



Australian Centre
for Child Protection

Professionals Protecting Children

Child Protection and Social Work Education in Australia



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Australian Government
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AASW

Improving the lives of vulnerable children

Contents

Foreword

Acknowledgements

List of Tables and Figures

Executive Summary I

Chapter 1 *Introduction* *1*

Chapter 2 *Design and Methodology* *11*

Chapter 3 *The Mapping Process* *19*

Chapter 4 *Analysis of Data and Results* *25*

Chapter 5 *Discussion and Conclusions* *47*

References *57*

Appendices *60*

Key Findings on Child Protection Related Content in Australian Social Work Courses

1. The majority (93%) of the 29 Australian social work education programs participating in the survey offered some form of child protection content, either as a "discrete" stand alone course/unit or "integrated" into courses.

2. Twenty programs (69%) reported including at least one discrete child protection course and 19 programs (66%) reported integrated child protection-related course content. Twelve social work programs (41%) offered **both** discrete and integrated child protection-related content.

3. Further analysis revealed that more programs reported offering discrete child protection content at the graduate and postgraduate levels than at the undergraduate level. Discrete courses/units at the undergraduate level were more likely to be offered as part of the elective curriculum, while discrete courses/units at the graduate and postgraduate levels were more likely to be offered as part of the core curriculum.

4. Nearly all integrated child protection-related content was offered within undergraduate programs, and the majority of the integrated courses were part of the core curriculum.

5. Our further analysis indicated the complexities of comparing undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate programs on their levels of "incidental child protection content" (risk factors and proactive strategies associated with child abuse and neglect that may be addressed incidentally throughout a program but not documented in course curriculum guidelines). There were more risk factors and proactive strategies linked to child protection than there were risk factors and proactive strategies "taught but not linked", or "not taught" in social work education programs.

6. Risk factors that were more likely to be *linked to child protection* related to "family/environmental issues" (specifically: domestic/family violence; family/community factors such as mental health, substance abuse, and poverty; and parental neglect). Child protection was also most likely to be taught within course content relating to "professional/ leadership roles and responsibilities". In contrast, risk factors that were most likely to be not taught in social work education programs related to "child-centred issues" such as child development and child emotional/behavioural problems.

Foreword

By Professor Bob Lonne

For half a century the social work profession in Australia has been at the vanguard of reform for child welfare. It has played a key role from deinstitutionalisation in the 1960s to the development of family support services in the 1970s, the creation of services for children who had been sexually abused in the 1980s and intensive family preservation services in the 1990s. Now in the first decade of the twenty-first century, social workers are playing a leading role in the reform of overwhelmed, legalistic and bureaucratic statutory child protection services which many of us increasingly acknowledge have the capacity to harm children and families.

Social workers in all fields of practice, however, have the potential to enhance the protection and nurturing of children. To fulfil this potential, social work graduates need to acquire the values, attitudes, knowledge and skills to see, hear and respond to the needs of children in the context of their families and communities. Yet despite the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child and the emergence of the understanding of children as citizens, overall children have been largely invisible and inaudible in the national social work curriculum.

The Australian Association of Social Workers is deeply committed to changing this and in 2004 we commenced a major review of our eligibility policies and procedures to ensure that the curriculum was relevant to the contemporary and emerging environment in which social work is practised. This review identified the protection of children, as well as mental health, indigenous issues and cross-cultural issues, as areas which urgently required strengthening in social work education. Over the next year the Association will develop the basic education requirements for qualifying social work courses in relation to these areas.

The Australian Association of Social Workers welcomed the timely invitation of the Australian Centre for Child Protection to work together, with the support of the Australian Council of Heads of Schools of Social Work, on a survey of the child protection related content in qualifying and post-qualifying social work courses in this country.

The results of this benchmark study are sobering in its analysis of what is and what is not in the social work curriculum. The AASW is committed to working with Schools of Social Work to address these gaps and to build the capacity of the social work profession to enhance the well-being of Australia's most vulnerable children.



Professor Bob Lonne
National President
Australian Association of Social Workers

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the Australian Council Heads of Schools of Social Work for giving support, in principle, to the mapping of child protection curriculum content in social work programs across Australia.

As this mapping exercise was a collaborative undertaking by the Australian Centre for Child Protection and the Australian Association of Social Workers, we would like to thank the National and South Australian members involved in this project for their support; in particular Professor Bob Lonne, Donnie Martin, Jenny Horne and Sue King. As well, many thanks to Cassandra Devine and Dr Robyn Gilbertson for their assistance with this project.

Lastly, thank you to all those people in the Schools of Social Work across Australia who compiled the data and returned the surveys to us. For many it was an onerous task, and we are extremely grateful for their time, effort and support.

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Tables and figures

Tables

Table 2.1	Broad categorisations of child abuse and neglect indicators and risk factors	16
Table 3.1	Description of broad categories	21
Table 3.2	Broad categories for type and length of degree or award	21
Table 4.1	Categorisation of child protection-related content items	36

Figures

Figure 3.1	Response rates for social work education programs by States and Territories	20
Figure 3.2	Surveys returned by type of degree	22
Figure 3.3	Surveys returned by universities	22
Figure 4.1	Discrete child protection content	26
Figure 4.2	Discrete child protection content by type of degree	27
Figure 4.3	Discrete child protection content by States and Territories	27
Figure 4.4	Discrete child protection content by delivery agent	28
Figure 4.5	Discrete child protection content by course type	29
Figure 4.6	Discrete child protection content by time allocation	30
Figure 4.7	Time allocated to discrete child protection content by type of degree	30
Figure 4.8	Integrated child protection content by cases	32
Figure 4.9	Integrated child protection content by States and Territories	32
Figure 4.10	Integrated child protection content by delivery agent	33
Figure 4.11	Integrated child protection content by course type	34
Figure 4.12	Time allocated to integrated child protection content by type of degree	35
Figure 4.13	All child protection-related factors by type of degree	38

Executive Summary

The Australian Centre for Child Protection is located at the University of South Australia and funded through the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science, and Research (DIISR). The Centre's Professional Education initiative, ***Professionals Protecting Children***, supports a broad range of professions to prepare graduates and practitioners who feel confident and competent to address and respond to the needs of all children who face adversity due to abuse or neglect.

The professions include teaching, nursing, psychology, social work, childcare, medicine and allied health workers.

In support of this outcome the Professional Education initiative investigates -

Focus Question	*Strategy*
What is currently being taught about child protection within professional education programs?	Map the undergraduate and graduate courses in relevant disciplines across Australia to identify the curriculum content that promotes professional competence for recognising and responding to child protection issues
What do professionals know, think and do about protecting children?	Explore, promote and evaluate processes for effectively enhancing professionals' child protection knowledge, beliefs and practices
Where does child protection fit into the respective professional education programs and who takes responsibility for its delivery?	Promote quality teaching and effective learning about child protection and diffuse exemplary models of professional practice through the development of high quality curriculum support materials

Purpose and Content of Current Study

The findings reported herein focus on the first question only. That is, how issues of prevention, identification and response to child abuse and neglect are currently addressed within social work education programs. As such the findings provide a valuable benchmark in time.

Together with companion studies of university-based teacher education, nursing and midwifery education, psychology education and a range of programs offered by the vocational education and training sector, it is anticipated that the process will provide valuable opportunities for professional engagement with key stakeholders. Through this dialogue ways in which the key issues of interest may be explored will be initiated and facilitated.

The research undertaken in each of the studies builds on two Australian Government Senate Committee reports commissioned in response to the increasing and convincing evidence highlighting the poor life outcomes of Australian children in State or Territory statutory care, and those considered to be vulnerable and at-risk due to abuse and neglect, namely:

1) Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children (Commonwealth of Australia, 2004)

2) Protecting Vulnerable Children: A National Challenge (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005) report.

In both reports, it was recommended that tertiary institutions establish courses of study that address child protection related issues in a range of disciplines. Specifically with regard to social work education, the *Protecting Vulnerable Children* report stated:

> *"…no university in Australia teaches its social work degree students about the many issues in child protection, including child abuse"* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005, p.73).

In light of these concerns, and in line with the Centre's mission, all Faculties/Schools of Social Work across Australia were invited to help map child protection curriculum content in social work education programs to determine the veracity of this perception.

The full account of findings begins with a brief review of literature on child protection and social work education nationally and internationally. It then presents the analysis and results of the curriculum mapping survey data, and outlines issues raised in the subsequent National Social Work Education and Child Protection Forum.

The Research Process

The curriculum Mapping Process consisted of three stages.

Stage 1 encompassed the research design phase. Specifically it examined previous studies and relevant findings, in addition to –

- scoping the sample group
- identifying the content to be mapped
- establishing time frames, and
- planning subsequent actions and outcomes.

Stage 2 involved the actual mapping of child protection content in tertiary education. To date, this methodology and data collection approach has been undertaken in teacher education, and nursing and midwifery education, and is being currently applied to the mapping of psychology education, and the teaching and learning undertaken within various vocational education and training programs.

This study reports the mapping of child protection content in social work education conducted in partnership with the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). After being contacted by the AASW, the Schools of Social Work nominated a liaison person in their respective school/faculty to coordinate the completion of the surveys. Survey data was then collected from August 2007 to January 2008.

In addition to the survey, a national roundtable forum was held on the 30th January, 2008. Invited participants included the Heads of Schools (or his/her nominee) and one staff member from each school/faculty, together with practitioners and representatives of the AASW.

The forum enabled –

- preliminary results from the survey mapping process to be presented
- discussion of perceived barriers and facilitators for including relevant content across a range of undergraduate and graduate programs
- the establishment of networks to explore future actions and directions; and
- the identification and promotion of good practice in the delivery of child protection content in social work education.

Expressions of interest were invited from participants who were interested in exploring future collaborative ventures with the Australian Centre for Child Protection and the AASW, and developing a collaborative online network of researchers in this field.

The final stage of the process addressed the analysis, evaluation, reporting and dissemination of results. Building on the findings and input from social work educators, possible future directions are being investigated.

Participants in the Project

All universities in Australia offering social work education programs, as identified by the AASW, were invited to participate in the mapping of child protection content. Surveys were sent to 24 universities across Australia which offer undergraduate, graduate or postgraduate social work education programs. Responses were received from 87.5 per cent of universities offering these programs.

Diverse perspectives were evident in survey comments. Specific issues raised related to (a) the inclusion of specialisations in a generic social work education program; (b) the development of new units of study in child protection at undergraduate and postgraduate levels; and (c) training that involved interdisciplinary, cross university and practice-based learning, including links with the field and interrelationships between social issues such as mental health and child protection.

Roundtable Participants

All Schools of Social Work who responded to the survey were invited to participate in a National Roundtable Forum to further discuss the facilitators and barriers to including child protection content in social work education. The Forum was facilitated by Professor Bob Lonne, National President of the AASW, and Professor Dorothy Scott, Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection. A total of 33 participants attended, including representatives from 21 universities, representatives from the National and South Australian branch of the AASW, and members of the Australian Centre for Child Protection.

Findings Related to the Delivery of Child Protection-related Content

As a result of trialling and refinement, the survey instrument was organised into five sections (See Appendix 1).

Section 1A identified discrete or stand alone courses specifically addressing the prevention, identification and response to child abuse and neglect. Findings from this section revealed that –

- a third of potential social work education graduates do not engage in any discrete learning about child protection
- of the 67 per cent of social work education programs that reported providing discrete child protection curriculum content:
    - 63 per cent formed part of the core curriculum
    - 80 per cent allocated eight hours to the equivalent of a week
    - over 70 per cent of discrete child protection content is provided by university personnel.

Furthermore, the data showed that all graduate and postgraduate programs and approximately half the undergraduate programs returning responses reported offering discrete units of child protection content.

In contrast to the provision of discrete courses, Section 1B identified courses, units or subjects that addressed child protection issues explicitly but in an integrated teaching and learning context. The findings suggest that –

- 83 per cent of social work education programs reported providing integrated child protection content. Of this:
    - approximately 70 per cent were core units
    - the majority allocated less than 30 per cent of unit time to the teaching of child protection content
    - the majority of integrated child protection content is delivered by university personnel.

The fact that this may be the only exposure to child protection content a student experiences throughout the entire social work education award/program raises serious concerns. Of particular concern is the limited time and opportunity students have available within instructional sessions offered by university personnel to engage in deep learning about child protection related issues.

On the basis that many child protection issues and concerns may be discussed incidentally throughout an award program, Section 2 provided a list of risk factors and proactive strategies associated with child abuse and neglect that could potentially be addressed but not documented in course curriculum guidelines. The format utilised a model, which placed the child within the family and the community. Thus, the respondents were asked to record if the strategies and factors listed in this section were 'taught but not linked' to child protection or if the issues were explicitly 'linked' to child protection.

The findings from this data revealed that students enrolled in undergraduate programs have greater exposure to a range of risk factors and strategies than students in graduate and postgraduate programs. The data, however, does not support the notion that the students will appreciate the inherent connections between the factors and the need to respond to the issues. For this reason,

opportunities need to be explored in social work education for more incidental course content to be linked explicitly to child protection.

The final two sections of the survey provided the opportunity for respondents to record comments, issues or concerns related to child protection in social work education, and to discuss any curriculum issues their school or faculty were interested in exploring at a Roundtable forum[1].

[1] *These issues and concerns were further explored by participants attending the National Social Work Education and Child Protection Forum.*

Facilitators and Barriers to Change

A range of barriers and facilitators were identified in the literature, in survey responses and the National Social Work Education and Child Protection Forum.

Barriers

- Overcrowded generic curriculum
- Lack of consistency in delivery and approach
- National inconsistency in legal requirements
- Narrow perceptions of child protection
- Negative media perceptions of social workers and child protection
- Lack of communication between various stakeholders
- Division between child protection practice and research
- Workplace constraints

Facilitators

- Working together
- Potential for workplace learning
- Re-professionalising the sector
- Networks and resources
- Professional development
- Building research capacity

Future Research Directions

Given the issues discussed and the need for quality research in this field, it was concluded that the social work education community would benefit from further exploration of the following issues –

- the perceived or actual, merits and challenges associated with:
    - providing discrete or integrated teaching of child protection content within a social work education program. Including the need to explore ways to address the practical complexities such as time and resource constraints
    - the delivery of child protection related content in multidisciplinary approaches
- the most effective and efficient way to incorporate child protection curriculum and the best place to situate associated content within generic or specialised social work education programs
- students learning or understanding about child protection issues as a result of exposure to the content within and across social work award programs
- determining what constitutes the minimal level of understanding required by a social work graduate
- the quality or nature of the teaching of child protection content within and across social work education programs.

Conclusions

The data collected from the curriculum mapping process provides a current snapshot of child protection content in social work education in Australia.

Emerging from the process was a unified commitment to exploring the most efficient and effective way to address and deliver child protection content in social work education programs.

The importance of child protection content in social work education was undisputed, as were issues related to the inclusion of the child's perspective in social work education. Further discussions, however, were recommended in order to find acceptable and feasible strategies to achieve this outcome and incorporate child protection issues comprehensively in social work education.

Participants also highlighted the need to shift the focus from an investigation and reporting paradigm to one which considers the overall well-being of the child. It was suggested that the implications this has for the profession, particularly with regards to training and development and child protection related issues in pre- and post-qualifying social work programs, requires further investigation.

In the context of the recent AASW Eligibility Review, both survey respondents and forum participants raised the need for the AASW to take the lead in defining minimum practice standards for social work education. The benefits of having social work educators who are well informed about child protection issues, and social work practitioners who can competently respond to the needs of vulnerable and at-risk children within diverse practice contexts was strongly supported.

Recommendations Emerging from the Study

In order to ensure social work graduates have the knowledge base and the confidence to competently meet their professional and legal obligations, and to enable them to work towards improving the outcomes for all children experiencing adversity due to abuse or neglect:

1) a shift in focus from an investigation and reporting paradigm to one which considers the overall well-being of the child is needed

2) the child protection content in social work education and eligibility requirements for registration be examined by the AASW

3) a collective voice between schools of social work and professional bodies be established to achieve a united approach in finding viable and effective solutions to the issues raised in this study

4) further consideration be given to undertaking a range of research investigations in accordance with the suggestions and areas of identified interest outlined herein.



Introduction

chapter 1

Background

The Australian Centre for Child Protection is located at the University of South Australia and funded through the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science, and Research (DIISR). The Centre's Professional Education initiative, ***Professionals Protecting Children***, aims to assist a broad range of professions to prepare graduates and practitioners who are equipped to prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect effectively. The professions the Centre is currently working with include teaching, nursing, psychology, social work, childcare, medicine and allied health. This study on social work education is one of a series of studies based on surveys of child protection related content in qualifying and post qualifying courses in these professions.

In support of its mission to enhance the well-being of Australia's most vulnerable children, the Australian Centre for Child Protection is working with educational providers, accrediting agencies and key professional bodies to:

- map how the prevention, identification and response to child abuse and neglect is addressed within undergraduate and graduate education programs across a broad range of professions
- explore how professionals can be best prepared for working with vulnerable children and families
- identify elements of good practice, exemplary teaching and learning practices, and resource development opportunities for the promotion of effective practice in relation to child abuse and neglect issues across a broad range of professional programs.

This investigation is underpinned by three key questions –

1) What is currently being taught about child protection within professional education programs?

2) What do professionals know, think and do about protecting children?

3) Where does child protection fit into the respective professional education programs and who takes responsibility for its delivery?

Australian Context and Impetus for Change

In Australia, as elsewhere, significant concerns have been raised in recent years about children who are victims of, or considered to be vulnerable to and at-risk of abuse and neglect. As a result of several major reviews conducted in most States and Territories, and Australian Federal reports published in the past few years, recommendations have been made to (a) review how child protection is addressed in social work education programs, and (b) the importance of establishing a national agenda and encouraging the development of innovative models in the child protection system.

In light of such recommendations, and in support of the mission of the Australian Centre for Child Protection, 24 Australian universities offering social work education courses fully approved by the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), were invited to help map child protection related content. This publication describes the analysis and results of the survey data, and outlines the issues raised in the subsequent Social Work Education and Child Protection Forum.

The mapping process was undertaken in collaboration with the AASW as the professional body that accredits social work courses and represents the social work profession in Australia. In June 2007 the AASW had 6,458 active members (AASW National Bulletin, 2007). However, as not all social workers are members of the AASW, and many people employed in child welfare settings are not social workers, it is hard to estimate the size of the workforce working with vulnerable children and families. While difficult to estimate, and acknowledging that only a minority of social workers work specifically in the field of child protection, all social workers have a responsibility to recognise and reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect in our society.

Timeliness of this Study

Prior to the commencement of the survey of social work programs analysed in this study, the AASW initiated a major review of its eligibility policies and procedures. This review involved the Australian Council of Heads of Schools of Social Work, Australian Social Work and Welfare Educators, and the AASW. It examined a range of issues such as the assessment of social work programs by the AASW and how fields of practice, such as child protection should be taught in social work education.

In response to growing concerns within the social work profession, the AASW also established a National Child Protection Working Party in 2006, which aimed to promote -

- a more balanced and reflective public debate on child protection issues
- improved services and practice standards
- increased focus on prevention
- professionalisation of social work in child protection
- a national agenda
- continuing professional education opportunities in child protection.

The collaboration between the Australian Centre for Child Protection and the AASW in mapping the curriculum of undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate degrees in social work offered by Australian universities therefore is very timely.

As a component of the broader curriculum mapping research series being undertaken by the Australian Centre for Child Protection, this research specifically examines how social workers are being educated to prepare for their role in the prevention of, and response to child abuse and neglect.

Following graduation, social workers in Australia are employed in diverse fields of practice, including child and family welfare, mental health, gendered violence, homelessness, drug and alcohol treatment, loss and trauma, health and hospital settings, aged care, and disability care. In all areas of practice, however, that involve children and families, the care and protection of children should be paramount. Social work education in relation to child protection therefore is broader than statutory social work practice. It is part of a much broader concern with child well-being, and about hearing, seeing and responding to the needs of children in the context of their families and communities. On this basis, throughout this publication, the term *child protection* is used to capture the broad domain of protecting and enhancing the well-being of children, not solely statutory intervention by child protection agencies.

Past and Present Roles of Social Workers

Concern about child abuse and neglect is not new. Scott and Swain (2002) note that in Australia, various societies for the prevention of cruelty to children emerged in the late nineteenth century, modelling those in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. This marked the first wave of the child protection movement. In the 1960s and 1970s the term *battered baby syndrome* emerged, highlighting the phenomenon of previously unrecognised severe physical abuse of infants and very young children by their parents and caregivers. This marked the second wave of the child rescue movement. In the 1980s the problem of child sexual abuse came to further prominence. Publicity about physical and sexual abuse led to the introduction of mandatory reporting laws and massive service expansion, and child protection became primarily the domain of doctors and professional social workers (Scott & Swain, 2002).

Despite physical abuse and sexual abuse being the focus of media concern, child neglect and emotional abuse make up the majority of substantiated child maltreatment cases in Australia (AIHW, 2008). Healy (2004) outlines two challenges facing social workers in the contemporary human services sector: the market reform of human services and the crisis of public confidence in child protection institutions. The latter and the growth of child protection services have exacerbated the challenges of recruitment and retention of social workers in the child protection field.

Initial and ongoing professional development emanating from quality research and evidence-informed policies is needed if social workers are to enhance the well-being of vulnerable children. In a national audit of Australian Child Protection Research (1995-2004), commissioned by the Australian Centre for Child Protection and conducted by the National Child Protection Clearinghouse, it was found that the highest number of research projects in child protection was conducted in the field of social work, followed by social policy (Higgins, Adams, Bromfield, Richardson & Aldana, 2005). This national audit did not focus on the education of professionals but one of the general findings was the need for adequate training of workers.

Any proposed professional development cannot be addressed through simplistic, one-off workshops or training sessions given the diversity of social workers' backgrounds, the agency settings in which

they work and the client populations they serve. There is a need to explore and understand what facilitates and inhibits effective learning in social work, particularly in relation to hearing the voice of the child. From a child protection perspective, this encompasses helping social workers to -

- recognise risk and vulnerability and take appropriate action at individual, family and community levels,
- understand and work effectively with at-risk, abused or neglected children and their families, and
- understand, critically examine and change social policies and structures to reduce the probability of child abuse and neglect and its harmful effects.

Reflections on Children in Social Work Contexts

Clare and Mevik (2008) note that children are rarely the focus in their own right as complex and competent citizens within social work practice and education. A number of authors report on the importance of giving voice to children in practice, research, policy and education (e.g., Grover, 2005; Hill, 2006; Jans, 2004; Roche, 1999; Warming, 2006). In the area of foster care, Warming (2006), for example, reports on participatory action research conducted with 15 foster children in Denmark. In her study she quotes the critical perspective of a foster child about social work professionals:

> *"If you say something that they don't expect or they don't have in their books about foster children, they get confused. First they don't know what to say. Next they try to convince you that they know best. Finally they just decide what they had decided before talking to you. Well, some are on the child's side and do listen, but they are always the ones with the least power to make decisions".* (p.42)

A number of authors also offer a critical analysis of the practical and ethical ambiguity inherent in ***listening to the voice of the child*** (Komulainen, 2007); the frustrations of young people ***offering a voice*** and then not being taken seriously (Kjorholt, 2002); the protective constructions of children by Human Research Ethics Committees compared to children being constructed as ***active beings*** in literature, practice and legislation (Balen, Blyth, Calabretto, Fraser, Horrocks & Manby, 2006); and contradictory policy initiatives in the UK that focus on children as ***objects of protection*** and children as ***competent social actors*** (Wyness, 1996).

Extent of the Problem

The number of notifications of suspected child abuse or neglect incidents have increased steadily since 1992 in all States and Territories, reaching over a quarter of a million in 2006, approximately one fifth of which were substantiated. Similarly, the number of children on care and protection orders across Australia has increased by 73% from 1997 to 2006, and the number of children in State care at any one time has almost doubled to over 27,000 (AIHW, 2007a). There is no clear or validated evidence available to explain this increase. The reasons are most likely complex. For example, (a) an actual increase in the number of children requiring statutory protection due to increased stress and pressure on families and in society; (b) increased awareness and willingness of professionals to report incidents due to identification and response training; (c) changes in reporting and systems, and (d) a widening of the definition of child abuse and neglect, to include factors such as the emotional abuse associated with witnessing domestic violence.

Bromfield and Higgins (2004) argue however, that incidence statistics drawn from child protection services can be unreliable because they can both under and over estimate the prevalence of child maltreatment in the community. On the surface, it may appear that only a small proportion of children are the subject of a substantiated investigation. These notifications and substantiated reports, however, are unlikely to represent the full extent of child abuse or neglect or its consequences. Therefore, there is potentially a larger number of Australian children that social workers may consider require specific support due to abuse or neglect related issues than what is represented by the official notification statistics.

Social Work Education and Child Protection

Those children who are in State care are among the most vulnerable in any society. Gilligan (2000) proposes the quality and effectiveness of the social work services available impacts directly on the welfare of children in State care. On this basis, it has been suggested that the capacity of social workers working in child welfare settings be improved through pre-service and in-service education that builds a skills and knowledge base focusing on developing effective relationships with children and families (Gilligan, 2000; Luckock, Lefevre & Tanner, 2007).

Statistics from the Department of Education, Science and Training (2007) on the total numbers of domestic and overseas students commencing the Bachelor of Social Work program indicate that 2,392 students commenced social work in 2005. There was a slight increase to 2,411 in 2006. A total of 1,370 students completed the Bachelor program in 2005 and 1,366 in 2006. The number of new graduates who obtain employment in settings that are directly related to the protection of children is not known but, as suggested previously, it is likely that most will find employment in settings where they will encounter disadvantaged and vulnerable children.

Australian Studies of Child Protection in Social Work Education

Despite the very large body of literature on child protection policy and practice, surprisingly little exists about child protection in social work education. Notably, there has been no prior comprehensive examination of the child protection content included in social work education courses offered by Australian universities. While child protection has been highlighted as a primary policy issue for social workers for a number of years, only a small number of Australian-based reviews, research projects or evaluation studies of child protection in social work education and professional development have been published. The few studies that have been published include the following -

- Clare and Mevik (2008) examined the extent to which Australian and Norwegian social work educators teach practitioners to work with children. They found that graduates are ill equipped to work with children, and argue that foundational professional education must equip students with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable them to work with children in their own right.
- Osmond and O'Connor (2006) undertook a small scale, multi-method study of the use of knowledge in practice by ten social workers engaged in statutory child protection. They found that most practitioners did not articulate a comprehensive theory and research base to their practice, and advocate for evidence based training in undergraduate and post graduate social work curricula.

- Healy and Meagher (2007) administered a telephone survey in 2004 to a stratified random sample of 208 child welfare practitioners working in two Australian states as a component of a three year international comparative research project on the child welfare workforce in Australia, England and Sweden. They also conducted interviews with senior workers in child and family welfare agencies, to analyse perceptions of the educational preparation of social workers for this field of practice.

  Two main barriers were identified. First, the social work profession has been ambivalent about its involvement in tertiary child protection and statutory fields of practice that involve a level of social control. Second, a tension exists between the generic orientation of social work education and the specialist knowledge required for child welfare practice.

  Senior workers in the field of child welfare also advocated for core knowledge, skills and personal characteristics such as a systems approach that was child focused and recognised family and community contexts; practice skills in time and stress management; and the interpersonal capacities of the workers to develop effective relationships with children, families and team members.

  A further three key themes dominated interview data: the variability of graduate preparation for practice, the tensions between social work education and tertiary child protection practice; and international child welfare agencies looking beyond traditional fields such as social work to recruit workers. It was recommended that social work educators re-examine the training offered to graduates who are employed in statutory practice, and support options be explored, including scholarships for involvement in postgraduate programs at universities in tertiary child protection training.

The generic orientation of social work qualifying programs has led to concerns about whether social work graduates are adequately prepared for working with children and for child protection practice. Healy and Meagher (2007) also reported little difference between social workers and other human service graduates in their perceptions of being prepared for child welfare practice, with statutory, tertiary child protection workers feeling less prepared for practice than workers in primary or secondary child welfare practice.

With regards to in-service education and professional development in child protection in Australia, Bromfield and Ryan (2007) conducted a national audit of statutory child protection learning and development units in October 2005 to March 2006. They suggested that there is a need for specialist vocational training in child protection to prepare statutory child protection practitioners for their role, despite the core entry-level qualification in most jurisdictions being a Bachelor degree in Social Work, Psychology or Social and Behavioural Science (Bromfield & Ryan, 2007). This report indicates that specialist professional education in statutory child protection is also needed, which could be provided by universities in post qualifying courses, in-service training by agencies, or in the form of university-agency partnerships.

International Studies of Child Protection in Social Work Education

Overseas studies (e.g., Luckock, Lefevre, Orr, Jones, Marchant & Tanner, 2006; Munro, 1998; Mullin & Canning, 2006; Smith, 2006) also suggest social work graduates do not feel confident or skilled to deal with child protection issues.

In the United States, Smith (2006) sampled 332 graduate and undergraduate students from a range of major disciplines, including 23 social workers, on their knowledge and understanding of child



maltreatment. She concluded that professional education should focus on helping students distinguish between personal beliefs and legal definitions of maltreatment (Smith, 2006). Additionally, Mullin and Canning (2006) identified the problem of inadequate attention to children in social work education in the United States of America arguing that social work ethics requires social work educators to address children as a vulnerable population.

In Michigan, Whipple, Soloman-Jozwiak, Williams-Hecksel, Abrams and Bates (2006) reported on a similar university-community child welfare learning partnership called the Child Welfare Learning Collaborative (CWLC), which involved Catholic Social Services/St Vincent Homes, University Outreach Partnerships, and the School of Social Work. This evaluation found the biggest factors contributing to the successful implementation of such a program were that the initiative was agency rather than university driven and interdisciplinary. According to Whipple et al. (2006), the development of well defined curricula and service delivery models are essential to the education and development of students as well-trained child welfare professionals. They further suggest that best practice approaches to the education of social work students in child protection needs to incorporate the practice wisdom of practitioners in the field as well as academic expertise.

In Canada, the social work programme at the University of Northern British Colombia and the Ministry of Children and Family Development entered into a partnership to develop and deliver

a Bachelor of Social Work subject for students with a child welfare specialisation (Bellefeuille & Schmidt, 2006). This education partnership occurred as a result of the *Report of the Gove Inquiry into Child Protection* (1995), which suggested that social work programs should increase their child welfare content (Bellefeuille & Schmidt, 2006). The subject was offered online due to the geographically diverse delivery sites. Initial results have been encouraging and suggest that this innovative education model of community-university partnerships is the hallmark of the 21st Century.

In the United Kingdom as part of a Social Care Institute for Excellence Knowledge Review, Luckock et al. (2006) undertook a comprehensive analysis of how communication skills with children and young people were conceptualised, taught, assessed and applied in social work education. They reviewed and mapped relevant literature, surveyed social work program information, and analysed semi structured questionnaires from Higher Education Institutions. The findings concluded that communicating with children is not a distinct topic in social work education. A common understanding of what skilled communication is, and what and how it should be taught, did not exist and few effective practices were identified (Luckock et al., 2006). It was further highlighted that in the United Kingdom social work students can complete their training without ever having learned about or worked with children, and that a survey by Ash (1987 as cited in Luckock et al., 2007) twenty years ago in relation to the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work revealed the same findings.

In a very recent paper in *Child and Family Social Work*, Lefvre, Tanner and Luckock (2008) propose a framework for understanding the components of skilled communication with children in the qualifying social work curriculum, and advocate a "whole programme approach" to developing curricula for communicating effectively with children.

In the same issue of that journal, Balen and Masson (2008) draw on their research into the Victoria Climbie Inquiry to argue that the gap between recognition of what social workers need to safeguard children, and the training they receive to prepare them for this, remains very wide. They provide ideas on how creative use can be made of child abuse inquiry reports in social work education, and argue for more experiential methods to enhance practice and critical reflective skills.

Munro (1998) examined social work errors in 45 public inquiries in Britain between 1973 and 1994, and a recurrent theme was that social workers lacked the necessary knowledge to conduct good child protection investigations and assessments. Over this 21 year period there was some improvement in investigations of allegations because social workers were collecting a wider range of information on which to base their decisions, but social workers had difficulties assessing information gathered, using assessments to consider options and producing a clear plan of intervention.

An extensive amount of professional education in relation to child protection is provided as in-service education by child welfare agencies. In the United States this has very recently been the subject of an extensive evaluation funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services (Collins, 2008). As part of this project, a comprehensive literature review on child welfare training was completed by a team at the Boston University School of Social Work (Collins, Amodeo & Clay, 2007).

The literature suggests, therefore, at a national and international level, strong concerns about improving social work education and the social work knowledge base in relation to children in general and child protection are longstanding.

Conclusion

Key points emerging from the literature include:

- strong and continuing concerns about social workers not being adequately trained to respond to work with vulnerable and at-risk children and young people
- the emergence of some promising approaches addressing the educational needs of social workers involving collaboration between education and service delivery organisations
- a lack of research on how child protection issues are currently being addressed in social work education programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels in Australia, and
- the need to explore ways to assist social work graduates develop the skills and strategies to communicate and work effectively and confidently with vulnerable children and families in a professional capacity.

The survey in this study will assist in addressing some of these gaps enabling stakeholders to examine the baseline of what is being taught, and needs to improve in the education of social workers, in relation to child protection related issues.

Aims and Purpose of Research

Prior to this initiative, the extent to which child protection issues have been included in the curriculum of social work education courses and programs had not been mapped at the national level. The principal aims of the study were to -

- identify discrete, integrated and incidental child protection course content
- examine perceived facilitators and barriers to the inclusion of child protection course content
- investigate planned and potential future directions and resource requirements for the effective inclusion of child protection components.



Key issues:

- Child protection is broader than statutory social work practice within social work education, namely it is about child well-being and responding to the needs of children and their families and communities
- The welfare of children in State care depends on the quality and effectiveness of the social work service available to them
- Social workers, particularly in tertiary and statutory settings, feel unprepared to protect, work with and respond to vulnerable and at-risk children and young people
- Child protection content in social work education has never been examined at the national level

Design and Methodology

chapter 2

In order to facilitate future comparisons of data across disciplines, the same questions addressed in the mapping of child protection issues in teacher education and nursing and midwifery education across Australia were applied also in this study, namely:

1) What aspects of child protection are currently being addressed in social work education courses across Australia, and how are they delivered within the curriculum?

2) What are the perceived facilitators or barriers for the inclusion of child protection content into the core curricula of social work education?

3) What does the social work education community recommend to facilitate the advancement and effective inclusion of child protection components?

As in each of the other studies, a roundtable approach was adopted. The rationale for each approach is discussed in the following sections. Readers of the companion studies will find the following section to be a replication, and may wish to proceed to the next chapter.

Curriculum Mapping

Overview

Curriculum, whether documented or not, is the sum total of decisions made about which activities are included or excluded (English, 1980) in an educational program.

Curriculum mapping is a systematic approach used to describe the content taught, the sequence in which it is taught, and the amount of time spent teaching it (English, 1980).The underlying thesis is that the quantity of instructional time affects student knowledge and achievement in an identified area of learning, and that any judgements or future actions should be based on accurate information of what actually happens (Clough, James, & Witcher, 1996) rather than simply examining course outlines of intended curriculum.

Essentially, when collated and analysed, curriculum mapping data can indicate the time spent and the order in which students encounter topics. It also permits estimations of the amount of variance within and between functional units of analysis, that is, faculties, schools or courses. Fundamentally,

the data generated by curriculum mapping techniques can be used to identify and address curricula gaps, overlaps, and desired as opposed to inadvertent repetition.

Curriculum mapping can be applied at two distinct levels of interest – the macro (e.g., national, state or discipline) and the micro (e.g., faculty, school, or classroom) level. Though the macro and micro levels are connected, and the functional units of analysis at each level is interchangeable according to context (i.e., a faculty may be defined as macro in a local university study but as micro within a national or international study), the process nevertheless provides the same picture (Jacobs, 1997). Namely, the process makes the curriculum transparent and provides a broad picture of what students experience within a particular context or program of study.

It is important to note, however, that in general, curriculum mapping techniques will tell us what, when and in which sequence content is provided to students but not what they have learned. Notwithstanding this limitation, the curriculum mapping approach was considered an effective and theoretically appropriate way to map when and how child protection content is delivered at the national level for two reasons.

First, the process promotes the identification of resource requirements and may potentially support the effective inclusion of child protection components in programs.

Second, in adopting the curriculum mapping approach there is the potential to promote 'second-order' change. This type of change both defines a given problem, and challenges the status quo of practice in order to find a solution (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). In particular, it is contended that participation in curriculum mapping initiatives can be the process by which we reflect upon, revise or change fundamental assumptions, perspectives and views (Weinbaum, 2004 cited in Hale, 2006). According to Hale (2006) curriculum mapping initiatives, therefore, can form the cornerstone of sustainable change when combined with sound leadership, the development of a shared vision and collaborative inquiry. It was considered therefore, that such an outcome would serve the Centre's mission of highlighting the need for child protection curriculum content within and across university-based social work education faculties and schools, thereby providing further support for the adoption of the proposed research method.

The Process in Action

When designing and undertaking a curriculum mapping study, there are three fundamental stages in the process:

1) the research and development stage which involves the -

- investigation of previous studies and consideration of the findings
- scoping the range of participants
- determination of the content to be mapped
- establishment of timeframes for implementation
- planning subsequent actions and outcomes

2) the actual mapping stage during which -

- survey instruments are developed, trialled and evaluated
- curriculum maps are generated based on skills, processes and content actually taught

3) the analysis, evaluation, and dissemination stage which incorporates -

- reflecting upon the curriculum taught, methodologies, materials and standards being met
- reporting of the findings
- planning to revise or re-evaluate as appropriate.

Examples of Curriculum Mapping in Similar Contexts

Curriculum mapping processes have been used in various university contexts to demonstrate how faculties and schools are developing graduate knowledge and skills. For example, the mapping of graduate attributes in the medicine, nursing and health sciences postgraduate coursework degree curriculum at Monash University (Krasey, Jackson & McCall, 2006); the generic skills fostered in the BEd (Early Childhood) curriculum at Macquarie University (Sumsion & Goodfellow, 2002), and the graduate attributes in the Arts curriculum offered at the University of New South Wales (Forsyth, 2006). The Learning and Teaching Unit of the University of NSW advocate curriculum mapping to 'initiating processes and discussions with colleagues about embedding graduate attributes into the curriculum' (UNSW Website, 2007).

Although the curriculum mapping process is descriptive by nature and does not perceive teaching and learning as static, there are some issues in applying the process to content that is -

a) not necessarily core to the education award or program, and

b) which can be interpreted or delivered in highly idiosyncratic ways.

Comparisons can be drawn between the mapping of child protection content and the mapping of non-discipline specific graduate qualities in higher education subjects. Specifically, like the 'top down' approach prevalent in the adoption of graduate qualities outlined by Barrie (2006), many faculties and schools have responded to legal mandates that child protection issues be addressed. For example, in some States and Territories there is a requirement that professionals working with children undergo police checks, and that mandatory notification workshops are completed by university students prior to a practicum placement. Beyond meeting such legal requirements there may be no single understanding of child protection held by academics asked to contribute data to a curriculum mapping exercise. It was anticipated that the extent and manner in which university teaching and learning processes actually develop child protection related knowledge and outcomes would be unclear and contestable.

The considerations of such issues suggested that simply asking for information about child protection courses could yield little valuable data. Given that people could perceive child protection differently, it was determined that the concept needed to be contextualised and made explicit within the proposed curriculum mapping process. In support of this aim, it was decided to conduct a trial to determine the most effective way of meeting this requirement (see Research and Development section for details).

Roundtable Approach

Overview

A Roundtable is designed to bring together and engage interested participants in a structured discussion.

The process is intended to provide a 'safe space' for the consideration of how change may be managed and its likely outcomes and impact (McAvinia, 2003). The process offers additional benefits including –

- the opportunity to collate extensive information about the facilitators that may progress, and the barriers that may impede, any planned or desired change in practice
- a collective knowledge base and group who can prioritise issues and generate feasible solutions that take into account resource implications
- the dissemination of information by members of the Roundtable through their personal and professional networks
- the facilitation of structural change within their respective institutions

(Centre for Learning and Teaching, 2002)

Carter and Mistry (2001) noted that respondents in their study distinguished between Roundtables as an 'approach' and a 'methodology'. The former was perceived as an opportunity to articulate aspirations and associated with dispersed leadership and collegiality, while the latter notion suggested managed directiveness. On the basis of this finding, the notion of a Roundtable 'approach' was adopted as being an option fully consistent with the Centre's aims and mission.

Research and Development

Feasibility

It was determined that a national and comprehensive depiction of child protection content in higher education programs was required. To this end, strategies to gain the support of higher education providers were explored.

Given the issues raised in the previous section, and the diverse range of education courses and pedagogical approaches adopted across Australia, it was determined that the curriculum mapping survey instrument needed to simultaneously -

- contextualise child protection broadly to include preventative and proactive approaches in addition to identification and response training
- provide multiple pathways for respondents to report both explicit and implicit coverage of child protection topics and issues.

The first stage of the curriculum mapping initiative, therefore, was to develop and trial a survey instrument that could meet these requirements and procure the information required in an effective and efficient manner. Consequently a trial was conducted in December 2005 prior to the mapping of the first discipline, namely teacher education.

Survey Design and Development

Through an iterative process of development, trial and refinement, the survey was designed to extrapolate the nature and extent of child protection content included in an identified education program. It was determined that one survey should be completed for each award or program offered by the targeted school or faculty.

The first two sections, namely Sections 1A and 1B, sought details of courses that have elements of child protection explicitly stated in course curriculum outlines or program syllabi. The next section, Section 2, asked for information about issues which may be raised or covered throughout the education program or award, but not explicitly stated in any course or program documentation. The final two sections, Sections 3 and 4 provided an opportunity for respondents to raise issues, concerns or share information regarding the school's approach to child protection not covered in previous sections. The following overview provides details of the type and nature of data collected. A copy of the survey instrument is provided in Appendix 1.

Section 1A – Discrete Courses

Section 1A identified discrete, or stand-alone courses specifically designed to address the prevention, identification and professional response to child abuse and neglect

Examples of courses for inclusion in this section were:

- compulsory child abuse identification and reporting programs, or 'one-off' mandatory notification training courses
- subjects in which the content is **fully dedicated** to the exploration of the prevention, identification or response to child abuse and neglect within a professional context.

Section 1B – Integrated Approaches to Child Protection

In Section 1B respondents were asked to indicate courses, units or subjects offered within the nominated award program that addressed child protection issues explicitly within an integrated teaching and learning context.

This enabled the identification of broader courses/subjects/units that **specifically listed** one or more child abuse and neglect topics in the course booklet as part of a lecture, tutorial and/or assessment tasks. Examples included:

- the impact of domestic violence on children is listed in week 2 of a semester-long 'Working with Individuals, Families and Groups' course
- the needs of a child that is deemed at-risk/vulnerable to child abuse or neglect is identified as an integral part of a professional practice course.

Section 2 - Child Protection-related Content

In order to contextualise child protection issues in multiple ways, a number of risk factors and proactive strategies associated with child abuse and neglect were listed in Section 2. The list was drawn from contemporary literature and existing categorisations of child protection-related risk factors and indicators, particularly Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model which places the child within the family within the community (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Broad categorisations of child abuse and neglect indicators and risk factors

Source	Broad Categories of Risk Factors
Warner, J. (2003) An Initial Assessment of the Extent to Which Risk Factors, Frequently Identified in Research, Are Taken into Account When Assessing Risk in Child Protection Cases *Journal of Social Work*, 3 (3): 339–363	Child Parent/Carer Demographics Environment
Cameron, G. & Karabanow, J. (2003) The Nature and Effectiveness of Program Models for Adolescents at Risk of Entering the Formal Child Protection System *Child Welfare*, LXXXII, No. 4, July/August	Childhood and adolescent problem behaviours Difficulties with peers Parents substance abuse & maltreatment history Family problems Step-parents Lack of social integration Neighbourhood disintegration Lack of economic resources
Powell, C. (2003) Early Indicators of Child Abuse and Neglect: A Multi-Professional Delphi Study *Child Abuse Review*, 12: 25–40	Physical Behavioural and Developmental Parental factors Other

Respondents were asked to record if any factors listed were referred to, or discussed with students during the course of the education program. For example, the impact of family and environmental issues on the child may be discussed in various contexts throughout the degree/award program with no reference to child protection. If the respondents believe this to be the case they were asked to mark the box in the first column: 'Taught but Not Linked'.

If, however, the impact of family and environmental issues or domestic violence on the child is discussed explicitly in terms of child abuse and neglect factors, then respondents were asked to mark the box in the second column: 'Linked to Child Protection'. It was also made clear to the respondents that only one box should be marked for any factor or strategy.

As the list of risk factors and proactive strategies associated with child abuse and neglect provided in this section cannot be comprehensive or exhaustive of all possible issues covered, extra spaces were provided for participants to nominate additional factors or relevant strategies.

Section 3 - Comments, Issues and Concerns

This section provided the opportunity for respondents to record any comments, issues or concerns related to child protection in the identified education curriculum. In addition, any future curriculum changes that may have been planned or innovative approaches that the respondents wanted to share could be included in this section.

Section 4 - Further Exploration

The final section invited respondents to discuss any child protection curriculum issues that their school or faculty were interested in exploring further. It also provided an opportunity to record any opportunities, challenges or dilemmas that they wished to raise or discuss at the Roundtable forum.

Trial of Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was evaluated prior to distribution to universities across Australia by means of a small-scale trial. The purpose of the trial was to –

- evaluate the design and format of the survey instrument
- identify any gaps or omissions in instructions or data entry requirements
- establish the average time required to complete the survey
- determine the relevance and quality of data the survey would yield.

In support of the above outcomes, the child protection content was mapped by a small sample of educators. On the basis of feedback, minor modifications were made to the survey instrument.

Seeking Support

To adapt it to the social work context, the survey was shown to nominated members of the AASW for comment and amendment where appropriate to conform with contemporary approaches within social work education programs. At the September 2006 meeting of the Australian Council of the Heads of Schools of Social Work, the Council gave support, in principle, to the mapping of child protection curriculum content in social work subjects across Australia. The support included agreement that the Heads of School or Deans would provide the name and contact details of a key liaison person in their respective school/faculty to facilitate dissemination and return of the surveys.

Roundtable Approach – Procedure

The second stage of the process involved the organisation of a National Social Work Education and Child Protection forum to support -

- the dissemination of preliminary survey results
- a structured discussion of how social work graduates can be better prepared to meet their 'duty of care' and respond effectively to child abuse and neglect both legally and professionally
- the exploration of strategies for advancing child protection and student well-being in social work education programs that build on current good practice in a collegial atmosphere

- the identification and prioritisation of resource needs (i.e., what participants believe is needed to make child protection an integral part of social work education)
- the development of a collaborative network of researchers, practitioners and faculties/schools to support the ongoing process of integrating child protection into social work education.

The forum was jointly hosted by the AASW and the Australian Centre for Child Protection. Invited participants included the Dean or Head of School (or his/her nominee) and one staff member from each school/faculty that provided data. Representatives from the AASW were also present.

The organisation of the 5-hour forum included a keynote address by Professor Bob Lonne, National President of the AASW and Professor Dorothy Scott, Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection. A presentation of the preliminary results of the curriculum mapping survey was also made by staff from the Australian Centre for Child Protection. At the completion of the forum, expressions of interest were invited for future collaborative ventures within and between schools/faculties and the Australian Centre for Child Protection.

The Mapping Process

chapter 3

All university-based Schools of Social Work were invited to participate in the mapping of child protection content in social work education programs offered across Australia.

Selecting Participants

As part of the initial process of inviting Faculties and Schools of Social Work to participate in the initiative, an email was sent to the Heads of Schools by the AASW requesting the nomination of a contact person to whom all future correspondence could be directed. Those who did not respond within a specified time received follow up reminders via emails and telephone calls. Social work education programs identified by the AASW were those required for entry into the occupation of social work and approved by the AASW. Completing the Bachelor of Social Work or identified double degree programs would provide students with eligibility to register with the AASW.

A list of social work education programs identified as relevant to the mapping of child protection content was generated by accessing university websites and subsequently verified by the AASW. An email was then sent to the nominated liaison person by the AASW to –

- confirm the social work program's status
- ensure that the list of programs was current

Mail out of Surveys

In August 2007, a letter of introduction, the required number of survey forms and return postage paid envelopes were sent to all contact people in each targeted faculty/school. As survey forms were returned each program was allocated a unique code. An email was then sent to the contact person thanking them for participating and providing them with the details of the unique code assigned to them. This unique code enables each school to request information regarding their survey response patterns should they wish to do so.

Surveys were sent to 24 universities across Australia that offered an undergraduate qualifying social work program. In one instance, two universities offered the same Bachelor program jointly and therefore only one survey was sent. The child protection subjects mapped were taught in the Bachelor of Social Work programs (4 year and graduate entry), double degrees, postgraduate Master of Social Work and Graduate Certificates.

Response Rates

A total of 21 of the 24 universities (87.5%) returned surveys. The response rate for the participating universities in each State and Territory is shown in Figure 3.1.

All States and Territories are represented with South Australia, Western Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory returning 100 per cent of the surveys sent to them.

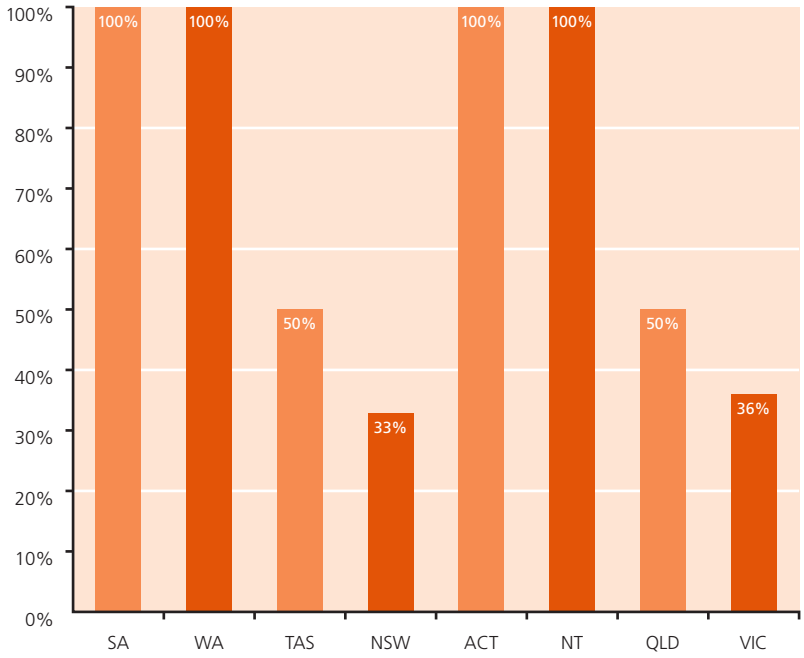


Figure 3.1 Response rates for social work education programs by States and Territories

Social Work Education Programs Represented in the Sample

Universities were asked to specify the program or degree type on their survey responses.

Programs mapped according to degree category are detailed in Table 3.1

Table 3.1 Description of broad categories

Broad Category	Description
Bachelor of Social Work	Bachelor of Social Work
Double Degrees	Bachelor of Social Work/Theology Bachelor of Social Work/Social Planning Bachelor of Social Work/Bachelor of Arts Bachelor of Social Work/ Bachelor of Human Services Bachelor of Social Work/ Bachelor of Social Science (Psychology) Bachelor of Social Work/Social Sciences Bachelor of Social Work/Law Bachelor of Social Work/Bachelor of Arts (Aboriginal Studies) Bachelor of Social Work/Bachelor of Arts (International Studies)
Master of Social Work	Master of Social Work
Graduate Certificates	Graduate Certificate in Child Protection Graduate Certificate in Human Services (Child Welfare) Certificate in Child Protection Practice

Type and Length of Degree and Awards represented in the sample

Universities were also asked to indicate the type and length of the degree on the survey form. Given the diversity of awards under consideration, each degree program was assigned to one of the following descriptive groupings as detailed in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Broad categories for type and length of degree or award

Category	Type of Award
Undergraduate programs	3 - 4+ year Bachelor awards
Graduate programs	Graduate Entry/Certificate/Diploma awards
Postgraduate programs	Masters programs

Primarily, the returned surveys represented undergraduate awards (see Figure 3.2)

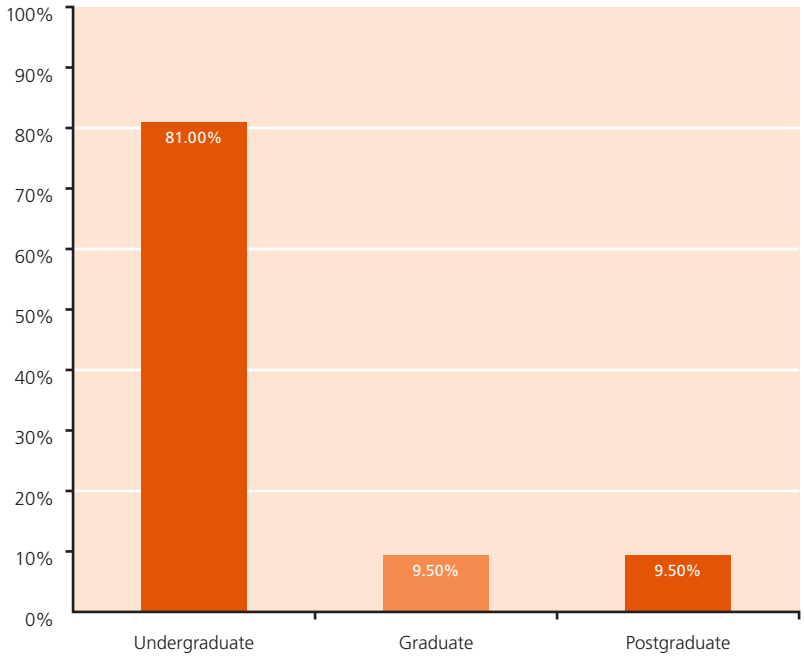


Figure 3.2 Surveys returned by type of degree

Response Patterns by University

Response patterns detailed below in Figure 3.3 show that 13 of the 21 responding universities provided data for 100 per cent of social work education programs offered by their school/faculty. Of the remaining schools/faculties, the majority provided data detail for at least a third of the programs offered by their institution.

N.B. In order to ensure confidentiality the one to two digit number used in the unique coding system, has been used in Figure 3.3 to identify individual universities rather than names or campus locations.

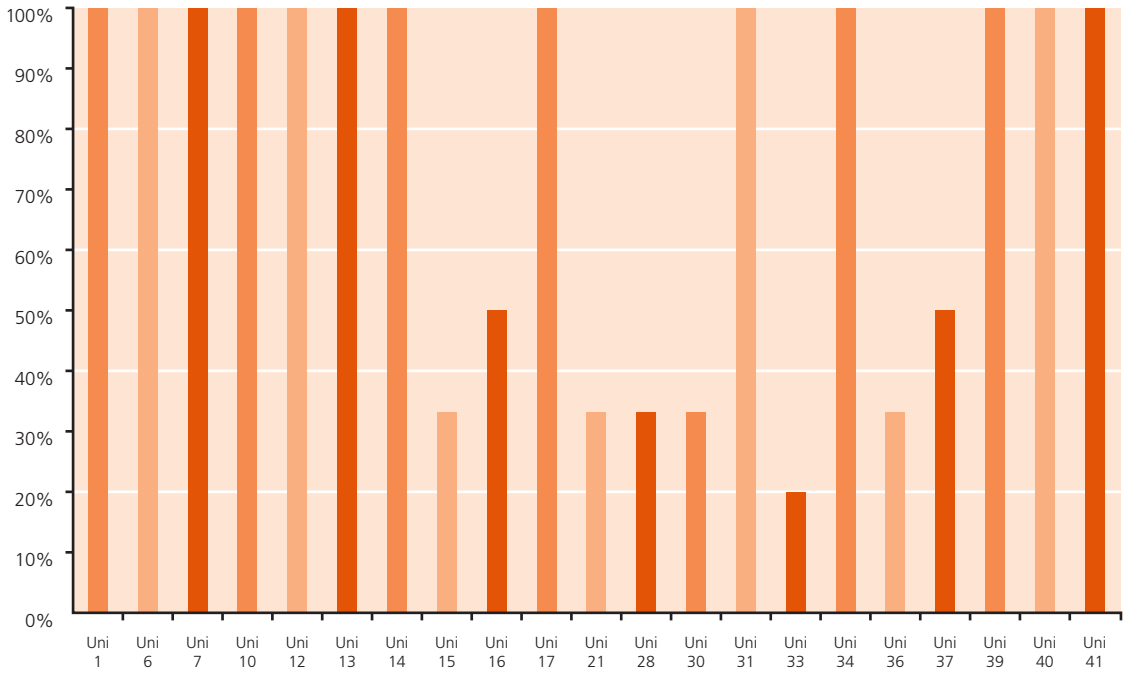


Figure 3.3 Surveys returned by universities

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Key results:

- Surveys were distributed to 24 universities across Australia that offer initial social work education programs
- A total of 21 universities responded to the survey
- 13 of the 21 universities mapped 100 per cent of the courses offered by them
- Of the remaining universities, the majority provided data for at least one-third of the programs offered by their school/faculty

Analysis of Data and Results

chapter 4

In order to facilitate discussion and reflect the data collection process, the analysis of data is organised as follows:

- Section 1A Discrete Child Protection Courses
- Section 1B Integrated Approaches to Child Protection
- Section 2 Child Protection-related Content
- Section 3 Comments, Issues and Concerns
- Section 4 Further Exploration

The discussion of the National Social Work Education and Child Protection Roundtable forum follows the report of survey analyses.

Software Packages

Analysis of the data was undertaken using SPSS Version 15 (2007) and Microsoft Office Excel (2007).

Overview of Data Entry and Analysis

As there are a small number of social work programs offered nationally, percentages have been used to report results across and within areas of interest in the study throughout Sections 1A, 1B and Section 2.

Section 1A Discrete Child Protection Courses

In order to determine the extent of discrete or stand-alone courses offered to social work students across Australia, schools and faculties were asked to identify courses that specifically addressed child abuse and neglect issues. For each subject, course or program identified, specific information was requested that detailed the following –

- the timing of the unit within the overall social work education program
- the number of hours dedicated to the unit or course

- who was responsible for delivery of the content, i.e., university staff or external providers
- if the course of study was core or elective, and
- the average number of students who participate in the course annually.

Discrete Child Protection Units/Courses

Initial analysis of data (see Figure 4.1) revealed that a third of the schools and faculties of social work that returned survey data do not provide any form of discrete child protection content within their social work education programs.

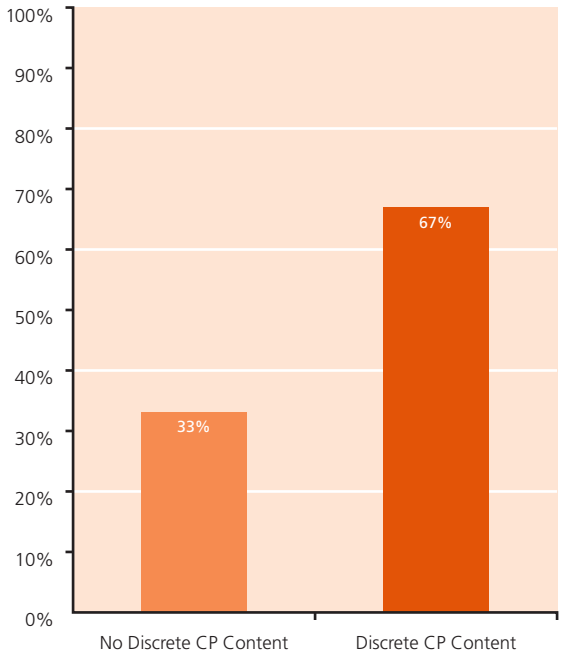


Figure 4.1 Discrete child protection content

When the data was inspected according to type of degree in which students were enrolled, the analysis demonstrated that of the 5,500 (Equivalent Full-Time Student Load - EFTSL) students who potentially graduate annually from the Bachelor of Social Work degree across Australia, over 40 per cent do not experience any formal or discrete content related to child protection (see Figure 4.2).

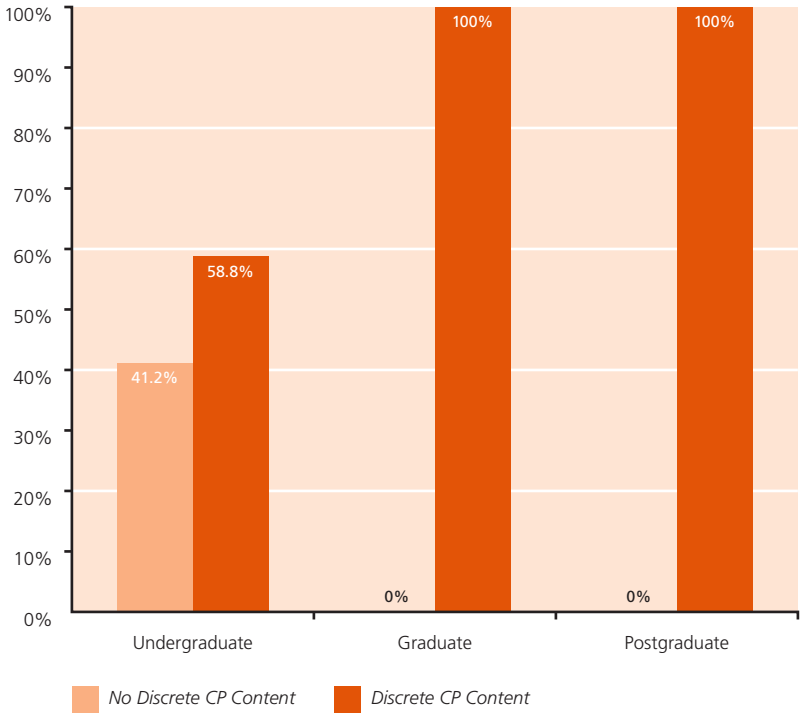


Figure 4.2 Discrete child protection content by type of degree

Examination of State and Territory survey responses (see Figure 4.3) revealed that social work education providers in South Australia, Australian Capital Territory and Queensland offer some component of discrete child protection content to students, whereas respondents in Tasmania, Northern Territory and Victoria reported 'no discrete child protection content' being offered to students.

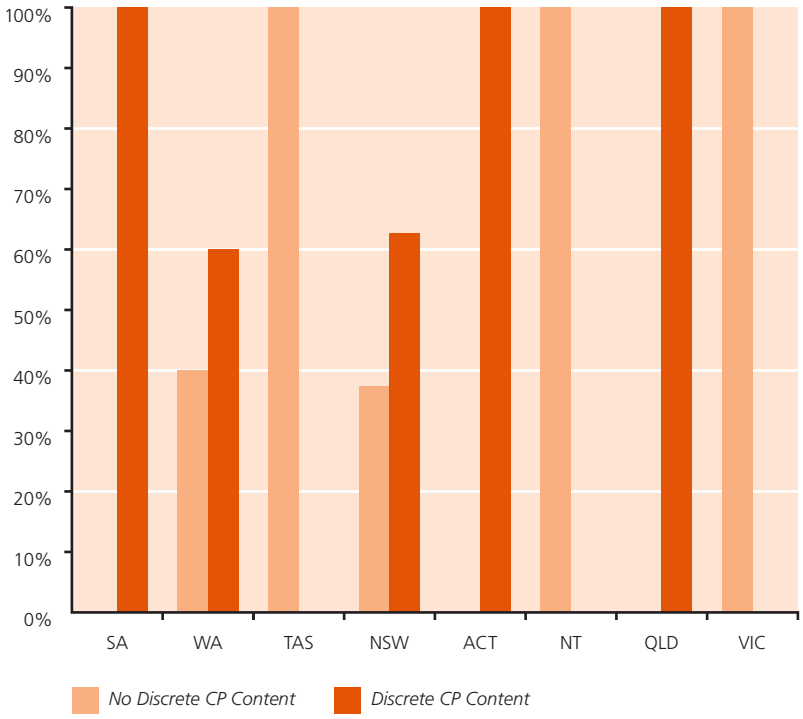


Figure 4.3 Discrete child protection content by States and Territories

N.B. Caution is required when interpreting the results reported in the Figure 4.3. Reference to Figure 3.1 in the previous chapter, which details response rates for each State and Territory is recommended in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the trends reported.

Where discrete child protection courses or units are provided, the extent to which university staff deliver the content in contrast to specialists from other agencies or employer groups was mapped. The results outlined in Figure 4.4 indicate that the majority of child protection content was delivered by university lecturers and tutors.

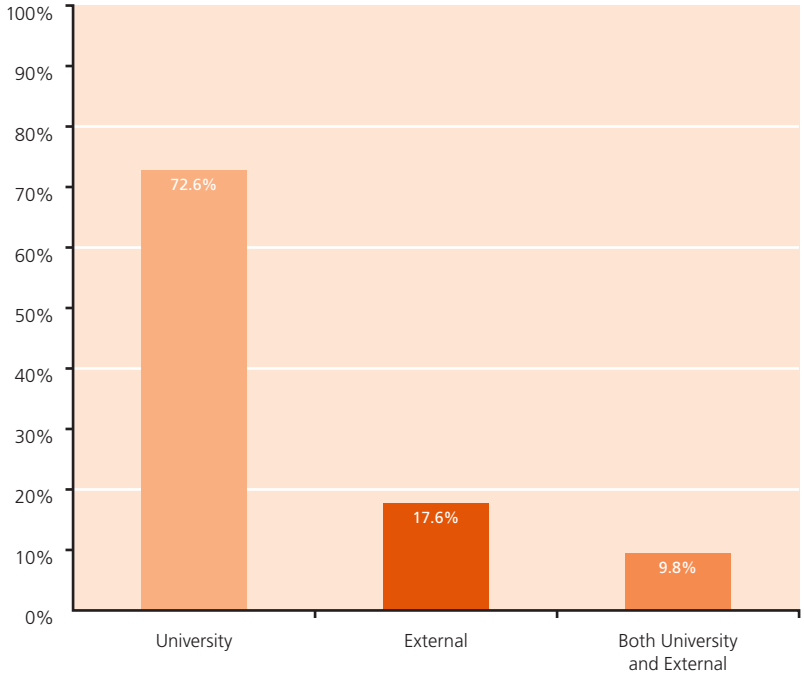


Figure 4.4 Discrete child protection content by delivery agent

In addition, the core or elective status of discrete child protection content provided by schools and faculties was identified. The results detailed in Figure 4.5 show that most of the discrete content is required learning offered within a core curriculum program.

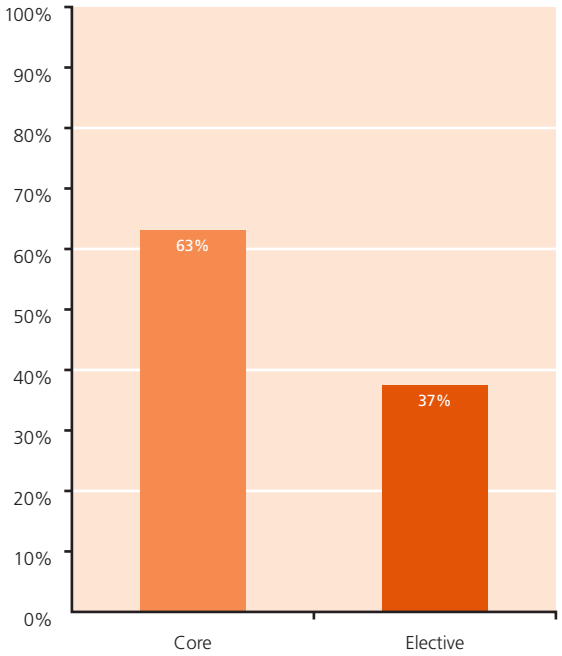


Figure 4.5 Discrete child protection content by course type

In examining Figure 4.5, the reader is reminded that the 63 per cent of core units are situated within the 67 per cent of overall social work education programs offering relevant content. Therefore, in actual terms this suggests that just over 42 percent of the discrete child protection content offered within social work educations programs are, in fact, core units of study.

In order to further facilitate the discussion regarding the extent to which students experience discrete child protection content, the number of hours allocated to content delivery was grouped into five categories –

- 1 to 4 hours
- 5 to 7 hours (includes courses run over a half to a full day)
- 8 hours to the equivalent of 1 week (includes courses run across multiple sessions times).
- more than 8 hours or one week
- not specified

According to the response patterns outlined in Figure 4.6, it can be conjectured that the majority of students enrolled in a social work education program engage in up to a week of a discrete, child protection learning. However, it is important to note that this result may represent as little as eight hours within a semester long course.

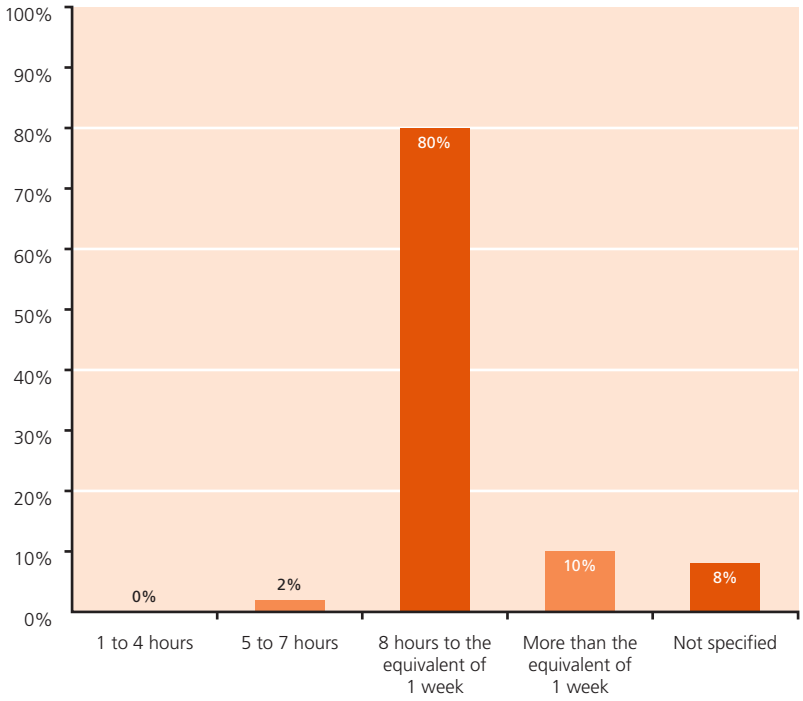


Figure 4.6 Discrete child protection content by time allocation

Further analysis (see Figure 4.7) exploring how the number of hours dedicated to child protection content is distributed across the types of social work education degrees revealed that in the average undergraduate degree, 78 per cent of programs dedicate between eight hours to the equivalent of one week to the teaching of discrete child protection content.

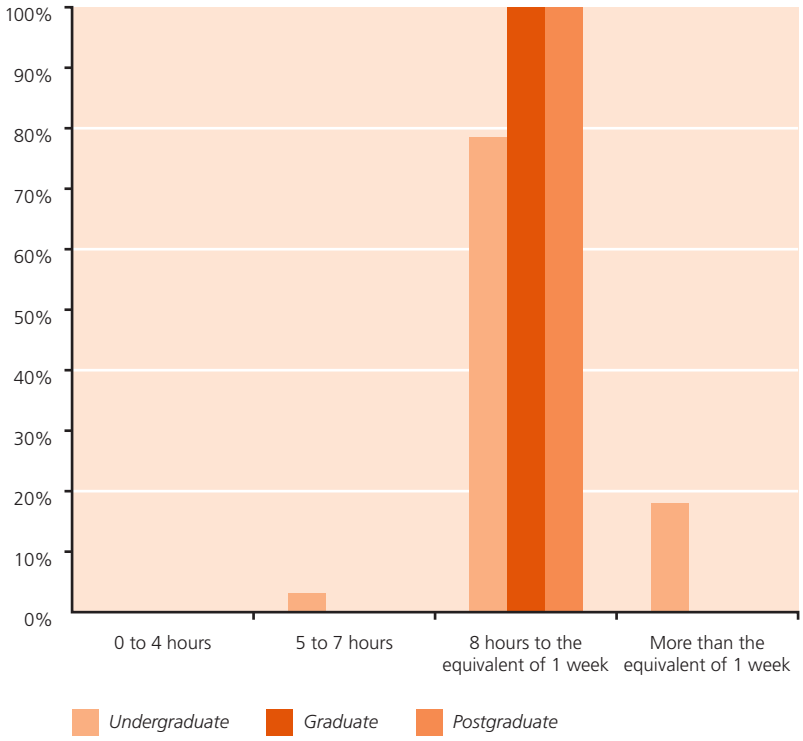


Figure 4.7 Time allocated to discrete child protection content by type of degree



Key findings:

- A third of potential social work education graduates do not engage in any discrete learning about child protection
- Of the 67 per cent of social work education programs that reported providing discrete child protection content,
  - 63 per cent form part of the core curriculum
  - 80 per cent allocate 8 hours to the equivalent of a week
  - over 70 per cent of discrete child protection content is provided by university personnel

Section 1B Integrated Approaches to Child Protection

In contrast to discrete child protection content, the extent to which child protection is integrated into social work education courses across Australia was examined. Social work educators were asked to identify courses/units that addressed child abuse and neglect issues using an integrated approach. For each course or program identified, specific information was requested that detailed the following –

- the timing of the unit within the overall social work education program
- the percentage of time dedicated to the unit or course
- who was responsible for delivery of the content, i.e., university staff or external providers
- if the course of study was core or elective
- the average number of students who participate in the course annually.

Figure 4.8 shows that the majority of social work education programs profiled in survey responses provided integrated child protection content.

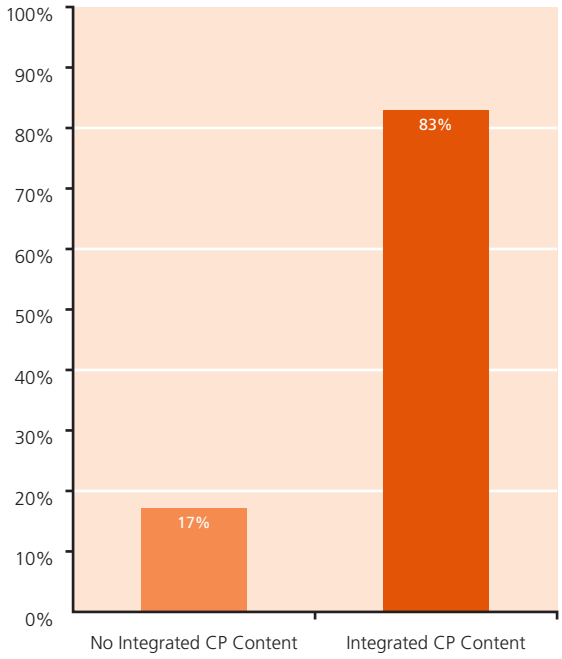


Figure 4.8 Integrated child protection content by cases

Of the 83 per cent that did offer some form of integrated child protection content, an analysis across the broad categorisation of undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate social work education degrees revealed that this integration was highest in the undergraduate programs. In contrast, a large number of graduate degree programs reported no integrated child protection content.

When examining where the integrated learning is occurring across Australia, reference to Figure 4.9 shows that the social work education surveys returned from South Australia, Tasmania, New South Wales, Northern Territory and Victoria reported the highest level of integrated child protection content.

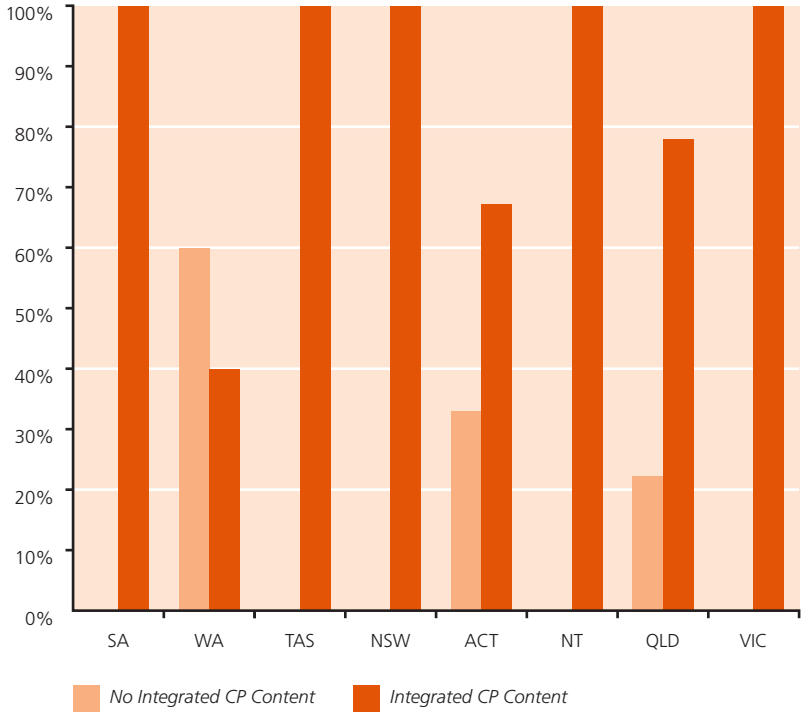


Figure 4.9 Integrated child protection content by States and Territories

In addition to the above analysis, where schools and faculties indicated the integration of child protection content into courses or units, the extent to which university staff or external providers delivered the content was mapped. The results outlined in Figure 4.10 indicate that the majority of integrated child protection content is delivered by university staff.

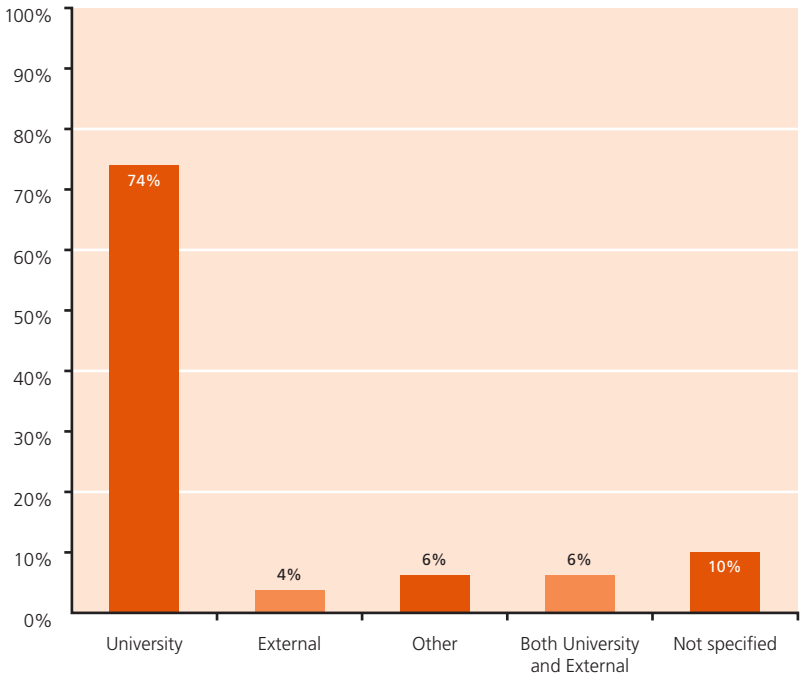


Figure 4.10 Integrated child protection content by delivery agent

In addition, respondents were asked to indicate the core or elective status of the unit within the program into which the child protection content was integrated. Reference to Figure 4.11 shows that most integrated child protection units offered were provided as core components of the curriculum.

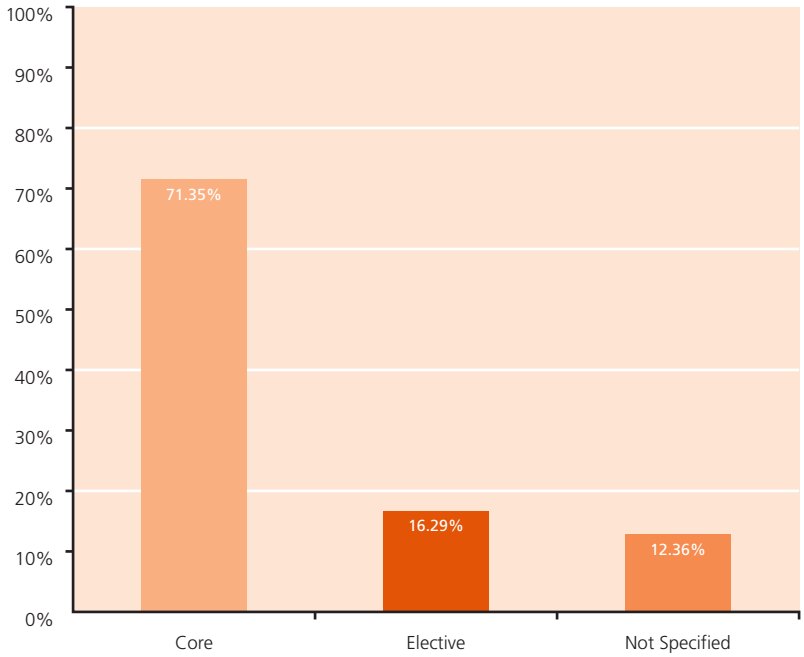


Figure 4.11 Integrated child protection content by course type

Although initial examination of Figure 4.11 suggests that a high percentage of core units of study integrate elements of child protection content, it is important to note that this percentage of programs is positioned within the overall social work education programs that offer any integrated course content.

To enable additional analysis of the data, and to further facilitate the discussion regarding the extent to which students experience integrated child protection content, the percentage of time allocated to integrated child protection was grouped. Reference to Figure 4.12 shows that for those programs for which details were provided, the majority of undergraduate social work education programs reported allocating less than 30 per cent of time to the delivery of integrated child protection content, with a large number falling within the 3-20 per cent range. As similar data was not provided for graduate and postgraduate programs, no conclusions can be drawn in this regard.

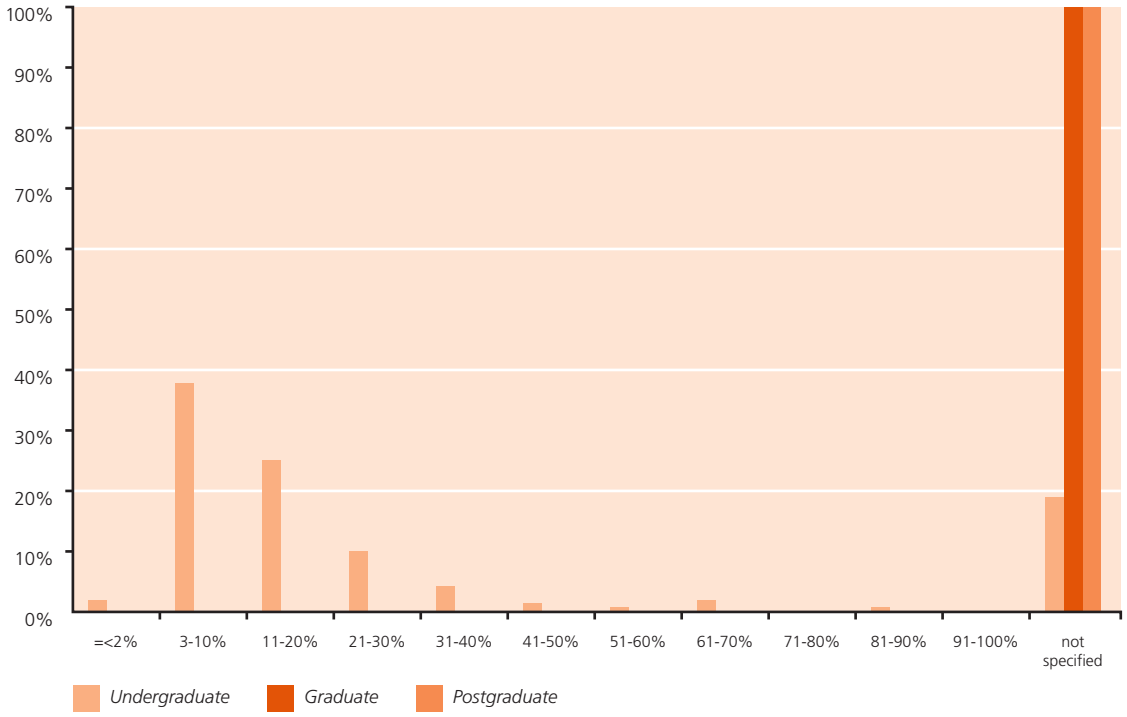


Figure 4.12 Time allocated to integrated child protection content by type of degree



Key findings:

83 per cent of social work education programs reported providing integrated child protection content

Of the programs reporting integrated child protection content -

- approximately 70 per cent were core units
- most allocate less than 30 per cent of unit time to the teaching of child protection content
- the majority of integrated child protection content is delivered by university personnel

Section 2 Child Protection-related Content

Section 2 of the survey listed a number of risk factors and proactive strategies associated with child abuse and neglect that may be addressed incidentally throughout a program but not documented in course curriculum guidelines.

In order to facilitate and simplify the discussion of data that reflects major areas of interest, intermediate levels were incorporated into macro levels of analysis, such as child-centred issues (including child development and mental and behavioural issues), family and environment (e.g., family, community, violence, neglect and dealing with difference) and professional issues (namely prevention strategies and professional roles and responsibilities).

Table 4.1 Categorisation of child protection-related content items

Macro Level	Intermediate Level	Micro Level
Child-centred Issues	Child Development	low weight for age / failure to thrive premature birth, low birth weight, sibling mortality slow to walk, talk, poor literacy / numeracy for age learning or physical disability - child aggressive / high levels of conflict undue fear of adults excessive shyness / timidity withdrawn or wary / lacks curiosity miserable, unhappy extreme anxiety about abandonment resilience (very high or very low) low self esteem/poor self perception
	Mental / Behavioural Issues	depression, anxiety, ADHD, hyperactivity cruel to animals sudden changes in behaviour extreme attention seeking behaviour persistent anti-social behaviour / bullying foraging or hoarding food / eating disorders substance abuse rocking / head banging / self harm stealing / making up stories running away inappropriate sexualised behaviour encopresis (soiling) / enuresis (bedwetting) school attendance problems
Family / Environmental Issues	Family / Community	mental health problems - parents / siblings substance abuse - alcohol drug problems in the family family structure - stable / transient / reconstituted maternal youth / teenage parents / sole parents low income / benefit dependent / financial problems parents / primary caregivers / siblings with a disability Indigenous history / disadvantage (e.g., stolen generation) parents / caregivers socially isolated serious parent-child and / or interparental conflict role of child in family (e.g. child as carer) inadequate supervision or safety provisions in home parent / carer abused in out of home care as a child poor housing, community resources or networks

Family / Environmental Issues	Violence	exposure to physical violence in family exposure to excessive physical / emotional punishment exposure to extreme / uncontrolled anger and aggression exposure to constant criticism, belittling, teasing of a child unrealistic parental expectations of the child adult sexual activity / pornography exposure to media abuse / violence (e.g., TV / internet) exposure to parental aggression / conflict with people in authority criminal record / criminal activity in the home
	Neglect	parental inability or disinterest in caring for children parent / carer who puts their own needs first child not collected from school, public places, other homes inadequate medical treatment or basic health care
	Dealing with Difference	dealing with difference - gender using non-sexualised language socialisation - femininity / masculinity sexuality and homophobia disadvantage - economic / social cultural and linguistic diversity child refugees (with / without parents / relatives) racism (vilification, stereotyping, prejudice) creating child-safe / child-friendly environment educational needs - individualised plans for student under guardianship special needs / disability learning programs impact of isolation, exclusion, remote / regional locations child labour child rearing practices / norms
Professional Issues	Prevention Strategies	infant home visiting / early years learning initiatives mental health (e.g., suicide prevention / psych disorders) self help initiatives (e.g., mutual support networks) building community capacity juvenile crime prevention drug and alcohol abuse initiatives children under guardianship / exit from guardianship support parenting programs - literacy and numeracy parenting programs - separation and divorce parenting programs - dealing with toddlers community partnerships initiatives
	Professional Roles & Responsibilities	use of authority in statutory child protection interventions contributing positively to family and community contributing positively to advocacy and empowerment for children / young people building interpersonal relationships with children / young people building interpersonal relationships with carers / extended family building interpersonal relationships with community members statutory and legal child protection harm minimisation / risk management frameworks stress management / debriefing counselling, supervision and consultation addressing / managing incidents of victimisation and abuse negotiation and conflict resolution

Analysis of Risk Factors and Strategies

In examining the trends across items at the micro, intermediate and macro level of analysis, the percentages of the total number of all factors across types of social work education degrees were calculated.

Child Protection-related Content: Undergraduate to Postgraduate

Survey responses detailed in Figure 4.13 indicate that postgraduate degree programs provide no incidental child protection content. Similarly a large number of graduate and undergraduate programs also did not report providing any incidental child protection content. Where incidental child protection content was reported in undergraduate programs, analysis revealed that around 28 per cent explicitly linked this information to child protection issues.

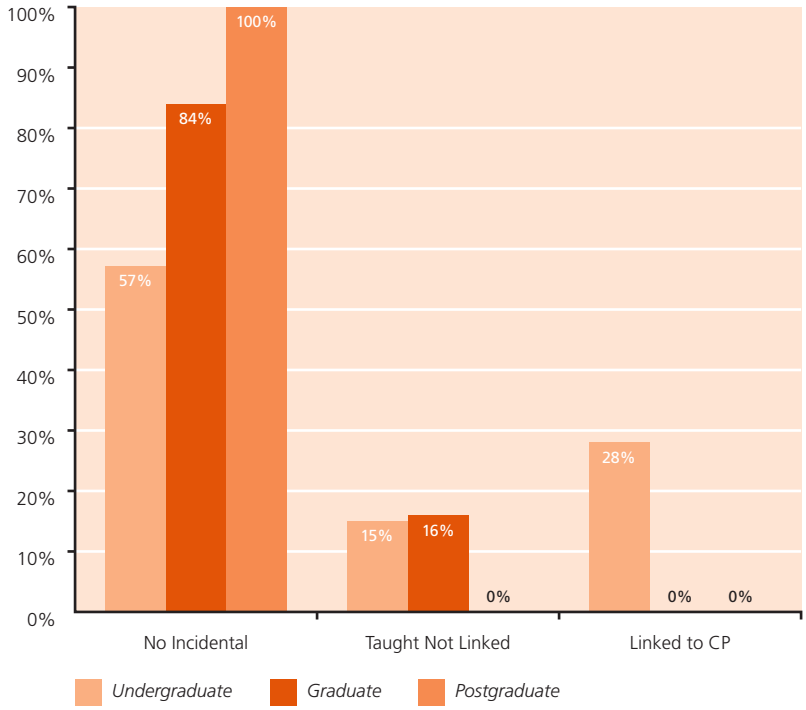


Figure 4.13 All child protection-related factors by type of degree

It is interesting to note that no graduate degree programs that were mapped reported linking the incidental content to child protection issues. On the basis of this finding, it may be worth the course providers considering ways to explicitly link the risk factors and proactive strategies already being discussed in course content to child protection issues.

Grouped Risk Factors and Strategies

Further examination of the three macro level categories, namely child-centred, family and environment, and professional issues, confirmed that undergraduate programs consistently reported addressing a greater number of risk factors and proactive strategies associated with child abuse and neglect. Also, greater likelihood was indicated for content to be linked to child protection in these courses.

Further Comments Recorded in Section 2

At the end of Section 2, respondents were invited to nominate curriculum content that was not recorded previously but was considered relevant to the social work education program being mapped. The additional risk factors or strategies included by respondents were: social policy, therapeutic interventions, inter-professional learning and Indigenous issues as linked to child protection, as well as the specifics of legislation and vulnerabilities of children in care.



Key findings:

- Undergraduate students are exposed to a greater number and range of incidental child protection-related issues than graduate and post graduate students
- Due to the low rate of explicit linking to child protection issues reported, opportunities exist for these factors and issues to be explored in conjunction with other social work topics and themes

Section 3 Comments / Issues / Concerns

Time constraints in a generic course

Respondents expressed a range of challenges in managing the practical complexities associated with incorporating additional and/or broader based content into an already full curriculum.

Further issues were raised regarding the challenges associated with identifying the relevant child protection theories, skills and knowledge which should be taught in a generic social work program.

Developing, introducing and evaluating new social work education programs

A number of current and recently developed courses dedicated to child protection were reported. Attention was drawn however to the complexities, in particular time delays, associated with the process of accrediting new programs within the university context.

Course content related to the legislation and beginning assessment frameworks were highlighted.

Opportunities for embedding child protection in programs, both in the delivery of content and in assessment tasks, and the importance of maximising opportunities to explore different approaches to the teaching of broad themes and theoretical perspectives was also acknowledged.

Existing approaches to content delivery were reported and strategies such as engaging practitioners in specialist workshops were identified as models.

The value of reflecting on current practice in social work education and conducting curriculum reviews, including the specific review of child protection curriculum, was identified as an important aspect to help inform future directions.

Shifting the paradigm

It was acknowledged that the social work profession is currently adult focused. The need for social work education to be inclusive of the broader themes of child protection and attentive to the child's perspective when designing course content was further noted.

Disseminating resources

The importance of developing and distributing resources among staff and students was highlighted. An example included the development and provision of an online blackboard site for sharing resource materials.

Field education placements

Participation in field education was seen as an opportunity for students to engage with a range of agencies and obtain exposure to a diverse range of learning experiences related to child protection.

However, it was noted that in some cases, the extent or nature of this exposure can be difficult to determine.

Workforce constraints

It was acknowledged that in some instances workforce constraints impact and influence expectations and requirements of professional roles. It was further noted that in some workplace contexts, processes and procedures are not necessarily supportive of best practice in child protection. The significant disparity between the literature and practice was also mentioned.

The dilemma of engaging students in consideration of good practice alongside the need to prepare them to deal with the frustration sometimes encountered in practice was identified as a challenge experienced by social work educators.

Cross discipline specialisation

It was noted that students may be exposed to child protection content through engagement with a range of subjects and experiences including field education, lectures by practitioners, role plays, online discussions and case studies in more generalist units of study. Active endeavours to incorporate child protection-related content across the curriculum were highlighted by a number of respondents with examples including the participation in specialisations and electives focussing on broader themes of child protection.

The need for interdisciplinary and interagency training and practice in child protection was highlighted.

Collaborative partnerships

The importance of establishing a collective voice between Schools of Social Work and employer agencies was noted.

Engaging in a consultative process with government bodies and agencies to develop relevant course content was identified as critical to help ensure that social work students have the opportunity to develop the necessary child protection skills and understandings to fulfil their professional role and responsibilities.

Meeting legal requirements

The role of mandatory reporting, and the importance of broadening the perspectives and definition of child protection, was documented. In particular, changing the focus from statutory responses to prevention was emphasised. It was acknowledged the broader focus on child protection is often given minimal attention in the curriculum.

Nevertheless, many respondents appreciated the need to incorporate child protection-related content and expressed a commitment to exploring the opportunities for the inclusion of this content in their social work programs.

Likewise many social work educators identified the need to work closely with statutory employers to ensure that students and graduates meet the legal and ethical requirements for working with children in professional settings.

Child Protection Curriculum Issues of Interest

A range of diverse and inter-related issues were raised by respondents. These comments have been collated and subsequently grouped as follows:

Course content

Interest was expressed in -

- reviewing the current status quo, and engaging in more explicit discussions related to the inclusion of child protection content in social work education programs
- examining the merits of providing specialist studies such as a Graduate Certificate in Child Protection, delivered in partnership with the field and the state based public sector
- conducting negotiations with States and Territories for professional recognition of higher level qualifications
- exploring opportunities to consider and address child protection issues from the child's perspective
- identifying and addressing the interrelationship between specific child protection related issues such as domestic violence, mental health and drug and alcohol affected families
- exploring options for interdisciplinary training on child protection.

Professional Practice

Comments in this category centred on the -

- complexities of addressing interagency and interdisciplinary practice and policy issues
- need to advocate for systemic change and resources in the area of child protection
- need for experiential, practice based and research approaches that inform the development of course material, and for research to be based on strong theoretical foundations for working with vulnerable and at risk families
- awareness of current and future research in the area of child protection, particularly research undertaken in Australian contexts
- necessity of exploring ways of addressing child protection content in workplace-based learning programs
- need to address the balance between protection and prevention and how this may relate to mandatory reporting and workforce issues
- clarification of the role of social work schools in shaping policy, practice and education in this field
- receptiveness of respondents to engage in discussions exploring theory, skills and competencies to further contribute to the knowledge and skills base of social work graduates.

The Challenges

The complexities inherent in addressing the issues of child protection in social work education discussed included:

- investigating ways to address the different State and Territory legislation, terminology and expectations related to child protection issues and responsibilities
- the challenges social work schools face in preparing graduates to practise within any field. While the importance and significance of child protection within social work education was acknowledged, it was also considered a specialised area in comparison to the broader area of child and family welfare
- exploring ways to incorporate and broaden the notion of child protection-related content in programs, while ensuring that the breadth of content provides an adequate foundation for students
- the need to acknowledge students' prior experiences and beliefs about dealing with issues in child protection and further challenging them to seriously consider the issues underpinning the field, and the implications this has for practice
- creating opportunities for professional conversations to inform directions and move the agenda forward
- addressing the transition from social work graduate to practitioner especially in the 'reality' of statutory practice contexts was emphasised as an important area to address, particularly in light of recruitment and retention issues
- finding innovative approaches to incorporating interagency and interdisciplinary practice in social work programs.

Suggestions and comments directly quoted from respondents:

We would welcome discussion of the theory, skill, competencies that should be included in a generic course

Challenges are students' experiences and world views in relation to tackling difficult issues in child protection and challenging students to critically reflect upon systemic issues underpinning child protection

We have chosen to focus electives on 'child, youth and family services' rather than the more narrow 'child protection' but within these specialised subjects, child protection content is ever present

A major issue around the inclusion of child protection is the challenge of expanding the curriculum given the current depth and breadth of the social work curriculum

We teach more broadly and address theoretical perspectives including attachment, ecology of childhood, child development, prevention and tertiary intervention. We look at legislation and some beginning assessment frameworks. We do run courses on a workshop basis and engage practitioners in specialist workshops

Major emphasis of the undergraduate and graduate units relating to children and child abuse is the social construction of child abuse and the impact of this on children, families and child protection intervention

The curriculum needs to reflect a complexity of knowing around the effect practice has on vulnerable populations including children

Section 4 Further Exploration

On Wednesday 30th January 2008, a National Social Work Education and Child Protection Forum was held in Melbourne. The forum was jointly hosted by the Australian Centre for Child Protection and the Australian Association of Social Workers. All Schools of Social Work that had responded to the survey were invited to participate. Subsequently the Forum was attended by a total of 33 participants representing 21 universities, and included Heads of Schools of Social Work, and child protection practitioners.

Discussion

The discussion focused on –

- the preliminary results of the curriculum mapping survey
- the need to consider and critically review child protection and child focused content in social work education programs
- exploring opportunities for identifying effective and efficient ways to address child protection related issues in social work education.

Topics

Issues identified by participants included -

- the professional role and expectations of social workers in contemporary Australian society
- the skills and knowledge base of social work graduates
- the multidisciplinary nature of the curriculum and the need to establish and broaden curriculum frameworks
- the need to promote evidence based practice
- the need to address practical and contextual challenges such as
  - difficulty of service provision in rural areas
  - incorporating strategies to help manage work related stress
  - managing the perceived bureaucracy of the statutory system
  - building and maintaining communication pathways between all stakeholders
- the need to shift the emphasis of child protection from notification and reporting to a more holistic approach to child well-being
- the need to overcome, in some instances, workforce constraints counteracting university education
- the importance of establishing a collective voice between the professional body and Schools of Social Work

Looking forward

Suggestions offered by participants to address some of the above mentioned issues included:

- the possibility of exploring the issues in a multi-disciplinary approach
- broadening the definition of child protection and moving away from the focus on investigation towards an emphasis on child well-being
- critically reviewing child protection-related content across all academic programs to identify what is currently being done well and the opportunities for further development
- reviewing the minimum requirements of the curriculum to ensure that all graduates have entry level knowledge, skills and standards
- developing curriculum resources, including multimedia resources such as DVDs that focus on the child's perspective for educators, practitioners and policy workers, with a long term view of a repository of resource materials on child protection (possibly online)
- broadening the social work curriculum framework and developing programs that incorporate child protection content
- conducting evaluations to help determine the effectiveness of the teaching and learning which occurs
- building the capacity of social workers and exploring opportunities for additional professional development in the area of child protection
- exploring innovative approaches to help prepare graduates to respond to the needs of children regardless of the field of service or agency
- building the research capacity of social work educators and disseminating their research to improve the link between theory and practice
- conducting further research into the transition from graduate student to practitioner, including possibly a longitudinal survey of social work graduates post graduation
- the promotion of exemplary practices and utilising technologies to link people across Australia
- exploring opportunities in the TAFE/VET sector to develop new training techniques, separating the functions of child protection into para-professional and professional registered staff with 'on the job' training
- establishing public sector State level graduate programs that focus on child protection issues
- holding a national social work conference with a specific focus on children
- establishing a Board of Practice for child protection
- building collaborative partnerships with other disciplines and public sector bodies to help improve career pathways for students and to improve staff retention rates. This could entail more fieldwork opportunities or a leadership program for students that would partner university and public sector departments in order to improve students' practical skills
- acknowledging practitioners, organisations and the media that demonstrate an active commitment to advocating for and protecting children's rights. This would help to publicise the importance of child protection and encourage leadership among practitioners.

Discussion and Conclusion

chapter 5

The Australian Centre for Child Protection greatly appreciates the commitment and support of social work educators who collaborated with us to provide the data and associated findings detailed in this publication. The conclusion and recommendations presented here are based on the survey responses, forum participants' ideas and suggestions, as well as our own interpretation of the data.

The findings from the study are drawn together and discussed in relation to the three key questions, namely:

1) What aspects of child protection are being addressed currently in social work education courses across Australia, and how are they delivered within the curriculum?

2) What are the perceived facilitators or barriers for the inclusion of child protection content into the core curricula of social work education?

3) What does the social work education community recommend to facilitate the advancement and effective inclusion of child protection components into future social work programs?

Essentially the data and findings reported herein have provided valuable insights to all three questions thereby realising the aims and purpose of the study.

Furthermore, the high rate of returns provides a realistic representation of the way in which child protection was addressed within social work education programs across Australian universities at the time of data collection.

In reading this discussion and any conclusions presented here, it should be noted that the primary aim of the curriculum mapping process was to identify child protection content in social work education programs. The advantage of the survey design was that it enabled specific and important details to be analysed and subsequently discussed, which related to the teaching and learning approach, allocation of time, delivery agents, course status and enrolment details.

The longer term outcomes and benefits anticipated from the study, and any subsequent actions related to expanding or enriching child protection content in Australian social work education programs, are to support the preparation of graduates who feel confident and competent to work effectively with children affected by abuse or neglect and their families.

Participants at the roundtable forum were given the opportunity to elaborate on the barriers and facilitators for change in this area. Valuable insights were gained that have and will continue to inform future directions and strategies for incorporating child protection content in social work education. As a result we look forward to working collaboratively with social work educators across Australia in the future.

What aspects of child protection are being addressed currently in Australian social work education courses, and how are they delivered within the curriculum?

This section discusses the findings of the curriculum mapping. Specifically it provides insights into the way in which child protection content is incorporated within social work programs. It is important to note that throughout the mapping process no conclusions or judgements have been made by the researchers regarding the merits or limitations of any approach reported by participants and respondents.

Aspects addressed

The development of social workers who feel confident to work with and respond to children at risk or experiencing abuse or neglect was identified as an important aspect within the social work education framework.

In exploring the associated issues the data revealed that:

- undergraduate students are exposed to a greater number and range of incidental child protection-related issues, but that due to the low rate of explicit linking of these to child protection issues, students are not necessarily recognising the inter-relatedness of the complex issues facing vulnerable and at-risk children and their families
- where details for integrated child protection-related content were provided for undergraduate programs, the allocation of teaching time generally ranged between 3 and 20 per cent. In contrast, the delivery of child protection content in the majority of graduate and postgraduate programs was reported within discrete teaching approaches
- generally the 3 - 4+ year undergraduate programs provided greater opportunities for the inclusion of child protection content than the shorter duration, graduate and postgraduate programs. This trend no doubt reflects the time constraints prevailing in shorter six month to two year programs

It is acknowledged that no assumptions can be made regarding the actual learning occurring, irrespective of whether the content is delivered discretely, integrally or incidentally.

The personal and professional implications, particularly for novice social workers who are not adequately prepared to address the complex and sensitive issues related to child protection was identified as a critical issue requiring further consideration and investigation. This was considered particularly important in light of issues related to the recruitment and retention of social workers and the associated stresses which may negatively impact on the individual and the broader work place setting.

The importance of adopting a multipronged approach, whereby opportunities are maximised to increase the awareness of the child was noted. Furthermore, the need to highlight the child's perspective and hear their voice was seen as critical in social work programs where typically the child's perspective may not be considered or addressed.

In addition, the need to broaden the notion of child protection to incorporate more than the statutory aspects of intervention was also identified as a crucial strategy. These concerns were accompanied by a perceived need to challenge misconceptions about the contemporary role of social work in child protection and further expand the social work knowledge base. Social work educators viewed this as a fundamental requirement in changing the beliefs and practices in the field of child protection.

Delivery Approach

Challenges related to the delivery of discrete and integrated child protection curriculum content were highlighted in both survey responses and forum discussions. Specifically, the concerns related to the overcrowded and generic curricula, time and resource constraints, consistency, and quality of content across social work education programs. The importance of finding ways to address these issues effectively was further noted.

Analysis of the delivery approaches revealed that:

- a third of all social work education programs did not report allocating any time to the teaching of discrete child protection content. In real terms this suggests that -
  - approximately 1,850 of the 5,552 potential social work education graduates in any given year may not be exposed to any ***discrete*** teaching or learning in the area of child protection
  - social work students in some States and Territories do not experience any exposure to discrete child protection content
- in the 67 per cent of cases that reported providing ***discrete*** child protection content -
  - the majority dedicated between eight hours to the equivalent of one week to this activity throughout the duration of the program
  - a high percentage of university based employees facilitate the teaching of the discrete child protection content.
- while findings reveal 83 per cent of social work education programs ***integrated*** child protection content within a semester course or unit, further analysis indicated that -
  - the majority of these courses or units reported allocating as little as 3-20 per cent of the unit to the teaching of child protection-related content
  - 75 per cent of graduate programs did not report providing any integrated child protection-related content.

In cases where incidental teaching of child protection content was reported, it was interesting to note that some undergraduate cases and all graduate programs did not capitalise on the opportunity to link the content to child protection. It is therefore considered important for social work educators to examine the variability and quality of incidental teaching particularly as such content may not be documented in curriculum or course guidelines. This is also important as there may be major implications for the continuity of students' learning potentially affecting the capacity of social work students to respond effectively to the needs of children facing adversity.

Survey respondents and forum participants further acknowledged the need to address these concerns, particularly in light of recent government policies which highlight the critical importance of responding more effectively to the needs of children and young people at risk of abuse and neglect to help improve their life outcomes.

What are the perceived barriers or facilitators for the inclusion of child protection content into core curricula?

A range of barriers and facilitators were highlighted in the survey responses, in the literature, and the National Social Work Education and Child Protection Forum. These are outlined below.

Barriers

Overcrowded, generic curriculum

The importance of incorporating the child's perspective and child protection-related content in social work education was acknowledged and supported throughout the mapping process. The challenges of addressing the practical complexities of refocussing current content or incorporating additional content in what is perceived to be an overcrowded generic curriculum were also highlighted.

Lack of Consistency in Delivery and Approach

The content delivery and focus within the child protection context varied across universities.

Participants acknowledged that the complex, interrelated and at times context specific nature of child protection can create dilemmas, particularly when making decisions related to content selection for programs.

Monitoring students' knowledge of child protection and building their capacity to apply this knowledge to practice contexts was also raised. Specifically, issues related to a graduate's experience of, and transition to practitioner status were identified as areas requiring further investigation.

Limited program evaluation was further highlighted as a critical issue. The need for documented evaluation of social work programs in order to inform future directions and meet the needs of social workers in contemporary workplace settings was also identified.

National Inconsistencies in Legal Requirements

Respondents and participants identified the challenges in trying to address the national disparities in social work programs due to differences in State/Territory based policy, legislation, context and service delivery.

The absence of a coherent framework around child protection was also perceived as a barrier. The need for social work educators to be able to access clearly defined guidelines when incorporating child protection-related content was seen as essential.

Narrow Perceptions of Child Protection

Participants indicated that in many instances a narrow focus on child protection, which emphasises identification and reporting, can result in many of the broader aspects of child protection being overlooked in social work programs.

Negative Media Perceptions of Social Workers and Child Protection

The role of the media in reporting issues related to child protection was perceived as problematic. On one hand, participants appreciated the role of the media in highlighting the need for reform in child protection, however, the tactics sometimes employed by the media were perceived as negatively impacting on an already fragile child protection system.

Finding ways to work alongside the media to raise awareness and promote positive change across the child protection system was identified as a strategy worth pursuing.

Lack of Communication

The lack of opportunities for establishing a collective voice amongst social work educators was seen as having major implications for progressing the child protection agenda. The need to explore possible avenues for facilitating open and frequent dialogue about the role of child protection in social work education was identified as an important priority.

Further concerns related to the perceived lack of communication between Federal and State/Territory departments, and the possible impact of this on social work practice. In particular, participants acknowledged the existing bureaucracy within the statutory system, understanding the context of the statutory child protection system and investigating ways to support the system to operate efficiently in order to meet the needs of vulnerable and at risk children.

Division between Child Protection Practice and Research

The limited availability of quantitative and evidence based research to inform practice and policy was a critical concern. Notably, the need for Australian research was identified, as was the need to increase the capacity of the profession to access and utilise large datasets.

Workplace Constraints

Addressing workplace issues such as work overload, difficulty in servicing rural and remote areas, isolation and the provision of adequate support structures, in addition to demand for assistance exceeding service availability were all identified as issues significantly impacting on the profession. Participants acknowledged the implicit and explicit implications these issues have on social work education, and the need to allocate time and resources to address these concerns was reinforced.

Facilitators

Working Together

Establishing a collective voice between social work schools, the AASW and employing bodies, and providing opportunities to engage in discussions to develop relevant and coherent frameworks for the inclusion of child protection-related content were seen as a means to strengthen the capacity of the profession. This approach was also recognised as a way to address the professional needs of students, graduates and experienced practitioners.

Furthermore, it was acknowledged that frequent open discussion could help facilitate a nationally consistent approach to aspects relating to professional training, and the development of a Statement of Principles.

Potential for Workplace Learning

Although obtaining a sufficient number of student field placements was identified as challenging for program coordinators, the undisputed merits of students participating in and accessing valuable workplace experience within a supported context was acknowledged. Importantly, investing time to maintain collaborative partnerships with employing bodies was perceived as a way to help provide and secure an adequate number of field placements.

Re-professionalising the sector

The need to provide quality support for novice social workers and/or statutory social workers was unquestioned, and viewed as a required strategy in addressing poor retention rates in social work occupations.

Exploring and implementing workplace structures and procedures which provide ongoing holistic support and professional assistance was identified as an imperative, particularly if the profession is to actively help build the capacity of child protection workers within the sector.

Furthermore it was considered that social work graduates may be better prepared to address the needs of vulnerable and at-risk children if they are exposed to broader notions of child protection. In particular, raising awareness about the importance of early interventions for children facing adversity, and helping social workers develop the confidence to apply strategies within clearly defined support frameworks also was highlighted.

Networks and Resources

Utilising information communication technologies to help disseminate resources and research, and connect people across Australia was recommended by participants.

The provision of supportive structures for educators at all levels, in addition to easily accessible and current resources, was noted as a requirement for the successful inclusion of child protection-related content.

It was also suggested that the development of teaching materials which incorporate the child's perspective are needed to support a shift in the paradigm, and to further bridge conceptual pathways between child protection-related content and child well-being.

Professional Development

The ongoing professional development of graduates and experienced social workers in responding to child abuse and neglect was considered to be paramount. It was noted that opportunities for teaching skills, and building a knowledge base in child protection could be pursued in multiple ways throughout the pre-registration and post-qualifying phases of a social worker's career. Participants acknowledged, however, that further discussions and investigations should be conducted to help determine the nature of the content to be included in training and development programs.

It was also suggested that child protection content developed collaboratively, and the adoption of a consistent approach to the delivery of this content would help facilitate improved learning outcomes for graduates.

Building research capacity

The value of evidence based research to inform practice and policy was identified as crucial. An example provided by participants included conducting longitudinal studies of social work graduates.

Support for promoting innovative practices and exploring the possibility of a national social work conference focusing on children was also recommended.

What does the social work education community recommend to facilitate the advancement and effective inclusion of child protection components into future social work programs?

In consideration of the question outlined above, and further acknowledging the need for quality research to inform policy and practice in social work education, the following were identified by participants as requiring further investigation:

- the merits of multidisciplinary approaches in the teaching of child protection-related content
- review of the social work curriculum frameworks and establishing minimum graduate requirements
- effective approaches that give children a voice and support a shift in social work education programs from a predominantly investigation and reporting paradigm to one with a broader emphasis on child well-being

- strategies and support structures which build the capacity of both novice and experienced social work practitioners to respond confidently and competently to child protection issues, regardless of their field of practice
- promotion of innovative practices that inform the development of relevant and current resources
- ways of utilising technologies to facilitate the development of collaborative networks, and to further support the dissemination of information and resources
- effective ways to manage practical complexities, including overcrowded curriculum, time constraints and disparities in the delivery and approach to child protection across States and Territories
- productive ways to engage with the media to present a united and informed approach in addressing child protection issues.

Strengths and Limitations of the Research Study

The perceived strengths and limitations of the research study should be considered within the context of the aims, purpose and key questions as previously outlined.

In recognising the continually evolving nature of social work education programs, it is important to keep in mind that the information collected during the study provides a snapshot of social work education at the time of data collection.

This research project is further characterised by a number of strengths including:

- the high rate of returns providing a realistic representation and broad coverage of social work education programs nationally across all universities
- the high rate of attendance at the roundtable forum, with a range of practitioners and representatives from universities across Australia
- the utilisation of two different data collection methods, namely surveys and a roundtable forum, to provide maximum opportunity to ascertain the true nature of child protection in social work education
- the potential to inform the evidence and knowledge base of content and practice related to child protection in social work education across Australia
- the opportunity for the social work education community to share innovative and successful practices in the area of child protection in social work education programs.

While one of the main aims of the research study was to map the child protection-related content in social work education, the research design also exposed additional areas requiring further investigation. For example questions surfaced related to:

- the perceived, or actual, merits and challenges associated with
  - providing discrete or integrated teaching of child protection content within a social work education program, including the need to explore ways to address the practical complexities such as time and resource constraints
  - the delivery of child protection-related content in multidisciplinary approaches

- the most effective and efficient way to incorporate child protection curriculum and the best place to situate associated content within generic or specialised social work education programs
- students' learning or understanding about child protection issues as a result of exposure to the content within and across social work award programs
- determining what constitutes the minimal level of understanding required by a graduating social worker
- the quality or nature of the teaching of child protection content within and across social work education programs

Conclusions

This research project has provided opportunities for social work educators to engage in professional conversations in order to -

- reflect upon current social work education practices and consider how and where child protection-related content can be incorporated
- contemplate future directions and strategies to address the identified issues and further discuss ways to incorporate child protection in social work education programs
- consider the implications of workplace issues identified by the profession, such as *re-professionalisation*, and what this means when considered alongside the challenges of addressing child protection issues.

Furthermore, due to the nature of the issues raised and discussed throughout the study, social work educators acknowledged the need to consider a multitude of perspectives, influences, constraints and opportunities when addressing the sensitive and complex domain of child protection in social work education.

In acknowledging that the curriculum mapping process has provided a current snapshot of the extent to which child protection is addressed in social work programs, it is proposed that the findings will inform future discussions, strategies and courses of action.

One of the underlying benefits of the research process was the opportunity it provided to initiate discussions related to child protection and social work education. While acknowledging that more questions than answers were raised, particularly with regards to overcoming practical complexities and resource constraints, and establishing strategies and criteria to help identify and promote exemplary practices, the commitment to improving current practice was unfaltering. Furthermore, the critical imperative to establish a collective voice between Schools of Social Work and professional bodies was emphasised in order to achieve a united approach in finding viable and effective solutions to the issues.

The need to shift the focus from an investigation and reporting paradigm to one which considers the overall well-being of the child also was highlighted. Recognition was also given to the implications this has for the profession, particularly with regards to training and development and the need for further investigation of how this may best be implemented in undergraduate and graduate programs.

Strong support was given by survey respondents and forum participants to the involvement of the AASW in identifying required child protection content in social work education and examining eligibility requirements for AASW registration.

Respondents and participants acknowledged the short and long term benefits of having social work graduates and experienced practitioners, regardless of their field of practice, who are able to respond competently and confidently to the needs of children facing adversity. The need for social work educators to be well informed about child protection issues in order to inform current social work practice was strongly endorsed.

Recommendations Emerging from the Study

In order to ensure social work graduates have the knowledge base and the confidence to competently meet their professional and legal obligations, and to enable them to work towards improving the outcomes for all children experiencing adversity due to abuse or neglect:

1) a shift in focus from an investigation and reporting paradigm to one which considers the overall well-being of the child is needed

2) the child protection content in social work education and eligibility requirements for registration should be examined by the AASW

3) a collective voice between schools of social work and professional bodies be established to achieve a united approach in finding viable and effective solutions to the issues raised in this study

4) further consideration be given to undertaking a range of research investigations in accordance with the suggestions and areas of identified interest outlined herein.

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Survey Instrument

Title Page:

Child Protection and Social Work Education

Code *(assigned by researchers upon receipt of completed survey)*
University
Faculty / School
Campus
Degree award
Program length
FTE student enrolment

Section 1A: Child Protection - Discrete courses / subjects / units.

(Please attach relevant course/subject/unit outlines and documentation)

Course title
Study period / semester
Year (1-4)
Course duration (weeks / hours)
Delivered by (e.g. uni staff / external provider)
Core / Elective
Number of places available annually and
If Elective - Average annual enrolment

Section 1B: Integrated Approach to Child Protection - courses / subjects / units.

(Please attach relevant course/subject/unit outlines and documentation)

Title of course unit
Study period / semester
Year (1-4)
Course duration (weeks / hours) (% of total course on CP issues)
Delivered by (e.g., uni staff / external provider)
Core / Elective
Number of places available annually and
If Elective - Average annual enrolment

Section 2: Child Protection-related Content.

Only one box should be marked for any factor / strategy.
(N.B. If not addressed – leave both boxes blank).

Taught but not linked to CP / Linked to Child Protection.

Child Development - physical / cognitive

- Low weight for age, failure to thrive
- Premature birth, low birth weight, sibling mortality
- Slow to walk, talk; poor literacy/numeracy for age
- Child with learning or physical disability

Child Development - social / emotional

- aggressive / high levels of conflict
- undue fear of adults
- excessive shyness / timidity
- withdrawn or wary / lacks curiosity
- miserable, unhappy
- extreme anxiety about abandonment
- resilience (very high or very low)
- low self-esteem / poor self-concept

Domestic / Family violence: exposure to

- physical violence in family
- excessive physical / emotional punishment
- extreme / uncontrolled anger and aggression
- constant criticism, belittling, teasing of a child
- unrealistic parental expectations of the child
- adult sexual activity / pornography
- media abuse / violence (e.g., TV / Internet)
- parental aggression / conflict with people in authority
- criminal record / criminal activity in the home

Neglect

Parental inability or disinterest in caring for children
Parent / carer who puts their own needs first
Child not collected from school, public places, other homes
Inadequate medical treatment or basic health care

Mental / Behavioural issues

- depression, anxiety, ADHD, hyperactivity
- cruel to animals
- sudden changes in behaviour
- extreme attention seeking behaviour
- persistent anti-social behaviour / bullying
- foraging or hoarding food / eating disorders
- substance abuse
- rocking / head banging / self-harm
- stealing / makes up stories
- running away
- inappropriate sexualised behaviour
- encopresis (soiling) / enuresis (bedwetting)

School attendance problems

Family / Environmental Issues

- Mental health problems – parents/siblings
- Substance Abuse - alcohol / drug problems in the family
- Family structure - stable / transient / reconstituted
- Maternal youth / teenage parents / sole parents
- Low income / benefit dependent / financial problems
- Parents / primary caregiver / siblings with a disability
- Indigenous history / disadvantage (e.g., stolen generation)
- Socially isolated parents / caregivers
- Serious parent-child and / or inter-parental conflict
- Role of child in family (e.g., child as carer)
- Inadequate supervision or safety provisions in home
- Parent / carer abused / in out-of-home care as a child
- Poor housing, community resources or networks

Dealing with Difference

Gender
- using non-sexualised language

- socialisation – femininity / masculinity

Sexuality and Homophobia
Disadvantage – economic/social
Cultural and linguistic diversity
Child refugees (with / without parents or relatives)
Racism (vilification; stereotyping, prejudice)
Creating child-safe/child-friendly environment
Educational needs
- individualised plans for student under Guardianship
- special needs / disability learning programs

Impact of isolation, exclusion, remote/regional locations
Child labour
Child rearing practices cultural / social norms

Proactive prevention strategies

Intervention programs
- infant home visiting/ early years learning initiatives
- mental health (e.g., suicide prevention / psych disorders)
- self help initiative (e.g., mutual support networks)
- building community capacity
- juvenile crime prevention
- drug and alcohol abuse initiatives

Children under guardianship / exit from guardianship support
Parenting programs
- literacy and numeracy programs
- separation and divorce
- dealing with toddlers / adolescents

Community partnerships initiatives

Professional Role / Responsibilities

Use of authority in statutory child protection intervention
Contributing positively to
- family and community development
- advocacy and empowerment of children/young people

Building interpersonal relationships with
- children and young people
- parents / caregivers / extended family
- community members

Statutory and legal child protection
Harm minimisation; risk management frameworks
- Stress management/debriefing
- Counselling, supervision and consultation

Addressing / managing incidents of victimisation and abuse
Negotiation and conflict resolution

Other:

Section 3

Comments / issues / concerns related to child protection in social work education curriculum.
(Discuss any future curriculum changes that may be planned or innovative approaches that you want to share here).

Section 4

Child protection curriculum issues that your School / Faculty is interested in exploring further: (Detail any opportunities, challenges or dilemmas here that you may wish to discuss in a future Roundtable meeting).