The training standards attained by any educational institution depend upon its curriculum, its teachers, the teaching materials available, and its students. The early experience of the Australian training bodies in each of these aspects is the subject of this chapter. Though their output was small, they were still confronted with basic issues in social work education and many of the problems experienced and the patterns set in this period continued into the post-war years.

**The Curriculum**

How long were the courses to be? At what level? What balance was to be struck between classwork and fieldwork, between psychological and sociological subjects, between generic and specific teaching? In designing its curriculum, each of the training authorities had to provide answers to these questions, but they did have the experience of the British and American training movements to guide them, and in fact they drew from both sources.

In the 1920s, some British schools granted diplomas to graduates only. This became the established pattern in the United States in the 1930s, largely as a result of pressure from the American Association of Schools of Social Work. The case for postgraduate education for social work was strong. It gave some chance to give professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes to people with a measure of maturity and with the social education of a university degree. In other words, the American narrow teaching of techniques, and the British broad social education unrelated to agencies’ practice could be combined into
what was in effect, one long professional course, similar to a medical course, starting from basic ‘background’ subjects and progressing to professional training enlightened by clinical practice or fieldwork. Moreover, a long course gave the student time to work through the various emotional and intellectual problems peculiar to social work education.

The Australian general training authorities were, at least to some extent, aware of the force of these arguments. At first, in Melbourne, it was mooted that the course should be postgraduate, and from 1933, the Sydney board stated in its prospectus that the most satisfactory educational preparation for its course was a university degree in Arts or Economics. The three schools discussed the question in 1938, and decided that postgraduate courses were not yet practicable.1

In fact, however, each of the three general training bodies followed the then typical British pattern of two-year undergraduate courses; but the British example was not slavishly followed, for the Australian courses included both a wide range of background subjects and classroom teaching of professional skills. With the considerable fieldwork requirements as well, this made too crowded a curriculum for a real grasp of both the background subjects and the professional skills.

All three general training bodies aimed to provide one basic course for every type of social worker, which, in the words of the Sydney board, was to impart ‘a knowledge of fundamental principles … essential in all branches of social work’. It is doubtful, however, if the early courses were generic in more than a rudimentary sense. More likely they consisted of an accumulation of pieces of experience drawn from social work’s many fields, from which only the gifted student could extract the common core.

Yet the development of one course was of the greatest importance in producing a unified occupational group. The training movement in Australia in the 1930s was spared the excessive number of claims for specialised educational provision which had been experienced in Britain and the United States. In general, groups in the various

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social work settings in Australia were too small or without sufficient interest to make substantial claims for specialised courses. Practical considerations alone suggested a pooling of educational resources in one course which pointed up similarities rather than dissimilarities.

Two different kinds of claim for specialised training provision were made upon the general training bodies. The more important was for further professional training for a particular field of social work after a general course; the other was to provide or help with sub-professional specialised courses which were taken apart from the general training.

Early, the Adelaide board received sympathetically a request for specialised training for psychiatric social work, but it did not have the resources to do other than provide a general course, which anyway it saw as encouraging adaptability: ‘too early specialisation does not tend to produce breadth of understanding and sympathy’, it declared in answering a League of Nations’ questionnaire. At the end of 1936, the director said, ‘We have to think in terms of a future Almoners’ Institute’.2 Until well into the 1950s, however, Adelaide students had to go to Melbourne or Sydney for specialised training in medical social work.

As has been described, such a training in Melbourne was in fact established first, but with the advent of general training it became a third year taken after the two years of the general course. There do not appear to have been moves towards any other similar specialised professional courses in Melbourne, run either by the general training body or by a separate institute.

The Sydney board presented a more confused picture. Two of its students in 1932 took a special course in nursery school work, and the board awarded them a certificate even though this was not primarily a social work field. Two years later, three students with the board’s general qualification took a one-year course in medical social work, and the board awarded them a special certificate, but, as has been noted, the almoners’ institute then took over this function. There is

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2  Amy Wheaton to Secretary, South Australian Board of Social Study and Training, 11 December 1936.
no evidence that the board actually provided any other specialised professional training, although some of its statements give a different impression.

When the three training bodies met in 1938, they found that there was considerable uniformity of content in their curricula. The availability of teachers and of existing lecture courses had, however, made for some local variation, and this was possible because any discipline which gave insight into the composition and behaviour of communities, groups, or individuals, had claims for inclusion.

It was expensive, and difficult, to have courses in the background subjects designed specifically for social work education, but if this were not done the degree of relevance of various subjects within a discipline could vary widely. Some sections of, for example, economics, psychology, biology, political science, history, and sociology, would be very closely related to professional social work practice, others only remotely. If the total training time was short, to spend a proportion of it on remotely relevant material was wasteful. Yet there could be advantages. Each of the training bodies used at least some full university degree subjects in its curriculum. In taking these, social work students mingled with students aiming to become, for instance, lawyers, teachers, psychologists, or philosophers, with benefit to the breadth of their outlook. Moreover, contacts and friendships between students of different faculties often carried over into professional life, with advantage to the discipline trying to become established. Also, it could be argued that systematic teaching in a firmly established course would have a greater educational impact upon the student than unsystematic teaching of a new course often by someone outside the university.

The Sydney board’s curriculum included three full university lecture series and part of another, and a number of specially constructed lecture series. The Victorian Council for Social Training started with five university subjects in its curriculum, but by 1937 only two remained. To these had been added lecture series of varying length arranged by the training body itself: Social Philosophy, Australian Social Organisation, Physiology, Nutrition and Family Budgeting, Psychology, Mental Hygiene, Social History, Problems of Society, and Casework. The Adelaide board’s curriculum included two existing
university subjects and a new one, Social Psychology, given by the board’s director. In addition, as with the other training bodies, there were a number of specially designed lecture series.

Of particular importance in each of the courses was the lecture series, usually combined with discussion classes, devoted to teaching professional skills. Not unexpectedly, this teaching was concentrated on social casework. Broader problems of community welfare were often stressed, particularly in Adelaide, but the teaching of techniques concentrated upon work with individuals. The theory of group work did advance during the 1930s, but still casework dominated the professional literature. Apart from the available teaching material, there were fewer agencies in Australia which concentrated on group and community welfare, and since, where possible, in their fieldwork students were placed under the supervision of qualified social workers and these worked mainly as caseworkers, the early concentration on casework was maintained.

From the start, each of the three courses included substantial amounts of practical work and these were later increased. At their 1938 meeting the schools agreed that practical work should be between a third and a half of the total work done by the student. As in Britain and North America, it consisted of supervised work in agencies, and visits of observation to agencies and institutions of social work significance. The agencies chosen for student supervision depended upon their relevance to the course, their willingness to cooperate without payment, the quality of the supervision they could provide, and the time available. Between 1932 and 1940, the Sydney board used over 30 different agencies for supervised student placements. The visits of observation did not have the educational potential of supervised work in agencies, but they did give students some idea of the actual nature of social provision and helped to give reality to classroom teaching.

During the 1930s, the International Committee of Schools of Social Work stressed the importance of social research. Occasionally, the early Australian social work students took part in research, but it had no regular place in the already crowded curriculum. In 1932 and 1938, the Sydney and Adelaide boards became members of the International Committee. The curriculum of each of the three training bodies was
patterned on overseas models, and if it could have been extended over three or preferably four years, it would have provided a reasonably adequate framework for the training.

The most obvious feature of the one-year curricula of the two almoner institutes was the emphasis on practical work, although later there was a trend towards more classroom training. Under the supervision of a qualified almoner, students saw the working of a number of hospitals, and they studied social and economic factors connected with ill-health.

Reciprocity with the British Institute of Hospital Almoners and with each other was important to both the Australian institutes. Not only did this provide prestige and interchange of knowledge, but it provided almoners with employment, both interstate and British. As early as 1932, the Victorian institute became affiliated with the British institute, and by mid-1939 the New South Wales institute had followed suit, which in turn established full reciprocity between the Australian institutes.

The Teachers

To put their training schemes into effect, the training bodies required many teachers from a variety of fields. Each teacher was limited as much by the curriculum, the teaching materials available, and the nature of the students as by his own training, experience, personality, aptitude for teaching, knowledge of social work, and interest.

The teachers were in two main groups, those teaching the background subjects and those the teaching directly concerned with social work. The first group were usually not qualified social workers; they were either full-time university teachers or were people practising another profession such as law, medicine, psychiatry, or psychology. In most instances, they were the best available in each city. Not always, however, were the university teachers interested in teaching social work students. Some did not like teaching only snippets of their discipline, and some thought the students’ practical work an unnecessary distraction from their academic work. Moreover, the teachers who were prominent in their professions had little spare time for preparing or revising lectures, and were often inexperienced in teaching.
The knowledge of actual social work possessed by the teachers of the background subjects was generally such that they often needed outside guidance, usually from the director, to make their subject as pertinent as possible for social work students. Further, for the course to be coherent, the work of the various teachers needed to be correlated, and this was difficult, for a number of busy people were involved, the directors had many other responsibilities, independent habits of thought were typical of university and professional people, and there was an assumption anyway that the students would see where it all fitted together. In addition, it was expected that much of the integration would occur in the teaching on the professional side of the course. Where possible, qualified social workers were engaged in this, but in the early stages this was often difficult to achieve. The story of the professional teaching is one of a group trying to pull itself up by its bootstraps.

The teaching of the professional discipline proper took place in the classroom and in the field. The first was largely the responsibility of the director, although social workers from agencies regularly helped with discussion classes, and gave some lectures. The second was done primarily by social workers when they supervised students’ fieldwork in the agencies, although members of the staff of the training bodies occasionally supervised students’ fieldwork directly. Again, the problems of integrating this side of the course were as considerable as integrating the background and the professional parts. In these early years, theory and practice were often unrelated. At least some of the supervisors in the general course did not know the theory, and even if they had, their practice and the theory would have been very different.

As the number of qualified social workers increased, there was a marked tendency to use as supervisors inexperienced trained people, rather than experienced untrained ones. One can surmise that the quality of teaching of the former would not have been high, but the alternative was worse. In May 1933, Joan Brett wrote to Edith Eckhard: ‘Very few of the large number of philanthropic societies here, with the exception of the COS have any idea of constructive casework and are quite incapable of handling training’. Three months later, she confided to the Victorian council’s president (Dr Newman Morris) that the training of students even at the Charity Organisation Society was unsatisfactory. In 1935, Jocelyn Hyslop, when speaking
to the Melbourne Ladies’ Benevolent Society, asked existing workers to look on the students as members of a younger generation preparing to carry on the work of their predecessors, and not as nuisances or as people only to be made use of, which had so often happened to her when she was training in England.³ When agencies were understaffed there was a strong temptation to use students as extra labour and to spend little time on their supervision. This was even greater when supervisors did not know what the students were being taught in the classroom.

Although the standard of supervision of fieldwork could not have been generally high, it did improve. The Melbourne director in 1936 called two conferences of supervisors, and in later years such conferences became customary. This kind of activity, greater consultation between the training bodies’ professional teachers and the supervisors in agencies, some direct supervision of students’ fieldwork by the teachers themselves, and especially the growth in the experience and number of qualified social workers who could supervise – all these helped to raise the standard of the practical work side of the course.

A reason for the establishment of the separate Institute of Hospital Almoners in Sydney was the dissatisfaction of the qualified almoners with the quality of professional teaching by the general training body. As soon as the institute was formed it began negotiations with the board to raise the amount and quality of the board’s professional teaching. Later it pressed specifically for an immediate appointment by the board of a tutor in casework brought from North America or Britain, but not until 1939 was an appointment made.⁴

In these early years, then, there were many reasons why the teachers in the background subjects and the professional subjects, in the academic work and the practical work, could not provide the students with an adequate and integrated education for social work; but there was improvement, particularly on the professional teaching side. Also, at least some of the teachers brought to their task enthusiasm for what they saw to be a significant new venture.

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³ Argus, 6 February 1935.
⁴ The person appointed, Elizabeth Govan, was to be in a key position during the war years in Sydney.
The Teaching Materials

Even if the courses had been longer, and the teachers suitable in all respects, there would still have been a lack of appropriate teaching materials – in the background subjects, in the professional subjects, and in the practical work.

Of particular importance in the education of social workers is the condition of the social sciences in their society. Until well beyond the 1930s, the social sciences, especially sociology (the discipline most concerned with social, as distinct from economic and political, phenomena), were in a very underdeveloped state in Australia.

This lack of knowledge about Australian society is not difficult to explain. In the larger, more industrialised societies, social research had spread from the study of social problems to the study of the society in which they were found. The Australian communities, however, had not been faced with sharp destructive social divisions. Their populations were solidly British in origin. There was only a small Aboriginal group. There were no tremendous extremes in wealth. There had never been a political revolution. The society was relatively late in becoming heavily industrialised. There was the myth that it was a classless society.

No local philanthropic trusts were willing to finance large-scale social research. The universities reflected the general lack of interest in social issues. The appropriate departments, if they existed at all, were small, their members lacked the money, time, and often inclination, to undertake empirical research. They leaned heavily upon British and American teaching materials. Further, their disciplines were often at a stage of development when armchair speculation unsupported by empirical inquiry went unquestioned. The position in Adelaide and Melbourne was less developed than in Sydney.\(^5\)

Although government departments in Australia early became involved in social provision, research within them was slow to develop, and when it did it was often of poor quality, concentrating merely upon the collection of statistics in stereotyped categories. The idea that highly

\(^5\) In 1940, eight of Sydney University’s 45 professorial chairs were in social science subjects; in 1941, three of Melbourne University’s 28 chairs; and in 1942, two of Adelaide’s 24 chairs.
qualified people were needed to do social research worthy of the name was difficult to accept in the public service, and this was not helped by the weak intellectual tradition of the Australian political parties. In political circles, as in the country in general, social questions were frequently considered to be matters of common sense upon which anyone could pass a judgement.

For many years, then, the teaching of the background subjects in the Australian social work courses was badly hampered by a lack of material. The same was true of the teaching material in the professional side of the course.

As late as 1954, an American, after teaching in one of the Australian courses, could say:

> There is a great need to develop teaching materials based on Australian rather than American or English practice. Much of the vitality is lost if one constantly uses materials from a different cultural context.  

The pattern of relying upon overseas, largely American, professional teaching materials was set in the 1930s. At the time there was no alternative, and with some modification they could be made at least roughly relevant.

Few collections of social work and social science literature existed in the Australian community then. Each training body built up its own collection, but general lack of funds kept it small, especially in Adelaide. To teach adequately such an eclectic discipline as social work, library facilities for teachers and students should be excellent.

In the practical work part of the course, social agencies provided students with experience from which to learn, but many of them were small and almost all were unaccustomed to careful self-examination. Students would have seen much, particularly in the early years, which was at variance with what they were taught was good practice. A spectacular, though somewhat educationally misguided attempt to show good practice to students was made when the Sydney board’s students, with the help of the Carnegie Corporation, visited American centres in the long vacation of 1934–35.

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6 Frances Hall, Report to the Board of Studies in Social Science, Adelaide University Board of Studies in Social Science, Minutes, 15 December 1954.
The Students

Of importance to the early training standards and thus to the nature of the new occupational group was the quality of the students.

Each of the training bodies agreed, for practical, educational, and sometimes moral reasons, that those embarking on the full course should be selected on both educational and personal grounds. The principle of student selection was especially difficult to apply in the early years. Opinions differed on necessary standards, interpretation of these standards varied, and a certain flexibility, particularly about experienced social workers, was politic in this transition period.

At their 1938 discussion, the general training bodies considered the selection of students in terms of age, education, and personal qualifications. Most delegates favoured a starting age of 20 years, allowance being made for exceptional cases. In this, they supported the practice of the Melbourne and Adelaide bodies. The Sydney board’s only age requirement was that no diploma was to be awarded earlier than the age of 21.

Maturity for practical work or for professional practice were the usual arguments advanced for the age requirements. Sound though these may have been, they presented a recruiting difficulty. During the waiting period after secondary schooling, many influences either in the university or in employment could channel potential social work trainees into other fields. In addition, a waiting period put social work as a career at a disadvantage with the careers for which training was immediately available.

In 1938, the three training bodies considered students should be capable of undertaking a university course and stipulated the Leaving Certificate or its equivalent as a prerequisite. Again provision was to be made for exceptional cases, particularly in the over-25 age group.

Within each student group there could, then, be a fairly wide range of age, experience, and intellectual ability. Striking appropriate teaching levels was, therefore, difficult, but at least while there were few students individual tuition was possible.
In addition to age and educational requirements, students were screened on grounds of personal suitability. If social workers were temperamentally unsuited to help people with personal and social problems (and this was conceived as their prime function), it was felt that they could harm both clients and themselves. Further, no matter how intellectually capable, it was a waste of time, energy and money, theirs and the training bodies’, trying to learn a discipline which their personalities precluded them from practising effectively.

Actual selection techniques usually included personal interviews as well as references, but they were not of the intensive character sometimes found in the North American schools. For a brief period in Sydney, all underwent psychological tests, but later this procedure was reserved for doubtful cases.

The 1938 discussion on student selection ended with agreement that educational background and cultural maturity must be considered, and that references should be obtained from people who knew the student personally and who knew the student’s work. A student was to have freedom from other commitments, satisfactory health, emotional maturity and stability, breadth of interest, ability to establish constructive personal relationships, and initiative and capacity in planning and execution.

The two almoner institutes reserved the right to determine which of those acceptable for general training were also acceptable for medical social work training. There were two main reasons for the insistence upon independent judgement. First, and this applied more in Sydney, the original selection was not considered rigorous enough; and second, hospital social work was seen as having pressures not found in other social work settings. It seems, however, that in practice most of the general students who wished to do the almoner course were accepted.

The entrance requirements, as with the courses themselves, reflected a conviction that modern social workers should be talented in a number of ways. Only a minority in any community had the natural and general educational endowment to gain the professional qualification, far from all of these had the financial resources, and at that time there was practically no outside aid available to students. Previously the main requirements for social work connected with non-government organisations were interest and leisure, and the one requirement to
work in a government department concerned with social legislation, as with other legislation, was literacy. Not everyone in existing agencies was engaged in potential social casework situations or policy-forming, but a great many would have been. It is probable that only a moderate proportion of these had the basic endowment to undertake the new professional courses. On the other hand, many with the basic endowment were not then engaged in social work, partly because it was not yet recognised that relatively rare talents were needed. Recruiting for the new courses therefore had to tap new sources and tactfully ignore some of the older ones.

None of the training bodies appears to have had a definite recruitment policy, something studied, planned, and executed over a period of time. Recruitment literature was sparse and was mostly of an all-purpose nature – directed to recruits, employers, donors, and the general public, all of whom had to be reached if the training was to become firmly established.

Press advertisements for students were not unusual, nor were special newspaper articles. The general coverage of the training bodies’ activities, at least in Melbourne and Adelaide, was reasonably good, much greater than at a later stage when they were better established and newspaper space was more competitive. Occasionally time was given them on the radio.

All the organisations represented on the training bodies were possible sources of recruitment, but there is little evidence as to the extent of their contribution. As workers became trained they themselves sometimes recruited for the profession. Most of the effort, however, emanated from the training bodies. Occasional attempts were made to reach students leaving school, and university students, particularly in the Arts faculties. There were occasions such as women’s conferences when information about social work training may well have brought recruits. To know precisely where the publicity penetrated, and how effective it was, is now impossible. Possibly personal contacts led many students into the courses.

The unquestioned assumption, based primarily upon British precedent, that hospital social work was women’s work meant that recruiting for the almoner courses was directed towards women, as was much of the recruiting for the general social work courses. Partly as a result of this,
but perhaps mainly from many other factors of which the limited recruiting was only symptomatic, almost all the pre-war students, and therefore the qualified social workers, were women – despite frequent repetition that the courses were for men and women. It is important to look at this in some detail.

The broad cleavage which had developed in Australian social provision by the time the training bodies were established has been observed. The government, mainly male, sector was often represented on the training bodies, and occasionally took part in the practical work section of the courses, but public servants or potential public servants had little encouragement to take the courses. There is an inbuilt slowness in government action, but by the end of the 1930s the New South Wales Child Welfare Department, through a proposed cadetship scheme, had shown the only sign of really active interest on the part of any state government. Almost all the government authorities had still to be convinced that the training was necessary for some, and worthwhile for many others, in departments primarily concerned with social welfare. Confidence in the existing standards, general suspicion of formal higher education, particular suspicion that much of the training was not relevant to the departments’ work, scepticism about the early standards of the training bodies, worry about the cost of training, anticipation of the difficulty of fitting trained people and their new techniques into an established administrative structure, fear for their own personal security, and lack of identification with social work in general either from ignorance or sex prejudice – these must have been some of the factors operating in the minds of the public servants.

The prime sources of advanced professional knowledge were at first the directors of the training courses and these were all women. There were restrictions to the employment of women in the public service, and public servants were not accustomed to working with women, at least not at policy-making levels. To say that sex prejudice did not enter into their judgement of the need for the courses offering would seem to be implausible.

Most of the organisations represented on the training bodies were in the non-government social services. Practically all these were small with slender financial resources. As has been mentioned, many men participated in these agencies, usually at policy-making and general
administrative levels but not usually as a vocation. The actual social work, the face-to-face handling of individuals or groups in need, was identified mainly with women.

The general training bodies were keen for policymakers and general administrators in the non-government agencies, and also for those in government departments, to take their courses. But it was difficult for people for whom it was a part-time interest, to undertake a two-year full-time course, particularly during the depression years. The small group of men in non-government agencies then actually practising as social workers could not be induced to take the course for a number of reasons. They were poorly paid and could not afford the necessary time or money, and their employers were in no financial or staff position to help, and there was also little chance of substantial financial recognition of the qualification. This applied too, of course, to those coming fresh to the field.

Many of the men worked in youth recreation. The concentration on social casework, to the neglect of social group work, made the courses appear irrelevant; in addition, a specialised, less rigorous training was already available, for at least some of them, through the Young Men's Christian Association.

Coping with the physically tough, antisocial elements and the chronically destitute element in society was usually the concern of men, and of the churches, because these elements were usually male, and it was considered either dangerous or not ‘nice’ for women to work with them. With no knowledge of effective remedial techniques, attitudes were inclined at the worst to be harsh, punitive and hopeless, at the best, custodial. Further, religious ‘saving’ rather than social rehabilitation, was often the focus. It was highly unlikely, at least in the early stages, that this traditional area of social provision would have provided many students for the courses. Attitudes were firmly established and the sophistications of social casework seemed irrelevant.

None of the clergy undertook the courses in the 1930s, yet some of them, particularly those attached to missions or in underprivileged districts, spent the greater part of their time in social casework situations. The training movement in Australia, as elsewhere, was essentially a secular movement, and one of its biggest challenges was to make
an impact on all the many social welfare functions the churches had traditionally, and were still, undertaking. Pre-war, little was achieved in this direction.

It may be true that some of the women concerned with the training bodies wished to keep the work for their sex, either because it was one of the very few interesting outlets for women's talents in communities where their roles were limited, or because they thought the work inherently more feminine in character. At points, the training movement was connected with the advancement of higher education for women, an aspect of the feminist movement.

These, then, were the factors working against the recruitment of male students. How did women students view it? Society at large was still at a stage when the idea of a professional career woman met with widespread resistance. A woman's natural role was seen as a domestic one, and it is unlikely that many of those taking the social work courses took a wider view. Granted that questions of students' motivation in undertaking any course are complex, it is apparent that the social work courses had advantages for women with marriage in mind. They qualified her for paid, interesting work which had some relevance to the life she would lead after marriage; and, in addition, compared with many university courses, was not too long or too difficult, yet gave her access to the university student body which raised her marriage chances. Somewhat later, when the training was a fully university one, ‘the deb. department’ was a label occasionally used in university circles for the department which trained social workers. If many of the students did their course without a sense of long-term commitment to professional practice, this would have had an effect upon the quality of their work and the teaching they received, to say nothing of the serious long-term repercussions for the building of a new profession.

The manifold effects of the identification with women of the new training were long-lasting, and made peculiarly difficult the effort to place all the responsible work in social provision, government and non-government, in the hands of people who were aware of its interrelation, and who shared common knowledge, skills, and values. There seems to have been little concern in the training bodies themselves about the lack of male students. Looking at the situation in the practical and short-term way in which they must have viewed
it, women students were far easier to recruit than men; in addition, social casework was the technique most advanced in its theory, and it was much more clearly linked with women than social group work, community organisation, or social welfare administration, where lack of theory made teaching more difficult. In any case, dealing with the broader aspects of the community in detail raised questions which could not be adequately handled in the time available in the courses. Uncertainty about the future, lack of time, money, and staff made it necessary to take the easier way.

At the 1938 conference of the training bodies, however, it was agreed, although apparently without reference to the important sex factor, that they must look to the public services to employ the trained people. ‘The lack of money in private agencies and the widening sphere of governmental activities’ were the main reasons given.

The length, level, and cost of the courses determined that the students were drawn mainly from the higher socioeconomic groups, from the professional and the more affluent of the white-collar families. At a time when educational opportunities were largely ruled by the socioeconomic status of one’s family, these courses confirmed the traditional class base of much of the voluntary social service activity. A description of the early students of the Victorian Council for Social Training mentions that many of them came ‘from Melbourne’s oldest families’. Although the social stratification of Australian communities was not as marked nor as rigid as in Britain, it was none the less real. It is doubtful whether the courses in the 1930s were of sufficient length or educational strength to shake the students’ outlook on society and to remould it to a new professional pattern; but this deficiency did prevent the qualified social workers from dividing off from the rest of the voluntary social service field too sharply too early. As for those administering government social provision, it is possible that, on occasions, the different social and educational backgrounds of the qualified social workers set up barriers – ‘Nice girls from nice families’ was a stereotype of qualified social workers which became established in at least some public service circles.

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7 Herald, 19 July 1934.
By starting with full professional courses, the Australian training bodies were immediately committed to handling many complex issues. Overseas example helped them to pick their way conceptually through their problems, but time and work were needed to give substance to many aspects of local training. Although the students of the 1930s did not receive a basic training comparable with that available later, their introduction to professional practice was much superior to none at all. The training bodies’ early concentration, however, upon casework and women, so natural at the time, remained as an impediment to a broad professional growth.