



Australian Youth Affairs Coalition

Submission in response to

**Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (CS&HISC)
Environmental Scan (EScan) 2012**

November 2011

Australian Youth Affairs Coalition

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) is Australia's non-government youth affairs peak body, which seeks to represent young people aged 12-25 and the sector that supports them.

AYAC boasts a growing membership of State and Territory Youth Peak Bodies, National Youth Organisations, researchers, policy makers and young people themselves, who are all passionate about creating an Australian community that supports and promotes the positive development of young people.

AYAC aims to:

- Provide a body broadly representative of the issues and interests of young people and the youth affairs field in Australia
- Advocate for a united Australia which respects and values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, promotes human rights, and provides justice for all
- Represent the rights and interests of young people in Australia, at both a national and an international level
- Promote the elimination of poverty and to promote the well being of young Australians, with a particular focus on those who are disadvantaged.
- Recognise the diversity of Australian society, to promote the cultural, social, economic, political, environmental and spiritual interests and participation of young people in all aspects of society
- Advocate for, assist with and support the development of policy positions on issues affecting young people and the youth affairs field, and to provide policy advice, perspectives and advocacy to Governments and the broader community
- Facilitate co-ordination and co-operation within the youth affairs field

AYAC and its members are dedicated to working for and with young people and seek to ensure they have access to mechanisms, which allow them to make decisions about issues that affect them in the Australian community.

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Introduction

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) was formed in a voluntary capacity in 2002, after the wind-up of the previous national youth affairs peak, the Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition (AYPAC) a few years earlier. Until late 2009, AYAC remained unfunded, and it was only in mid 2010 that a permanent staff team was appointed, and a national office established, following an establishment phase. In the absence of an able national youth affairs body, a large void grew in data and knowledge of the youth support sector workforce.

Our contribution, then, to the scan is based upon recent work we have undertaken to fill the void and to better understand the demands on youth sector organisations and includes mention of work we are currently and planning to undertake in the coming months on workforce development issues.

We note that a large amount of work still needs to be assessed, and a wider ranging, better resourced and more strategic approach is needed to fully build a comprehensive youth sector that is of an international standard. AYAC has made much progress to get to a point in which these comprehensive recommendations can be asserted and in this submission we draw from data at both a national and state-based level.

Response to Guiding Questions

How is the demand for services in your industry changing?

INTRODUCTION

During the year demand for youth support sector has not changed significantly, but demand for these services remain high.

The lack of a national youth peak body for over a decade (AYAC was refunded in 2009, after the previous body was disbanded and funding discontinued in 1998) has resulted in chronic gaps in information pertaining to youth support services. There remains strong demand for a national body with the capacity to continue to monitor and analyse demand in this sector.

WHAT IS DRIVING CHANGE?

Policy and funding changes in 2011 have focussed increasingly on mental health support services for young people, and a greater recognition of young peoples mental health needs.

In early 2011 AYAC responded to the government's discussion paper on the National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP). Many of AYAC's key recommendations to the program have been introduced. Minister Peter Garrett placed a strong emphasis on the quality and value of qualified youth workers in schools, which, in addition to additional school chaplains, will serve to increase demand for youth worker training at the Certificate IV level and above.

The modifications will result in an increasing demand nationwide, as over 500 existing chaplains will have 12 months to complete mandatory units of Certificate IV in Youth Work; all new chaplains to complete a Certificate IV in Youth Work or an equivalent qualification; regional, remote, and rural schools, as well as schools in disadvantaged areas will receive more funding, at priority; and provisions for ongoing professional develop and support have been implemented. Over 2700 schools nation wide currently take part in the program, and it is foreseeable that more will now participate.

Mining industry booms have had an impact, mainly in Queensland and Western Australia, of retention and recruitment, as workers are less likely to stay in the sector when mining companies offer a considerable increase in remuneration for unskilled positions.

AYAC RESPONSE TO CHANGES

AYAC has begun to undertake significant work to identify and address workforce and industry needs in the youth support sector. In mid 2011 AYAC released its research report *Future Focussed – Youth Work in Australia: Reflections and Aspirations*. The report aimed to capture the views of key stakeholders within the youth sector and act as a conversation starter around key issues in the sector such as professionalisation and code of ethics, the quality and availability of education and training for youth workers, and what distinguishes youth workers from other occupations and professions that work with young people. In moving forward, some key recommendations were identified, being:

- A comprehensive definition of youth work as a clear and well articulated expression of the sector

- Mapping of education for youth workers on a national scale to investigate the quantity, quality and availability.
- Discussions about the need for a National Code of Ethics
- Investigation into the professionalisation of youth workers, as one of the more contentious issues
- Rurality and remoteness is a pressing issue in Australia, particularly for youth workers, and an investigation into youth work impact is required.

AYAC has already actioned some of these key recommendations, instigating a Code of Ethics debate, which is in the process of analysis and reporting.

AYAC is also working with Professor Trudy Cooper at Edith Cowen University to develop a common framework for university youth work courses, encouraging resource sharing and development across the tertiary education landscape.

AYAC will be seeking to work closely with the Government to implement changes to the NSCP in developing appropriate training, strategies and feedback mechanisms so that the program's potential is maximised.

EMERGING ROLES

The strong focus on mental health and young people has resulted in a flow of funding into this segment, with impact on demand for other youth sector roles. With whom youth workers can work is becoming more and more defined by funding availability with the effect being the loss of the 'generalist' youth worker and a move towards specialisations that may actually be contributing to a reduced sense of a 'youth sector'.¹

Youth worker roles are diminishing or being amalgamated into other roles. In Tasmania, for example, it is reported that youth worker positions are gradually being subsumed and replaced by Community Development Officer positions, and workers not only do this job role, but are additionally performing youth work in this function, placing a considerable amount of stress on the youth sector workforce in Tasmania.

More needs to be done to articulate the unique role of youth work, that is, to explain the complexities involved in youth work, the specialised and diverse range of skills of youth workers and what the youth sector contributes to the community.

What workforce development trends exist?

INTRODUCTION

Across the Australian states and territories the impact of funding methods (e.g. projects) and amounts have resulted in a reduction of full time positions, with a flow-on effect of part-time workers with the load of full time workers. Anecdotally, these reports are representative of Tasmania, NSW, Western Australia, Victoria, ACT and Northern Territory.

¹ Youth Affairs Network of Queensland Inc, 2010, *The Youth Sector in Queensland*, viewed 31st November 2011, via http://www.yanq.org.au/images/stories/Documents/youth_sector_report_2010.pdf

The difficulty to recruit and retain high quality, well trained youth workers is again widespread and appears to be a issue in every state and territory, particularly in remote and rural communities and in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Reasons range from inadequate remuneration, increasing complexity of roles, lack of and extremely high cost of remote or rural housing, professional uncertainty due to funding or lack of career pathways, and inability to compete with other sectors in remuneration such as government youth work or unskilled and highly paid roles in the mining industry.

CURRENT AND EMERGING OCCUPATIONAL SHORTAGES

There are significant shortages in attracting youth workers in regional, rural and remote communities. Anecdotally, housing cost and availability in these communities is a considerable barrier, as well as lack of training, incentives and living conditions.

Chronic shortages in Aboriginal communities, most particularly in remote communities, are characterised by “fly-in, fly-out” service provisions and are at the expense of providing training and community capacity building. The Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ), in their *The Youth Sector in Queensland* report noted an enormous lack of cultural competency in the sector, despite the large numbers of ATSI and CALD clientele accessing youth services.²

Occupational shortages are expected to grow with amendments to the National School Chaplains Program, with the significant increase in funding to the program, introduction of minimum qualifications for chaplains and the ability to use funding to select a secular student welfare worker. In his media release dated September 7, 2011, Minister Garrett stated “The Gillard Government is committed to extending this successful scheme to up to an extra 1000 schools from 2012, with priority given to schools serving disadvantaged areas or in regional or remote locations and an extra \$222 million in funding,”³. These will greatly increase demand on the sector.

INHIBITIONS TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IN THE YOUTH SECTOR

The ongoing decline in youth work qualifications offered at a tertiary level has and will continue to inhibit the development of the youth support sector. There is a total lack of university level qualifications in some states and what is available is certainly limited in all states and territories, excepting Victoria. Tasmania and Northern Territory do not even offer diploma level qualifications through TAFE.

Wages and remuneration in the youth support sector do not compare favourably with other industries, particularly given the nature of the work and risk to community in many roles. The lack of parity between non government and government pay rates is well documented and the loss of skilled and experienced personnel to the government sector with their accompanying sector knowledge is often referred to, with those ranging on the scale of 10 years experience or more are drawn into government positions. . There is limited ability to pay over-award, and provide bonuses and incentives to attract workers and encourage retention. The ability to recruit and retain high quality, well-trained youth workers remains an issue therefore.

² Youth Affairs Network of Queensland Inc, 2010, *The Youth Sector in Queensland*, accessed 31st November 2011, via http://www.yanq.org.au/images/stories/Documents/youth_sector_report_2010.pdf

³ Garrett, P (Minister for Youth) 2011, *Schools given greater choice under expanded chaplains programme*, media release, accessed 31st November 2011 via <http://www.petergarrett.com.au/955.aspx>

Industry profiling is such that the broader public awareness and understanding of the job roles and career opportunities is limited and public opinion is, at times, poor. As mentioned, because there was no national presence prior to 2009 there is limited awareness and data of the size, diversity and predicted growth of the youth sector workforces. There is inadequate recognition of the contribution industry workers make to individual well-being and community cohesion.

As further elucidated in AYAC's research report, there is a lack of clarity about the unique role of youth work in the community sector. It was found that there are common themes that delineate youth work from other disciplines, but a nationally fully agreed definition of youth work would be of significant benefit to both the youth worker and the young people they support.

Workforce planning in the Youth Sector

AYAC, as shown in the research report, founded key recommendations to assist in developing the sector as a whole. Whilst AYAC has already begun work on a number of elements, more work is needed to consolidate and action recommendations.

Currently, AYAC is working with new youth worker associations in WA and VIC. AYAC has hosted an online debate regarding a national Code of Ethics and is now compiling results and analysis. AYAC has begun work on a constructing a definition of youth work. AYAC is connecting with key stakeholders to begin work on the contentious issue of professionalisation of the sector.

The Youth Affairs Coalition of the ACT in November 2010 released *Motivation, Money, Making a Difference: A Profile of the ACT Youth Sector Workforce*⁴, which aimed to support youth sector workforce planning and development, through developing a comprehensive workforce profile of the ACT youth sector.

*Youth Work Snapshot 2011: YAPA Survey of Youth Services and Workers in NSW*⁵ was also conducted by the NSW youth peak body Youth Action and Policy Association NSW for the purposes of gaining up-to-date, detailed and relevant information about youth work and youth services, the first of its kind in 10 years.

Again in Queensland, *The Youth Sector in Queensland*⁶ was a report released in February 2010 to explore youth sector workforce issues.

Across each report, there were a number of commonalities, included under the section heading 'action required to address challenges'.

Addressing Workforce Development Challenges

⁴ Accessed 31st November via http://www.youthcoalition.net/dmdocuments/MMM_Workforce_Profile_Report.pdf

⁵ Accessed 31st November via <http://www.yapa.org.au/youthwork/facts/snapshot/snapshotbig.pdf>

⁶ Accessed 31st November 2011, via http://www.yanq.org.au/images/stories/Documents/youth_sector_report_2010.pdf

ACHEIVEMENTS IN ADDRESSING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

In AYAC's previous submission to the E-Scan (2010) it was noted that a national wage equity case for community service workers needed to be supported, with full funding to NGO's in implementing pay increases. As of

In announcement of the changes to the NSCP, Minister Garrett placed a strong emphasis on the quality and value of qualified youth workers in schools. Although this is a positive step in addressing public awareness and opinion of youth work, further strategic communication of industry careers and workforce achievements needs to happen across the board to raise public awareness and promote positive opinion.

AYAC's research report *Future Focussed – Youth Work in Australia: Reflections and Aspiration* was successful in galvanising the youth sector and acted as a catalyst for reflection and robust conversation pertaining to the development of the sector. Its recommendations are practical and are in the process of expansion and action.

ACTION REQUIRED TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES

There needs to be a significant improvement in resources for identifying and addressing workforce development needs. No up-to-date data or evidence is available at a federal level and a significant 'catch up' is required to address the void left in the decade long absence of a national youth peak body.

An appropriately resourced national survey of the youth sector workforce and employers is needed to accurately gauge the needs and issues presenting.

There needs to be a consistency nationally in delivery of youth worker qualifications at a university level, building on work currently being undertaken by Professor Trudy Cooper at Edith Cowan University.

New approaches need to be piloted to deliver qualifications, especially for rural remote and indigenous communities. In the recent National Workforce Development Fund applications, AYAC had bid to pilot new approaches, to address this challenge.

As mentioned in AYAC's 2010 submission, attention needs to be drawn to the following recommendations to address challenges. These issues are also strongly represented in workforce research conducted by youth peak bodies in Queensland, NSW and ACT:

Wages & Remuneration

- State and federal Governments to fully fund NGO's to implement any pay increase as a result of the national pay equity test case
- Establish wages equity between government and non-government employers
- Optimise use of salary sacrifice and salary packaging to improve the value of wages
- Identify non-financial benefits and incentives, and ensure these are promoted and supported
- Policy responses required to mitigate the impact of regional and rural labour draw within "boom" communities, such as in mining communities

Industry Profile

- Raise public awareness through strategic communication of industry careers and workforce achievements
- Employer engagement in career promotion and longer-term recruitment strategies in addition to traditional vacancy promotion and recruitment. This includes careers expos, school partnerships, public awareness, community partnerships, etc.
- Employee recognition and reward strategies
- Support to states and territories to research and record data about youth services to address the significant gap in knowledge available to government and non-government agencies interested in services provided to young people

Nature of Work

- Focus on job role design, teamwork and workload management to ensure reasonable and rewarding jobs
- Incorporate incentives and compensations for non-standards shifts
- Employee assistance schemes, skills development, practice supervision and regular debriefing to support workers
- Employee health and well-being programs
- Effective management and leadership
- Provide the sector with access to an ethics training program to provide individual skilling and build capacity to contribute to the development/articulation of values based youth work practice and recruitment framework
- Prioritise values and determine measurement and assessment for recruitment
- Engage the sector in the development and articulation of a broad evidence based youth work practice framework, including identification of core values and competencies

Career Pathways

- Define Youth Work and its core skills and practice frameworks and promote within the youth sector and broader community sector
- Further research existing career pathways including across services and service types to inform future possibilities
- Create a 'career map' that shows entry points and qualifications, opportunities to cross sectors and career pathways to promote the youth sector
- Portable long service leave – increase chance of staying within community services sector

AYAC will be further undertaking considerable work in this area during 2012. This will include an investigation of the decline in tertiary youth work courses and the impact this is having on the youth sector; and research into workforce development needs and issues.

BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

AYAC notes here a number of issues found to be obstructive to addressing challenges.

Funding continues to restrict organisations abilities to address a number of issues. Most noteworthy is the type and amount of funding and its impact on recruitment and retention, with concerns spanning training, wages and remuneration, job stability, and increasing complexity of roles.

As part of its core work, AYAC is committed to supporting the youth sector to be unified, well resourced and professional. Our goal is for a youth sector comprises organisations, people and services that are professional and sustainable and that are achieving great things for young people. We aim for a workforce that is recognised as highly skilled, valuable, and expert and is rewarded appropriately through professional recognition and conditions. AYAC, as it stands, is critically under-resourced to achieve its set mandate. As prior noted, the lack of a national body for over a decade has resulted in a gap in sector and industry data and knowledge, which has not served to advance the development of the sector, in fact quite the contrary.

It is also noted that there is no national professional association for youth workers.

There are also a number of opportunities present to advance development in the sector. The changes to the NSCP and the introduction of minimum qualifications can serve as a platform for greater emphasis and recognition of youth work skills and competencies.

Work to identify and prioritise youth sector workforce development needs has begun. AYAC canvassed the sector in 2011 with the *Future Focussed – Youth Work in Australia: Reflections and Aspiration*, recording key recommendations for further investigation, conversation, and development.

AYAC recently applied for to pilot new approaches to deliver Certificate IV in Youth Work via the National Workforce Development Fund for rural remote and indigenous communities.

Effectiveness of training packages in support workforce development needs

The federally funded packages are seen to have limitations, as they are too generic in their design. Some states also complain that there are insufficient places available. In Tasmania, for example, anecdotal evidence suggests that 70% of potential trainees are turned away from Certificate III and IV course and Diploma courses. There is a noted lack of training opportunities presenting in rural and remote communities. Whilst youth workers report that training opportunities are open to them on a regular basis, there is a noted need for training to be more relevant and in response the arising and current challenges, for example, cultural competency.

KEY CHANGES REQUIRED TO MEET THE INDUSTRY NEEDS

As detailed above, more effort is needed in recruitment and retention of staff; defining and clarifying the role of youth workers; professionalisation of the sector; and in ensuring parity between staff in government and non-government agencies for equivalent roles, to name a few.

Skills building needs to become more accessible and practical, especially for rural, remote and aboriginal communities.