If social work was to be a profession worthy of the name, it was important that qualified social workers throughout each country combine in a single, effective, overall professional association, rather than remain isolated, either geographically or in specialist associations. To bring this about members had to identify with the national body and there had to be adequate provision for specialist interests inside it.

Again it was American social work which gave the lead. In 1955, four well-established specialist professional associations, two embryonic specialist groups, and the long-established general association, were all absorbed by the new National Association of Social Workers. Provision was made within the new association for specific interests, and by 1958 there were sections concerned with group work, medical social work, psychiatric social work, school social work, and social work research, and committees on community organisation and international social welfare. To be a member of the association, it was necessary to hold a degree from a graduate professional school of social work accredited by the Council on Social Work Education, and for membership of a section there were further qualifications. The association at the beginning of 1957 had roughly 22,500 members in 143 chapters.¹

The stage of professional organisation reached by British social workers was very much less advanced. They remained organised in a number of specialist associations, some of which, such as the Association

of Psychiatric Social Workers, and the Institute of Almoners, insisted on a full professional qualification for membership, but others were far more open.

The wide variety of British training schemes and much less emphasis on a generic professional training and a social work profession, made it difficult to organise a united national professional association. The British Federation of Social Workers was plagued by a shortage of money and by disagreement over membership requirements. After becoming almost moribund, it was replaced in 1951 by the Association of Social Workers of Great Britain. Amongst other aims, the new association was ‘to promote unity of interest and purpose between specialist groups’. Full membership was opened to individuals with a recognised training. In addition, associations of specialists, for whom professional training based on a university course of social studies was an approved way though not necessarily the only way, of entering their particular field, could become affiliated. In 1959, when it had eight affiliated specialist associations and 320 individual members, its chairman described it as still a small body. There were indications, however, that a need was now felt for a strong, informed, national coordinated body which could deal with training and employment questions and could make a significant contribution to social policy.²

Three outstanding changes took place in the way in which qualified social workers in Australia were organised professionally: the establishment of a national general association with branches in each state, the closing of the association to unqualified people, and the absorption of the well-established almoners’ association by the general national body, a development similar to that in America, although, of course, on a very much smaller scale.

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A National Comprehensive Professional Association

In 1945, 1946, and 1947, general associations of qualified social workers were formed in Queensland, Western Australia, and Tasmania, matching the earlier development of general associations in the three states with training bodies. As the war came to a close, a national general association to parallel the almoners’ association began to be discussed seriously, not only to unite professional social workers throughout the country, but also because of the growth of national and international social welfare programmes. On the initiative of Norma Parker who urged speed in establishing a national body that might carry some weight in Australian government circles, a constitution was drawn up, and was adopted after interstate conferences in Sydney in June, and in Melbourne in September 1946.

The aims of the Australian Association of Social Workers were those of a fully developed national professional association, but whether it could be an effective body depended upon its mode of organisation, the nature of its executive officers, its financial resources, the characteristics of its general membership, and the extent to which qualified social workers were distracted by other professional loyalties.

The association’s constitution was far from settled during these post-war years. At first it was experimental, then came the need to conform to the Commonwealth Arbitration Court’s requirements, and later the need to provide for special groups within the association; but the broad structure and machinery remained largely unaltered. The governing body was a federal council consisting of seven office-bearers and two delegates from each branch. Apart from questions on membership, the division of responsibility between it and the state branches was left vague. Throughout the whole period, the federal council met only at half-yearly intervals, and it became customary for the federal executive officers to refer most matters by correspondence to state branches; further, when the council did meet, it frequently wished to have its decisions confirmed by the state branches. This meant federal action was usually slow and much of each branch’s time was absorbed by federal business. By the end of the period no solution had been
reached in the problem of making federal council decisions more rapid and confident, while retaining the active interest and approval of the general membership.

The federal council was in Sydney from 1947 to 1953, in Melbourne from 1954 to 1958, and again in Sydney from 1959, and these two central states had provided its chief officers.

The organisation of the Australian Association of Social Workers at branch level during these post-war years varied widely, because of differences in the size of branches, and also because of a general tendency towards unstable organisational forms. The larger the branch, the more the association’s affairs were carried on through committees, the most important being an executive committee, or the committee of management as it came to be called. In both the New South Wales and the Victorian branches, a great number of sub-groups existed for varying periods and under a variety of names and terms of reference. Periodic attempts to regularise the relations between these groups and the executive group failed. Even when rules were drawn up for the purpose, they appear to have been either unknown by later conveners of the sub-groups and executive officers, or ignored by them. In general, there was recurring uncertainty about the roles of the executive and other sub-groups in relation to each other and to the general membership. Right at the end of the period, both the Victorian and New South Wales branches began to make a determined effort to rectify this.

Another administrative problem, this time encountered in all states, concerned the role of branch representatives on outside organisations such as the Council of Social Service, the National Council of Women, the Good Neighbour Council. Branches did not as yet have an established policy on the subject, although in the late 1950s, the two largest branches were giving some thought to it.

Problems of organisation naturally were more complex in the larger branches, but throughout the whole association they were rarely handled successfully. A certain degree of flexibility was desirable, but this was not a conscious policy, and in any case it could well have been argued that an organisation so liable to changes of membership needed stable organisational forms and adequate records. Older members were often aware that certain problems of organisation kept recurring,
and many members were dissatisfied with ineffectual discussions on association machinery. Because records were defective, non-existent, or inaccessible, and of a lack of awareness of the past among the many newcomers, there was little building from an established position.

An explanation of the administrative weakness of the association was, in part, that most members and executive officers had no particular interest in broad policy and administrative issues because they were women and also because they were mainly caseworkers. If many of the members had a sense of only short-term commitment to the work, this too would lead to a concentration on day-to-day details.

A strong factor in the association’s effectiveness was the nature of its executive officers at both a federal and branch level. Often presidents and secretaries were inexperienced, and sometimes they had little knowledge of the branch’s affairs. Throughout the whole period, the association relied upon changing, honorary, spare-time officers. The load borne by the officers, particularly the secretaries in the larger branches, became overwhelmingly heavy in the 1950s. Either the branch’s work or the officer’s own professional work was, therefore, likely to suffer. As they were unpaid as well as overworked, it was difficult to call the officers to account if they were inefficient, and as an experiment in 1956, the Victorian branch employed, part-time, a married woman member as its secretary.

In the early 1960s all the federal executive officers were still honorary, yet as early as 1947, the federal president had said the burden of the association’s work at a federal level was becoming intolerable.3 In 1949, part-time clerical assistance was employed; three years later the federal executive officers argued strongly for the appointment of a permanent full-time executive secretary, and the outcome was a money-raising scheme by a committee in the New South Wales branch. After four years of toil this yielded the equivalent of only a year’s salary for a well-qualified, full-time, executive secretary.

Not only did the association now need salaried services, but it also needed, at least in the largest states, premises of its own – to provide a tangible witness to the existence and serious intention of the association, to give a sense of continuity and permanence to the social

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3 Presidential Address by Miss Norma Parker, 15 August 1947.
workers themselves, and, not least important, to provide a permanent home for the association’s records. In 1960 the New South Wales branch began to think seriously about acquiring premises of its own.

By the end of these post-war years, it was apparent that the only realistic long-term solution to the association’s inefficiency was considerably increased membership fees, yet there was still hesitation to take this step for fear that it might discourage membership of the association. The initiative lay with the association’s members since they were its only source of income.

The movement of the New South Wales general association in 1945 towards an association exclusively for qualified social workers was carried to its conclusion by the founders of the Australian Association of Social Workers. After June 1947, only qualified social workers were to be admitted to membership. When the constitution was recast to meet the Arbitration Court’s requirements, it was specified that membership was open to professionally employed social workers holding a qualification from a school of social work approved by the federal council. Usually it was considered desirable to have as associate members qualified social workers not professionally employed, but there continued to be doubt over their legal position. Occasionally in the smaller branches in particular, the admission of unqualified people with limited rights was suggested, but normally there was strong opposition to this.

For membership qualifications, the federal council automatically accepted those of the Australian schools of social work. British and other overseas qualifications sometimes presented a problem, however, since some were academic rather than professional in character, and others were only specialised in scope. In the mid-1950s, the federal council sought the guidance of the Australian schools in setting admission standards, and towards the end of the period, the trend was in the direction of raising them.

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4 By 1960 the subscription in the larger branches was £5 a year, and rather less in the smaller ones. Just before the federal council was formed in 1946 subscriptions were: New South Wales and Victoria, £1 1s; South Australia 10s 6d; Queensland 5s. At first 5s of each branch’s membership fee was paid to the federal council, in 1949 this became 10s, and in 1952 was raised to £1 10s.
In 1949, the association had roughly 300 members. In 1958, the number was 360, three-quarters of whom were in New South Wales and Victoria (43 and 32 per cent respectively), and the branches in Queensland, Western Australia, and Tasmania were very small (each 4 or 5 per cent). The future distribution according to branches was likely to be altered by the foundation of new schools of social work, increased student numbers in Victoria, and the possible establishment of new branches at Canberra and Newcastle where small groups of qualified social workers began to meet during the 1950s.

Although the actual proportion fluctuated according to the attention given to fostering membership, the great majority of qualified social workers in employment in the various states were members. The low proportion of professionally experienced people, and the wide variation in the degree of professional commitment found amongst social workers in employment was likely, therefore, also to be found in the association’s membership.

Because there were so few qualified men social workers, the association’s membership remained largely of women, and for the most part its officers were women. This made it easy for outside bodies to dismiss the association as ‘just another women’s organisation’, especially when in four states its branches were affiliated with the National Council of Women.

The extent to which the qualified social workers were distracted by other professional loyalties from participating in the general association depended largely upon the activity of the Australian Association of Almoners (in 1949, ‘hospital’ was dropped from its title). Its branches in New South Wales and Victoria were roughly a third the size of the local branches of the general association and they met with about the same frequency. The almoner group in South Australia was proportionately rather larger, but it met less often. In addition, a tiny branch in Western Australia survived briefly in the late 1940s. In the period 1947–57, the central council of the almoners’ association met between four and eight times a year. It was in Adelaide 1946–48, Melbourne 1948–52, and Sydney 1952–59.

During these years, the two associations cooperated quite frequently at federal and state levels. Many almoners belonged to both, and leadership of the general association was often in the hands of
an almoner. Its first three federal presidents were qualified as medical social workers. The climate in the post-war years was favourable to an even closer relationship between the general and almoner groups. The post-war emphasis on a generic professional education stressed the common core of all social work. Further, the absorption of training for medical social work by the university schools and the emergence of other specialist interests within the broad professional discipline encouraged social workers to think in terms of a common association which would cater for specialist interests inside it.

Eventually, in May 1958, after over a decade of intermittent discussion, the Australian Association of Social Workers made provision for special groups, at a branch level, of members with distinctive professional interests. The arrangements were such that specialist interests could have wide scope within the association, although they were under the general surveillance of the branch’s committee of management. By the end of 1958 a Medical Social Work Group had been formed in both New South Wales and Victoria, each group having identical objects and almost identical terms of membership. The disbanding of the Australian Association of Almoners in March 1959 marked the end of a phase in the development of professional social work in Australia. The substitution of ‘medical social work’ for ‘almoner’ signified a wider professional identification, and a general levelling up in the standards of social workers in other than medical settings.

The need to accommodate special groups within the Australian Association of Social Workers presented it with yet another organisational problem. For the association to be efficient in its purposes, it now, more than ever, needed greater continuity of membership and executive officers, better records, more stable functions, paid staff, and proper accommodation.

Protecting Social Workers’ Interests

The poor employment conditions experienced by most of the qualified social workers since the war was partly a commentary on their ineffective attempts to improve them. What they did manage, however, perhaps partly to the detriment of short-term gains in employment conditions, was to keep clear of various industrial groups who might break up their unity or lower their prestige. One solid post-war
achievement was registration with the Commonwealth Arbitration Court (from 1956, the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission), which provided some safeguard to their corporate existence; but by 1964 the second step of seeking an award had not been taken, even though much of the discussion before registration had concentrated upon this.

The experience of three different groups of qualified social workers in the immediate post-war years brought the question of registration with the Arbitration Court to the notice of the Australian Association of Social Workers. First, in South Australia, almoners were handicapped in their negotiations with the state Public Service Board because there were no recognised employment conditions for social workers. Next, a group in the Commonwealth public service were required to join a union to obtain full salary rights even though there was none with the appropriate interests and status; and then the almoners in New South Wales were threatened by absorption into the inappropriate Homes and Hospitals Employees’ Union. The matter was brought to a head in 1949 by the claim to industrial authorities that the Federation of Scientific and Technical Workers could cover social workers in industrial matters.

To help carry a unanimous federal council decision to take the first steps towards registration, the case was put to the general membership in a detailed memorandum. It was argued that the professional status and skills of social workers could only be protected by suitably defined employment conditions. The individual discussion of the past on these questions had proved ineffectual. Some social workers interested in new developments had taken posts which were underpaid, but it was doubtful whether they served the interests of social workers or their clients if they continued to accept this. Unless recruitment figures could be increased by improved status, salaries, and working conditions, ‘a period of frustration and stagnation [appeared] inevitable for professional social work in Australia’.

To counter doubts about the propriety of a professional group registering as a trade union, the memorandum pointed out that, unlike medicine and law, but like teaching and nursing, the social work profession did not consist primarily of self-employed persons; further, when doctors were in government employment, they had sought industrial protection. In Australia, trade unionism was widely
accepted as desirable for employed persons, and in general agencies employing social workers would welcome regulated conditions of employment.

Registration would prevent the inclusion of social workers in unions foreign to their interests, but would not prevent them joining another union if they so wished. If some but not all of the association’s members registered as a union, this was likely to cause bitterness and dissension in the profession, since only a small group would be spending their efforts and money for the benefit of the whole.\(^5\)

The memorandum’s arguments were convincing, and in September 1950 the general membership of the association very firmly endorsed the federal council’s decision to seek registration. After a series of delays, in 1955 the association became registered with the Commonwealth Arbitration Court – as an organisation of persons ‘usually employed for hire or reward in or in connection with the industry of professional social work’.

The association did not press on to seek a federal award for a number of reasons. It was deterred by the possible cost, the difficulty of explaining much of its work because of its intangible nature, the fear that an award might prevent some voluntary agencies from employing qualified staff, the possibility that state groups might seek state awards, and finally, general uncertainty about industrial matters. The association could have received assistance on the last point if it had accepted an invitation to affiliate with the Council of White Collar Associations (later the Australian Council of Salaried and Professional Associations), but it decided to remain independent.

Although the Australian association did not seek an award, from its beginning it took some responsibility for members’ employment conditions. In the immediate post-war years, an increasing number of agencies, particularly government ones, sought from it information about salaries and working conditions, and the need for an authoritative statement such as the British Simey Report was felt. In 1949, a federal committee of the association sent to each branch a statement on possible employment conditions, and then began a study of actual

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\(^5\) Executive Officers, Australian Association of Social Workers, Memorandum on the Registration of the Australian Association of Social Workers as a Trade Union, 15 May 1950.
conditions in New South Wales. It did not report until 1952, and the study was not extended as originally planned; but the association did begin an inquiry through another New South Wales committee into the employment of men social workers. This found that the main male employment opportunities were within government agencies which could pay a suitable salary, and recommended that more cadetships be offered, and that administrative posts be opened to qualified men. The findings of both this and the earlier general New South Wales study were fruitless.

In the later 1950s, there was increased interest in employment conditions in the two largest branches of the association. In 1955, a Personnel Practices Committee was established in New South Wales to keep itself informed on social workers’ employment conditions, but by 1957 it was without a convener. In 1956, a Status and Salaries Committee was set up in Victoria to achieve some coordination between the various groups of association members who were negotiating about salaries, since ‘what [happened] in one group [had] a vital effect on others’. It was slow to become effective, however. It was in fact the success in 1958 of a sub-group working through the professional division of the Victorian Public Service Association which made Commonwealth government and voluntary agencies re-examine their salary levels.

Medical social workers’ salaries continued to be linked with those of inappropriate hospital groups; but there was a new departure in 1959, when the New South Wales branch of the Australian Association of Social Workers negotiated with the Hospitals Commission on behalf of the medical social workers. It argued, with some success, that their salaries should be related to those of social workers in other fields and not to those of other hospital groups. The branch declared its policy was now to work for equitable salaries for all social workers, and it hoped employers would accept this. Yet to do this effectively, in one branch or throughout the association, up-to-date knowledge of the employment conditions, and ways of altering them, was needed, and it was doubtful whether changing honorary spare time services could meet this need. Also, while the association remained relatively inactive industrially, social workers in government employment were induced to join public service bodies, which reduced the association’s possible area of industrial cover.
Periodically during these years, the subject of the use by unqualified people of the term ‘social worker’ was discussed, but as yet the qualified social workers could claim no monopoly on the title. Moreover, some of them were not comfortable with it, because of its ‘charity’ overtones and non-professional sound. Until the title ‘social worker’ was used exclusively and normally for a qualified person performing social work, the public image of the social worker was likely to be very blurred, or a false one as far as qualified social workers were concerned.

The question of a written code of ethics for Australian social workers was raised in 1954 when a Queensland Red Cross official demanded access to social workers’ case records. Subsequently the federal council of the social workers’ association asked branches to consider the subject. Two important points arose in the resulting discussion: the level of generality of a code, and its degree of relevance for actual practice. In August 1957 the association agreed to use, although without any interpreting or enforcing machinery, an experimental code for a set period.

This code reflected the philosophy and general principles of professional social work. It spoke of the worth of every individual and men’s mutual responsibilities to each other, the need to respect clients’ confidences and their right to make their own decisions, the need to balance individual and community interests when these conflict, a responsibility to have self-understanding and to understand others, a duty individually and collectively to increase professional competence and use it for the community’s good, an obligation to act with professional and moral integrity and to enhance the standards and prestige of the profession.6

Social Action

Turning from the negotiations on salary and employment conditions to the post-war efforts of qualified social workers to improve the community social welfare, it is apparent that, compared with the war years, there was some waning of interest. Many and diverse factors at different times held their collective social action in check

6 Australian Association of Social Workers, Interim Code of Ethics, August 1957.
– the continued concentration on casework in their training and practice, the inexperience and employment instability of many of them, their lack of specialised knowledge in many areas of social policy, fear of political involvement, identification with employing agencies rather than with the professional group, fear of losing cooperation in social welfare and professional circles, lack of a tradition for social policymakers to use specialist opinion – especially when it came from women – the ability of some of them to change their own agencies’ policies from within, and so on.

Frequently action taken by the qualified social workers was not publicised, which meant that they appeared far more timid and complacent about social provision than in fact they were. Nevertheless, the following challenge issued to American social workers in the 1930s could well have been issued to Australian social workers in the 1950s.

Do social workers believe that any other profession is better able to speak authoritatively of need for, and method of, achieving maintenance of normal family life, protection of children, prevention of delinquency, extension of public social services including public health and medical care, creation of social group activities, or improvement of housing conditions? To the extent that the solution of these problems is within the competence of any profession, it is certainly within that of social work.7

The variety of their community interests is illustrated by a glance at the activities of the New South Wales branch of the general association. The interests of its members, arranged roughly in the chronological order in which the branch became involved in them, were as follows: the extension of medical benefits to sick, age and invalid pensioners in their homes, women’s employment problems, various issues connected with migrants’ welfare, marriage guidance, fostering interagency cooperation, compiling a resource file on leisure-time activities, publishing a newsletter for the local Council of Social Service, radio talks on social welfare topics, the needs of country people, the care of the aged, recreation for special groups, the use of the central index, the non-payment of pensions to patients in mental hospitals, the welfare of unmarried mothers and their babies, the welfare of pensioners’ children, support of the local Council of Social Service, ‘The Call to the Nation’, the employment of the physically handicapped, the inclusion

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7 Esther L. Brown, Social Work as a Profession, p. 186.
of family casework services in a list of parent education facilities published by the Minister for Education, contributions to the Lord Mayor’s Flood Victims Appeal Fund, supporting the Australian Social Welfare Council financially, preventing sensational newspaper articles on social work cases, cooperation with the Department of Education, the Australian Rheumatic Council, and the New South Wales University of Technology in various surveys, promoting and supporting the New South Wales Association for Mental Health, housing needs and the Commonwealth–States Housing Agreement, anomalies in legislation relating to deserted de facto wives, the relationship between state and federal children’s allowances, support of the Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association, the housing position of marginal families, the New South Wales Child Welfare Act, evidence to a committee preparing legislation on the care of the intellectually handicapped, and letters to the press about pension anomalies and hospital benefit payments.

Similar lists, though rather shorter in the smaller states, could be given for each of the branches of the general association and for each of the three branches of the almoners’ association; but it must be remembered that frequently these interests were not spread throughout the whole group and often were shared by outside groups, that the amount of time spent on each, and the degree of effectiveness of any action taken, varied greatly, and also that this list covers about 15 years of endeavour in the largest of the groups.

Educational Opportunities

The post-war improvement in education for social work was not confined to basic training. An increasing number of educational opportunities became available to the qualified social workers, especially in New South Wales and Victoria, and if they were medical social workers. These opportunities were provided by the training schools, some employing agencies, other social welfare organisations, overseas experience, and by their professional association.

The training schools helped many practitioners to increase their skill and knowledge by their greater concentration on standards of student supervision. In addition, both the Sydney and Melbourne schools provided occasional refresher courses. In the mid-1950s, there was a significant new development in Sydney when an autonomous
Committee for Post-Graduate Study, consisting of people from the school and the professional association, was established. In the following years, it sponsored various lectures and discussion courses, and in 1961 brought out a new publication, *The Australian Journal of Social Issues*.

Another aspect of this post-war period was a growth of staff development programmes within agencies employing qualified social workers. Two national agencies, the Commonwealth Department of Social Services and the Australian Red Cross Society, paid particular attention to this. Each had its library, its staff meetings, and its national staff conferences. Moreover, the social work section of the department regularly sent to agencies, associations, and social workers throughout the country, selected journal articles, and general and specific bibliographies of material in its library. By the end of the period it was customary in most agencies to set aside working time for professional staff development.

The growing number of coordinating bodies in particular fields of social welfare often provided the qualified social workers with opportunities to learn. To cite just one instance: by 1958 the Australian Advisory Council for the Physically Handicapped had held nine conferences. In addition, addresses, discussion, study, and occasional research, on a wide variety of social welfare topics, were undertaken by the various councils of social service. By now the journal of the New South Wales council was well established, although a similar publication in South Australia lapsed after a trial period. In the 1950s, both the Victorian and New South Wales councils held state social welfare conferences; but there was no national social welfare conference until 1960 because of the delay in establishing a general national body.

This delay also meant that for the greater part of the period, Australia had no official representation at the International Conference of Social Work. The Australian Association of Social Workers was represented, sometimes only after considerable effort, at each of the Conference’s post-war meetings – at the preliminary discussions at Brussels and the Hague, and at the Fourth Conference in Atlantic City, in 1948; and at the subsequent biennial meetings held in Paris, Madras, Toronto, Munich, Tokyo, Rome, and Rio de Janeiro. Some of the association’s members became acutely aware of Australia’s international social
welfare obligations, especially to the under-developed countries. Directly and indirectly, many qualified social workers also benefited from other conferences held overseas during the period.

Qualified social workers often went abroad after the war. The federal president of the general association commented in 1950 on the migration overseas, especially of more senior people, in search of professional education and experience. In the early 1950s, it was estimated that about 40 Australian social workers were away – seven in the United States, one in Canada, and most of the others in Britain. This pattern was to be expected while entry into the country, money problems, and employment, were far easier in Britain than in North America, and, in addition, of course, there was a general inclination for Australians to visit Britain. Both the general and almoner associations concerned themselves with overseas opportunities for their members, and especially notable was the establishment by the general association in 1956 of machinery to give professional endorsement to social workers who sought to work and study in North America.

The post-war educational opportunities most generally available to the qualified social workers were those provided by their own professional organisation – through meetings, seminars, study groups, conferences, and journal. The general membership in each branch of the general association and of the almoners’ association met regularly. Association business absorbed some of their time, but the greater part of it was usually spent in listening to and discussing addresses by members of their work and experience, or by non-members, such as visiting social workers, doctors, psychologists, nurses, government officials, and university teachers.

Occasionally, usually when an overseas social worker was visiting, branches of the general association held refresher courses and seminars. To help qualified social workers from interstate or abroad, orientation programmes were also provided by some of the social work groups.

To give close attention to a subject, to provide opportunities for many members to participate, and to allow for specialised interests, various study groups were formed in the branches, especially the largest branches, of the general association. With encouragement from the federal council, most of the branches tried, usually through study groups, to prepare for the association's national conferences. All branches in 1954 reported difficulty, however, in arousing members' interest in pre-conference study groups, and by 1957 there was little preparation for the association's national conference, except in New South Wales.

The founders of the Australian Association of Social Workers agreed that one of its first activities was to hold a conference. From 1947 to 1957 at two-yearly intervals at Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide in rotation, the association held national conferences. At times, because as yet there was no national body to run a social welfare conference, pressure was placed upon the association to make its own conference much broader in scope. Occasionally it did invite outside speakers and opened some of the sessions to the public, but the conferences were kept mainly for the professional development of qualified social workers. Members of the fourth conference decided that the national conferences of social work should widen the horizons of the association and of individual social workers, help develop a common body of knowledge and purpose for Australian social work, and provide educational and personal stimulation.10

The Australian Association of Social Workers did not hold a conference between 1957 and 1961 so that its members could give their maximum support to the first National Conference of Social Welfare. This conference was in no way a substitute for the association's conferences, but once it was established, the association could concentrate wholeheartedly on its members' professional development in its own biennial conferences.

The association's national conferences had an important public witness aspect. The publicity they received in the press, and amongst employers, contributed to the general recognition of qualified social workers as a distinct national occupational group with professional

aspirations. But with the growth in the number of conferences of social welfare interest it was important to think clearly about the function of each, to avoid too much overlapping and to make each a worthwhile occasion.

The general, though slow, improvement in the amount of social science and social work literature in Australia in these years did help to spread knowledge gained by local experience but little of what was produced was printed in a permanent form. The first move towards a national professional social work journal was made when, in September 1945, the New South Wales Social Workers’ Association began publishing a monthly Social Workers’ Digest. When the Australian association was formed it was suggested that it should take over the publication, but though a national journal was considered desirable, the question was postponed and soon afterwards the Digest lapsed.

The next move was in Melbourne when the Public Relations Committee of the Victorian branch of the general association began a slim two-monthly publication called Forum. Early in 1949 it became a quarterly, and in mid-1949 a joint publication with the Victorian branch of the almoners’ association. In 1950, on the suggestion of its Victorian branch, the Australian Association of Social Workers decided to develop Forum into a national journal concerned with professional social work. The Australian Association of Almoners, who had themselves been showing interest in a journal, agreed to join in the venture, but the main responsibility rested with the general association.

At first the new Forum had financial problems, but these were solved in 1955, when the membership fee of the general association was increased to include a subscription to the journal. Problems of control and responsibility were settled the previous year by a federal council decision that the committee which published Forum should be one of its standing committees even though its members were drawn from and nominated by one branch. At the same time, issues settled down to two a year, mainly because of cost and the dearth of contributors.

For a variety of reasons, very few of the members of the association made contributions to the journal during the 1950s, and many of these had to be solicited, or were a record of papers given on other occasions. Editors, therefore, could not be very selective and description rather
than analysis predominated. *Forum* did, however, slowly improve both in form and content, and in 1959, a change of name to *The Australian Journal of Social Work* was considered justified. It was now intended to make the journal a truly national professional publication. Some four years later, its format was again improved and it promised to become a quarterly.

There were, then, expanding educational opportunities for social workers during this period, and many of them were provided through the professional association; but whether individual social workers made full use of the opportunities depended on where they lived, where and how long they worked, their financial resources, and their sense of professional commitment.

The ideal to which the qualified social workers in Australia appeared to be moving was an Australia-wide association containing all qualified social workers, an association which catered fully for both general and specialist needs; one which provided a wide range of educational opportunities, alone and in conjunction with other bodies; an association which was effective in its community activities, both in its independent action and in combination with other groups; and one which protected the interests of its members through raising their status and salaries, through defining their areas of professional competence, and through sponsoring a common ethical code.