian Labor Party.
- Provide the collective strength to bargain for reasonable wages and conditions of employment. May:
 - Provide representation when negotiating an award, enterprise agreement or contract.
 - Ensure that members know their entitlements.
 - Represent members in any disciplinary matters.
 - Assist with specialist industrial advice and legal representation.
 - Arrange workplace inspections in relation to occupation, health and safety (OH&S) matters.
 - Liase with other relevant unions.
- The main unit of a union is the Branch. Members join through their nearest Branch which consists of a minimum number of people who work within reasonably close geographical proximity to each other. Branches nominate regional representatives. There is normally a state or national conference where members determine the policy and direction of the Union's affairs for the following year.

For example...

Community and Youth Workers Union UK

The Community and Youth Workers Union was formed by workers in the voluntary sector in 1938 and is the only specialist trade union in the youth sector in the UK.

The key aims of CYWU are to:

- Defend the jobs of all members.

- Protect the rights of those members to work in safety.
- Obtain the best possible salaries and conditions of employment for its members.

The Union's priority is to represent the employment and professional views of members in relation to employers. The Union also provides training and support to members on a variety of work and professional issues. The CYWU has a Code of Professional Conduct which spells out worker behaviour within organisations and with other workers.

The Union is open to volunteers, part-time and full-time workers in the youth, community and allied sectors (for example play work, juvenile justice, community development) in Britain and Ireland. There are different levels of membership. For example Associate members are workers who work with young people but are members of another Union (eg teachers). Members join through their nearest Branch.

The union is largely funded by subscription fees which are based on a sliding scale according to the salary of members.

The union is managed by a National Executive Committee which implements decisions made at the National Conference and takes overall responsibility for the finances and staffing of the union. There is an annual National Conference which brings together members to vote on policy decisions. National Conference also has the right to impose disciplinary measures on members who have acted in an unconstitutional manner or who have brought the Union into disrepute. Disciplinary measures range from written warnings to expulsion from the union.

The CYWU is an independent trade union and is an affiliate to the Trades Union Congress and General Federation of Trade Unions. It also works in partnership with the National Union of Teachers.

Website: www.cywu.org.uk

The Police Association of Victoria

The Police Association was formed in 1917 due to police concerns over poor working conditions. The Association negotiates with the Chief Commissioner of Police and the Ministry for Police and Emergency Services and other relevant organisations on behalf of its members to obtain improved wages and working conditions.

The key objectives of the Association include:

- To promote the interests of members of the Police Association.
- To regulate the relations between members of the Association and the Victoria Police Force.
- To improve the conditions of employment and service and to promote the welfare of members generally.

- To protect the rights, powers and privileges of the members.
- To assist members who have been injured in the execution of their duty and to safeguard the interests of members in such cases.

Services available to members of the Police Association include:

- Advice and representation regarding all issues relevant to employment in the Police Force.
- Legal assistance and representation on work related issues.
- Access to legal services by Association's Legal Adviser.

Full membership of the Association is available to any person who is a member of the Police Force of Victoria, a Police Recruit, a Protective Services Officer or a member of the Retired Police Reserve of Victoria.

The business and affairs of the Association are managed by an Executive Committee comprising twelve full members of the Association. There are locally elected representatives, Association Delegates, who assist members with industrial queries and concerns at a district level. Association Delegates are located throughout the State.

The Association is largely funded by member subscription fees and is affiliated with the Victorian Trades Hall Council.

Website: www.tpass.com.au

Victorian Psychologists Association and Medical Scientists Association of Victoria

The Medical Scientists Association of Victoria (MSAV) and the Victorian Psychologists Association (VPA) are both component Associations of the Health Services Union of Australia. MSAV and VPA are the only bodies in Victoria that specifically look after the industrial interests of medical scientists and psychologists. The Associations cover medical scientists and psychologists employed in a range of settings in both the public and private sector - in hospitals, community health centres, pathology laboratories and psychological and mental health/psychiatric services.

The Associations aims to work towards the maintenance of salary and working conditions for medical scientists and psychologists. MSAV and VPA will:

- Advocate on salary and working condition issues.
- Negotiate with employers and monitor employer's compliance with the law.
- Represent members in unfair dismissal cases.
- Arranges the training of OH&S reps.
- Provide professional indemnity insurance as part of membership.

The Association is affiliated with the Victorian Trades Hall Council.

Website: www.msav.org.au

Professional development model

Key characteristics

- Focus on improving worker skills and competencies.
- Promote standards and good practice.
- Develop and recognise the skills of the professional.
- Work with tertiary institutions to determine curriculum and accreditation.
- May regulate training and accredit courses. Accreditation may refer to a formal external review process involving assessment of the quality of courses or schools or may relate to the acceptability of graduates for membership of the association.
- May be responsible for the registration and deregistration of workers. This role may have legislative force (eg Victorian Institute of Teaching) or may be more self-regulatory (Australian Association of Social Workers).
- Do not act on industrial issues but may liaise with unions regarding workplace issues and remuneration.
- Membership of professional associations is not usually compulsory in order to work within a profession, although it may be necessary for professional advancement.

For example...

Australian Association of Social Workers

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) is the professional body of social workers in Australia. It was formed in 1946 at a National Level. The objectives of the AASW are:

- To promote the profession of social work.
- To provide an organisation through which social workers can develop a professional identity.
- To establish, monitor and improve practice standards.
- To contribute to the development of social work knowledge and research.
- To advocate on behalf of clients.
- To actively support social structures and policies pursuant to the promotion of social justice.

The AASW:

- Has a code of ethics which reflects the value base of the profession and provides guidance for practitioners.
- Provides a mechanism through which social workers can develop a professional identity.
- Provides Continuing Professional Education and certification as an Accredited Social Worker.
- Promotes, maintains and works for the improvement of standards of professional practice, education and research.
- Offers professional support on issues affecting social workers.

- Deals with complaints relating to ethics and professional practice.
- Acts as a lobby group on health and welfare issues and policy development.
- Makes statements to the media on service and professional issues.
- Provides professional indemnity insurance and public liability insurance to all members.
- Organises professional seminars, workshops and national conferences.
- Reviews Australian undergraduate social work courses to determine eligibility for graduates to become members of the AASW.
- Endorses a guide schedule of fees.

A four-year Bachelor of Social Work degree is required for entry into the occupation as required by the AASW. While there is no legal registration for social workers in Australia, many jobs require eligibility for membership of the AASW and to be eligible, people need to complete an AASW approved Bachelor Degree.

The Association's funding comes from membership fees, publication subscriptions, and conference and education fees.

Website: www.aasw.asn.au

Australasian Housing Institute

The Australasian Housing Institute (AHI) is the professional body for practitioners in the social housing sector in Australia and New Zealand. The Institute is focussed on supporting and resourcing its members and providing opportunities for professional development. The AHI aims to:

- Promote professional standards and good practice in social housing.
- Promote debate of and to advocate on social housing issues.
- Recognise and promote access to the skills of the social housing profession
- Foster opportunities for professional advancement.
- Provide a range of professional services and programs that keep members up-to-date with Australasian Housing Developments.
- Provide opportunities for members to build links, create extensive networks, participate in forums of debate, further their career opportunities.

Membership of the AHI is open to all people working in social housing sector. Members may be paid workers or volunteers.

There are several membership categories:

- Affiliate Member: new workers and volunteers (less than 12 months experience), students, people on parental or other extended leave, retired workers and volunteers.
- Associate Member: workers and volunteers formally involved in social housing for at least twelve months.

- Member: workers and volunteers formally involved in social housing for at least five years or for at least one year plus a housing qualification.

Membership fees are based on member's salaries.

Members must abide by the AHI's Code of Conduct. The Code sets out in detail the standards of personal and professional conduct. The Institute can suspend or disqualify members found guilty of dishonourable or unprofessional conduct following a complaint handling process.

The Institute's funding comes from seed funding (from State and Territory Housing Authorities, and Housing New Zealand), sponsorship, memberships subscriptions and seminar fees.

www.housinginstitute.org

Victorian Institute of Teaching

The Victorian Institute of Teaching is a statutory authority, established by an Act of Parliament in 2001, and is the professional body for the teaching profession. The Institute registers teachers working in Victorian government, independent and Catholic schools. Teachers are required to be registered in order to practise their profession in Victoria as stipulated by the legislation. The Institute will grant registration to applicants who possess approved tertiary study or an approved Certificate of Proficiency/Completion in a trade.

The Institute:

- Registers all teachers to ensure qualified people are employed in Victorian schools.
- Works to raise the standing of the profession in the community.
- Works with teachers to develop high professional standards.
- Is a public advocate for the teaching profession.
- Approves teacher education courses that qualify future teachers for entry to the profession.
- Investigates and makes findings on instances of serious misconduct to protect the integrity of the profession.

The key functions of the Institute include:

- Recognise and promote the profession of teaching and regulate members of the teaching profession.
- Approve teacher education courses that will lead to qualifications or competencies in teaching that satisfy the requirements for registration as a teacher.
- Recommend for the approval of the Minister qualifications, criteria and standards for the registration and renewal of registration of teachers in schools in Victoria.
- Develop, establish and maintain standards of professional practice for entry into the teaching profession and for continuing membership of the profession.
- Grant registration or permission to teach in Victorian schools.

- Issue certificates of registration to those teachers who are registered to, or have permission to, teach in schools in Victoria.
- Maintain a register of teachers who are registered to, or have permission to, teach in schools in Victoria.
- Develop, maintain and promote a code of conduct for the teaching profession
- Investigate the conduct, competence and fitness to teach of registered teachers and impose sanctions where appropriate.
- Develop and maintain a Professional Learning Framework to support and promote the continuing education and professional development of teachers.
- Undertake professional development programs and activities in relation to the functions of the Institute.

The Institute is governed by a twenty member Council, many of whom are practising teachers, and several members are appointed by the Minister for Education Services & Training.

The institute is largely self-funded by members through the payment of annual registration fees. Government grants supplement the income from teacher registrations and there are some services are provided on a Fee for Service basis.

Website: www.vit.vic.edu.au

VISTA – Association of VET Professionals

VISTA is the peak professional association for managers and leaders in the Victorian Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. VISTA represents managers and leaders in Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) across the VET sector in Victoria. This includes RTOs in the public, private, industry, VET in schools and adult community education (ACE) sectors.

VISTA members come from both public and private sectors and represent all areas of the VET community including TAFE Institutes, Adult Community Education, Industry groups, Universities, Policy-makers and government departments, Secondary schools

Private providers, Commercial and enterprise providers, Professional training bodies and Education Researchers and consultants.

VISTA aims:

- To be a recognised organisation which reflects the views of its membership and provides advice and assistance on Vocational Education and Training matters to government, the OTTE and other appropriate organisations concerned with vocational education and training.
- To provide appropriate professional development for members.
- To provide opportunities for members to liaise, cooperate and collectively express an opinion in relation to all matters affecting the operation and future of the vocational education and training system.

- To facilitate liaison between organisations associated with the planning and delivery of vocational education and training.
- To liaise with industry, business, government and the general community concerning the provision and further development of vocational education and training.

VISTA is largely self-funded by members through the payment of annual registration fees.

Website: www.vista.org.au

Industrial Relations/Professional Development model

Key characteristics

- Not affiliated with Trade Councils but may advocate for the industrial rights of members.
- Share characteristics of professional development model

For example...

National Youth Agency UK

The National Youth Agency (NYA) was founded in 1992 and is based in Leicester, England. The Agency is funded primarily by the Local Government Association and government departments.

The Agency seeks to:

- Secure more innovation in methods for youth work, youth services, and youth participation/citizenship.
- Influence public and policy-making perception and understanding of the needs of young people and the contribution of youth work.
- Improve the quality assurance of training for youth work.
- Extend the resources for youth work that will modernise and improve practice;

The NYA is responsible for the professional validation of higher education qualifications. The NYA ensures the quality and development of youth work training at all levels through the review, professional validation and annual monitoring of the different youth work training programmes. It undertakes this work on behalf of the Joint Negotiating Committee for Youth and Community Workers (JNC). The JNC sets out conditions of pay and responsibilities of post to which employers should adhere. NYA has also worked to develop national occupational standards and new qualifications structures for youth work.

Once professionally validated, a professional training programme may confer nationally qualified status to its graduates. In England, you can begin working with young people without qualification only if you commit yourself to a programme of training to achieve a qualification.

Funding comes from Central and Local Government grants and is supplemented by income generated through other activities, including research projects, project management, publications, conference revenue and consultancy.

Website: www.nya.org.uk

Australian Medical Association

Members of the Australian Medical Association (AMA) are registered medical practitioners and medical students. The AMA aims to:

- Promote and advance ethical behaviour by the medical profession and protect the integrity and independence of the doctor/patient relationship.
- Promote and advance the public health.
- Protect the academic, professional and economic independence and the well being of medical practitioners.
- Preserve and protect the political, legal and industrial interests of medical practitioners.

The AMA provides advocacy, policy and campaign services for salaried and private doctors in their dealings with governments, public and private health services. The AMA also co-ordinates activity on major professional, legislative and industrial relations developments affecting the medical workforce and produces a range of information on remuneration and industrial relations matters.

The AMA is funded largely through member subscriptions with income supplemented by publications and conferences.

Website: www.ama.com.au

A model for Victoria

This section details three models of a Victorian Professional Association of youth workers. The models draw on the key characteristics outlined above.

This section is only a preliminary examination of possible models for Victoria and the models are presented to provide a basis for discussion. More detailed research would need to be undertaken if workers in the sector agree on the establishment of a professional association.

An industrial relations model

Key objectives

- To represent the industrial relation interests of members.
- To improve the conditions of employment and salaries of Victorian youth professionals.
- To protect the occupational health and safety rights of members.
- To support members and provide legal assistance on employment related issues.

Key functions

A professional association for Victorian youth professionals based on an industrial relations model would:

- Provide representation when negotiating an award, enterprise agreement or contract.
- Ensure that members know their entitlements.
- Represent members in any disciplinary matters.
- Assist with specialist industrial advice and legal representation.
- Arrange workplace inspections in relation to occupation, health and safety (OH&S) matters.

Key affiliations

- Would be affiliated with the Victorian Trades Hall Council.
- Would work with existing unions whose membership may be drawn from the youth sector. The two main unions are the Australian Services Union and the Health and Community Services Union.

Eligibility

Membership to be open to:

- All those engaging in full or part time work in the youth sector including services delivery, management, policy and research and ancillary roles in the government and non-government sectors.

- Volunteers.
- Those who are members of another union but who are engaged in working with young people may be Associate Members.

Resourcing

Seed funding required. Ongoing funding to come from membership subscriptions. Fees are on a sliding scale according to the salary of members. Income may be supplemented by fee for service training, publications, forums etc.

Management

Victoria would be divided into branches and members would join the union through their local branch. A branch would consist of a minimum number of members who work in close geographical proximity. Each branch has a regional representative who attends regional meetings.

The Union would have an Executive Committee which implements policies and which manages the union.

Ethics

The Union would develop a code of ethics/conduct which sets out the principles guiding behaviour in the workplace.

Disciplinary procedures

Has the right to impose disciplinary measures on members who have acted unconstitutionally or brought the union or the professional into disrepute. Disciplinary procedures may range from a warning, a fine, to suspension of or expulsion from membership.

A professional development model

Key objectives

- To promote the profession of youth work.
- To promote professional standards and good practice in the youth sector.
- To foster opportunities for professional advancement.

Key functions

- Provide ongoing professional development opportunities.
- Offer professional support on issues affecting youth professionals.
- Make statements to the media on service and professional issues.

- Organise professional seminars, workshops and conferences.
- Work with tertiary institutions to determine curriculum and accreditation.
- May regulate training and accredit courses. Accreditation may refer to a formal external review process involving assessment of the quality of courses or schools or may relate to the acceptability of graduates for membership of the association.
- Develop a code of ethics/conduct which reflects the value base of the profession and provides guidance for practitioners.
- Deal with complaints relating to ethics and professional practice.
- May carry out police or Working with Children checks.

Key affiliations

- Liaise with unions regarding workplace issues and remuneration.
- Consult with peak bodies such as YACVic and VCOSS to ensure no duplication of roles/services.
- Work with existing training providers and ITABs to ensure that the procedure for accrediting education and training is appropriate.
- Work with employers and employer bodies.

Eligibility

Membership to be open to:

- All those engaging in full or part time work in the youth sector including services delivery, management, policy and research and ancillary roles in the government and non-government sectors.
- Volunteers.
- Students undertaking youth work courses.

If membership were to be based on qualifications, there would need to be different categories of membership. For example:

- Affiliate membership – for students and those with qualifications but no work experience in the sector.
- Practitioner membership – for those with recognised experience but no formal qualifications.
- Full membership – for those with formal qualifications and experience in the sector.

Membership of this professional association is not compulsory in order to work within the youth sector.

Resourcing

This Association would need seeding funding during the initial establishment phase. This may come from government or philanthropic sources. Ongoing funding to come from membership

subscriptions. Fees set on a sliding scale according to the salary of members. Income may also be supplemented by fee for service training, publications, forums etc.

Management

The Association would be managed by a Board of Governance or a Committee of management and a paid secretariat would manage the day-to-day operations of the association.

Ethics

The Association would develop a code of ethics/conduct that sets out the principles guiding youth work practice.

Disciplinary procedures

The Association would have the ability to impose disciplinary measures on members who have acted unconstitutionally or brought the association into disrepute. Disciplinary procedures may range from a warning to a fine, to suspension or expulsion from membership.

A combined model

Key objectives

- To coordinate activity on professional and industrial relations issues affecting youth work professionals.
- To promote the profession of youth work.
- To establish, monitor and improve practice standards.
- To preserve the legal and industrial interests of practitioners.
- To promote ethical behaviour in the youth sector.

Key functions

- Provide ongoing professional development opportunities.
- Make statements to the media on service and professional issues.
- Organise professional seminars, workshops and conferences.
- Work with tertiary institutions to determine curriculum and accreditation.
- May regulate training and accredit courses. Accreditation may refer to a formal external review process involving assessment of the quality of courses or schools or may relate to the acceptability of graduates for membership of the association.
- Develop a code of ethics/conduct which reflects the value base of the profession and provides guidance for practitioners.
- Deal with complaints relating to ethics and professional practice.
- May carry out police or Working with Children checks.

- Work with relevant unions and support workers when negotiating an award, enterprise agreement or contract.
- Ensure that members know their entitlements.
- Assist with specialist industrial advice and legal representation.
- Promote good practice in relation to occupation, health and safety (OH&S) matters.

Key affiliations

- Would work with the Victorian Trades Hall Council and other unions whose membership may be drawn from the youth sector.
- Consult with peak bodies such as YACVic and VCOSS to ensure no duplication of roles/services.
- Work with existing training providers and ITABs to ensure that the procedure for accrediting education and training is appropriate.
- Work with employers and employer bodies.

Eligibility

Membership to be open to:

- All those engaging in full or part time work in the youth sector including services delivery, management, policy and research and ancillary roles in the government and non-government sectors.
- Volunteers.
- Students undertaking youth work courses.

If membership were to be based on qualifications, there would need to be different categories of membership. For example:

- Affiliate membership – for students and those with qualifications but no work experience in the sector.
- Practitioner membership – for those with recognised experience but no formal qualifications.
- Full membership – for those with formal qualifications and experience in the sector.

Membership of this professional association is not compulsory in order to work within the youth sector.

Resourcing

This Association would need seeding funding during the initial establishment phase. This may come from government or philanthropic sources. Ongoing funding to come from membership subscriptions. Fees set on a sliding scale according to the salary of members. Income may also be supplemented by fee for service training, publications, forums etc.

Management

The Association would be managed by a Board of Governance or a Committee of management and a paid secretariat would manage the day-to-day operations of the association.

Ethics

The Association would develop a code of ethics/conduct which sets out the principles guiding youth work practice.

Disciplinary procedures

The Association would have the ability to impose disciplinary measures on members who have acted unconstitutionally or brought the association into disrepute. Disciplinary procedures may range from a warning, a fine, suspension or expulsion of member.

Key issues underpinning these models

Do members have to be qualified as youth workers?

In previous debates about the establishment of a professional association, the issue of eligibility typically evokes the most concern amongst workers. As discussed above, many practitioners working in the field do not hold specific youth work qualifications and some may not hold any formal qualification. These workers may be concerned that they would be ineligible to join a professional association if membership was determined by qualification and that this may impact on their career.

Given that education and training is a key component of professionalism, should members be required to hold a minimum level of qualification? If so, what is the minimum level?

If qualification is to be the basis for eligibility there would need to be a long transition period in which existing (unqualified) workers can gain qualifications and credits are given for experience.

Different levels of membership could also be offered (as presented in the models above) to reflect different levels of qualification and experience.

Alternatively, eligibility could be based neither on qualifications or experience but rather on a commitment from workers to adhere to a code of ethics

Who will fund the association?

While most professional associations are funded through membership subscriptions and services such as training and conferences, a professional association will require seed funding for the

establishment phase. The government or grant-making bodies may be approached to provide this funding.

There is also the question of the sustainability of funding if solely based on membership subscriptions particularly if membership is small in the short to medium term. A diversity of funding sources will need to be considered to ensure the sustainability of the association.

What are the alternatives?

The interim working group's role was to investigate the establishment of a professional association for youth workers and to provide the sector with models of a professional association for Victoria. For this reason, this paper focuses on the concept of a professional association. However, it's important to consider what alternatives are available to assist the professionalisation of youth work. These include:

- Developing a code of ethics – YACWA, the youth peak in WA, has developed a code of ethics in consultation with the youth sector. This is a voluntary code. As discussed above, one problem with this approach is that there is no body to monitor compliance with the code and to address breaches.
- Professional development training – may be undertaken by YACVic and other relevant peak bodies (eg VCOSS, CWAV) following consultation with the sector about professional development needs.
- Industrial relations – individuals and peaks to work more closely with existing unions to raise issues pertaining to the youth sector.

While other bodies can undertake some functions, issues such as youth work course accreditation, registration of workers and police checks are not readily picked up by existing structures.

Another alternative is to do nothing. But what impact would this have on the youth sector? The very process of establishing a working group to investigate the development of a professional association indicates that many workers are clearly frustrated with the status quo. There is also concern that doing nothing may result in youth work being further marginalised. While related professions such as social workers, teachers and psychologists pursue ongoing professionalisation, due regard may not be afforded to youth workers who are not seen as part of a profession. Recent comments by the Federal Opposition Leader suggest that there is a lack of understanding about the unique role of youth work.⁵⁰ While peak bodies obviously have a role to play in addressing these issues, it is not their key function. So this begs the question, can the status of youth work be increased without the establishment of a professional body?

⁵⁰ See http://www.yacvic.org.au/pages/media/news/040205_latham_youth_centres.htm

Key questions for discussion/feedback

This discussion paper has been written by YACVic to provide members and other key stakeholders with an opportunity to feed into this discussion. We welcome any feedback to this discussion paper and we will incorporate this feedback into future discussions and will publish a summary of responses.

The following questions may assist you in responding to this paper but feel free to raise other issues that you think are important.

- Do you believe that a professional association for youth workers should be established in Victoria?
- If so, which model (industrial, professional development or combination) is your preferred model?
- Who should be eligible for membership? Should members be required to hold a minimum level of qualification? Should experience be taken into account?
- How should a professional association be resourced?
- What are the alternatives to establishing a professional association? What would happen if a professional association was not established in Victoria?

Conclusion

As stated earlier, this paper has been written to provide an overview of the key issues and to inform the development of the current discussion. Any impetus to establish a professional association for youth workers must now come from the youth sector. In conclusion, if there is a decision made to proceed with the development of an association it would be worthwhile to consider recommendations arising from the 1995 Ministerial Review of the Training of Youth Workers in Victoria as these thoughts hold relevance today:

'As with any professional association in any occupation, the initiative and impetus for such an institute has to come from youth workers themselves. A body for this purpose can be established and maintained only if youth workers want to support it and are prepared to subscribe enough time and money to keep it active and consistently solvent...

We believe that the care and thoroughness with which an institute be developed is more important than the speed of development...

The eventual success of such a body should be judged by whether outcomes for young people (rather than youth workers) have been improved by its existence'.⁵¹

⁵¹ Report of the Ministerial Review of the Training of Youth Workers in Victoria op cit, p. 68.

Feedback

YACVic welcomes responses to this discussion paper.

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