The previous chapters have given an historical analysis of the development of professional social work in Australia. They were written in an attempt to give present-day social workers an account of the tradition to which they are heirs, and to make known to others an historical story of considerable significance for human welfare. This final chapter discusses what appear to be the main contemporary issues facing the Australian social work profession.¹ Not all of these are ‘issues’ in the sense that they are matters of widespread lively concern, but they are all suggested by the analysis of the development of the profession and by observation of the current scene. The profession can, at least partly, mould its future according to its own values if it consciously weighs the advantages and disadvantages of the various courses lying ahead.

Briefly, the issues which demand discussion are these: Will men as well as women engage in the profession? Is the basic professional education to be raised to a graduate level and what of postgraduate education? Is social casework to remain the dominant social work method? Are social work services to remain available to only a small section of the community? Does social work need better modes of organisation? Finally, should the profession have far greater numbers? Clearly these are interrelated questions, but for clarity they will be discussed singly.

A Mixed Profession?

In recent years, mainly on the grounds of equality of opportunity and waste of intellectual talent, arguments have been put forward to open up to women all areas of university education and the established professions. The story of this book is an oddity in that it tells of the establishment of a new profession largely by women, and much of its character has stemmed from this fact. That the social work profession has developed as far as it has in a not very encouraging male environment has been due to the general validity of its arguments for professionalism in social work, to the personal ability of a small group of its leaders, and to the standing of the few men associated with, though not part of, the profession. It no longer has to fight for survival, but it does face difficulties if it wishes to make a full contribution in the fields in which it claims to have special competence. Not the least of its problems is the continuing preponderance of women.

The advantages claimed for men qualified social workers over women are many. They have a greater sense of professional commitment in the early stages of their career. They provide essential employment stability in social agencies. They stay in the profession longer. They are not hampered by community attitudes to professional women. They rely less completely upon their work for social and personal satisfactions because they have a family and home of their own. They are more likely to gain recognition of qualified social work in public service circles. They are less likely to accept inadequate employment conditions. They are keener to insist upon independent and equal status with the established professions. They can more easily bridge the gap between government and non-government agencies. They take a broader view of individual problems. They are generally more aware of the father’s part in family life. And so on. Although some of these claims may be challenged, either in terms of their accuracy or their importance, together they contribute a powerful case for a great increase in the number and proportion of men social workers in the profession.

This has been the trend in the social work profession in the United States and it can be regarded as a long-term trend in Australia. But how long-term? There is nothing automatic about it. Attitudes and actions inside and outside the profession will determine the pace and the strength of the trend.
There is little apparent hostility on the part of the present-day women members of the profession to men as their colleagues; in fact, many state this as a need, but generally they have not acted as if it were a vital problem. It is not easy for women to recruit men for a social work career. They can, however, influence the attitude of employers and others to men social workers and ensure that they do not promote a professional image related to their own sex. Those men already in the profession have a special responsibility in recruitment activities. As will be discussed later, social work as a possible career has usually not been represented, or at least not strongly represented, when most young men are choosing a career. At present many go into fields such as teaching, the church, medicine, and psychology, who are really more interested in social work than in these other professions.

At present men social workers remain very unevenly spread in fields of social work. There may be some good reasons for a preponderance of one sex over the other in particular situations, but no field may be seen as ‘belonging’ to one or other sex – either male adult correctional work to male social workers or medical social work to female social workers. There are many reasons why the male qualified social workers in the adult correctional field in New South Wales are not active members of the professional association, and why the probation field, and at least temporarily the parole field, has only tenuous links with professional social work. One appears to be that they regard the existing profession and its association as a women’s organisation which is not very interested in militant industrial action or in new ‘male’ fields of work.

Any division of the profession on sex lines, whether in fields of employment or in thinking about professional matters, is likely to interfere with the effective performance of social work’s tasks. This does not mean that an awareness of sex roles is unimportant in assessing realistically the position of a professional worker, but it is professional competence not sex which should count. Neither sex has a monopoly on the personal qualities considered desirable for social work practice.
Though men students may be a better long-term investment for the profession than women, it would be undesirable to have an undue emphasis on male recruitment. This would encourage sex antagonism in the profession, and would lead to a great waste of talent in work in which able women have already gained widespread acceptance.

All that is being argued here is the need for a better sex balance in the profession. What the optimum should be is a complex question, at least partly influenced by general cultural changes in the community, but it is evident that at present there are not enough men.

**Graduate Education?**

The social work education scene in Australia leaves no room for complacency. Until each of the courses has achieved, and is worthy of, degree status, and is offering postgraduate opportunities, the profession’s basic educational facilities leave it vulnerable.

Why is the degree label so important? Is it not sufficient to have, as at present, the diploma courses of the same duration as an Arts degree and the same academic entry requirement of matriculation? And anyway, do not a substantial proportion of the social work students do an Arts degree as well as the professional diploma and are therefore university graduates? There are good reasons – inside the universities, in the profession, and in the general community – for the basic professional education of social workers to be at a degree level and to be labelled as such.

A completely new university climate in the 1960s was brought about by the post-war population bulge hitting tertiary education, by concern over the relatively small proportion of the national income devoted to institutions of higher learning, and a new Commonwealth government general interest in tertiary education. As never before, the role of the university and the technical college is being examined. One obvious way of relieving pressure on the universities is to
off-load sub-graduate courses onto technical institutions. This is sensible if these courses are technical in nature, that is, if they are concerned primarily with the application of certain techniques.

Is social work education technical in nature and therefore amenable to a transfer from the universities to technical colleges? The distinction between technical education and more fundamental education is not easy to draw, but it is clear that those who have designed the curricula of the Australian social work courses have been solidly on the side of a broad professional education similar to that of the so-called ‘learned’ professions. Even though the length of the courses has been very restricting, they have not made the courses primarily applied in character. The strong connection with Arts faculties, although this has had its disadvantages, has ensured an emphasis on ‘background’ subjects and the teaching of the principles and techniques of social work has used a body of knowledge at least partly integrated with the ‘background’ disciplines. Whatever the outcome, the intention has been education rather than training for the profession.

Since of all the professions this one is most directly involved in questions of human welfare, it has to be the most explicit in its moral justification. It has to develop a tradition of criticism – of its own work and of the community’s social welfare services. Because of the complexities of human beings and their social systems, it can only do this after a fairly lengthy preparation which has stressed the university values of free inquiry and intellectual integrity and capacity. By recognising a professional preparation as a degree course, a university indicates its acceptance that this is and should be a learned profession.

The University of Queensland has decided to discontinue its three-year Diploma in Social Studies, and in future all new students will enrol for its four-year Bachelor of Social Studies degree. After a very uncertain start involving modifications to a Diploma of Sociology,
it now appears that social work education at the University of New South Wales will take the form of a four-year Bachelor of Social Studies degree. These are not dramatic new developments, they are the logical outcome of the history of social work education in this country. As yet the old-established social work courses at the universities of Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide continue as diplomas, despite the fact that the Vice-Chancellors of the first two have testified that their social work courses are of graduate standard, and the Victorian Public Service Board has accepted the Melbourne University diploma as the equivalent of a full degree qualification. Because of the substantial fieldwork requirements it is doubtful whether these three-year courses warrant being called a degree. If they were extended to four years, there would be no doubt about the quantity of their academic content and little about its quality. As has been mentioned, a large proportion of social work students already spend at least four years on their university education anyway. They might better spend the extra year making their professional qualification a degree rather than on general education. For many reasons, arrangements for combining a social work diploma with an Arts or some other degree have been flexible. A social work degree qualification would allow some flexibility in the curriculum, but one could expect to develop a greater measure of social work relevance in all sections of the student’s course.

That social work education should be guided by social work functions would seem to be almost axiomatic. It is easy to assume that much human knowledge and experience has at least a rough relevance for social work, and also to take an all-embracing approach to the functions of the social work profession. This presents special hazards when a social work curriculum is designed. The 1956 study of social work employment in New South Wales stopped short of a full analysis of social work functions as actually performed. For many reasons much more needs to be known about social work functions in Australian society, and important among these reasons is that the initial professional education should be relevant.

If there is too big a gap between current teaching and practice, all interested parties suffer. There should be no strict dichotomy in people’s thinking about theory and practice, for all so-called practical

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people are making theoretical assumptions, and further, the value of theory is eventually assessed according to its usefulness in real-life situations. The development of social work theory is a joint enterprise between people in social work practice and people in social work education and there must be no rift between the two. Developed professional subjects in a degree course will tend towards a generic treatment based upon empirical study, and should give students a grasp of professional social work functions, of those which may be performed by other than qualified social workers, and where qualified social workers fit in with other professional groups. Other subjects in the degree course should preferably be designed so that they are related to social work and to other subjects in the course.

One of the advantages of a degree social work course is that it provides a basis for a postgraduate qualification. For some years, Melbourne University has offered a Master of Arts degree specialising in Social Studies to graduates with an Arts degree and the Diploma of Social Studies, but this has been little used. A candidate for the University of Queensland’s Bachelor of Social Studies may enrol as an honours student and may go on to a Master of Social Studies degree. This would seem to be a suitable model for the other social work courses to follow. The profession badly needs local opportunity for formal higher study – to extend its most able students, to produce a group with Australian research experience, and to provide the social work teachers of the future.

The American pattern in which basic professional education is postgraduate has still not much support, especially in view of Sydney University’s almost disastrous experience with it in the mid-1950s. The University of Western Australia is, however, thinking in terms of a postgraduate diploma, although it will be guided by the person appointed to establish its school of social work. Recently, too, the University of Adelaide has introduced a one-and-a-half-year postgraduate diploma. Whatever the local reasons for this, it does not seem educationally sound. In particular, the professional teaching and learning, although intensive, extends over much too short a period to be effective, and the Sydney school, with far greater teaching resources, found the provision of two streams of professional teaching at different levels a very difficult arrangement.
Although to make all the social work courses full degree courses immediately would not constitute a drastic change, it is difficult to know what effect this would have on student numbers. They could in fact increase because of the greater status of a degree qualification in a community which is becoming qualification-conscious, and because of the greater professional opportunities offered by such a qualification. One result and an inducement to increased numbers would be for the salaries to come into line with those in Victoria. With most public service authorities a degree carries far more weight than any undergraduate diploma. If social work employers had to pay more for their social work employees, it might make them more thoughtful about their most effective use. A degree qualification should give them assurance of a more even quality of performance than prevails at present. It should also place social workers in a stronger position when cooperating with other established professional groups.

Those who talk about the need for different levels of training in social work can be talking about a number of different things. They may mean what has been discussed above – the need for further formal education beyond the basic professional qualification. This is a need recognised in the established professions. They may, however, mean a need for training people who will be performing social work functions but who are not able, for a variety of reasons, to undertake the full professional training. Or again, they may be using ‘social work’ to cover all social welfare, and may be referring to a need for special training for people engaged in the various kinds of social welfare work.

The profession can be expected to give every encouragement to special training schemes for workers in social welfare performing clerical, simple administrative, and highly specific tasks, so that they will be more efficient. Usually this is done by in-service training, although agencies could sometimes profitably combine in at least some of this type of training. But what should be the profession’s attitude to training schemes which are in effect sub-standard professional courses, for example the courses provided for marriage guidance counsellors? Should the social work profession lend its educational facilities and prestige to such developments, or should it actively discourage them? If the profession has conviction about the necessity for the length and level of its basic training, it cannot look disinterestedly upon such developments. What the profession can do is to point out that these people are performing social work functions and that the relevant
preparation for this work is provided by the social work courses in the universities. If these people are not capable of handling the basic professional preparation, should they have the right to practise? This is essentially a moral, not a legal question.

The question of different levels in social work will be returned to when the availability of social work services is discussed.

A Variety of Social Work Methods?

Most qualified social workers are still engaged in social casework, but many of these also employ other methods to further the community’s welfare, and there are a few social workers primarily engaged in these. The profession does demonstrate some awareness that social work’s goals can be achieved in a variety of ways other than through helping individuals one by one or family by family.

In 1963, a New South Wales seminar on group work undertaken by social workers revealed a rather unsuspected range and variety of work, much of it undertaken in traditional casework settings such as family agencies, prisons, rehabilitation centres, and psychiatric clinics. This seminar has begun a local examination of the social worker’s function in relation to various kinds of groups. The outcome will be clearly relevant to the extent and nature of the teaching on group techniques in the basic professional education. Most courses have some teaching in this, but it is not as highly developed as casework.

There are still very few qualified social workers employed in community organisation positions, although most social workers are familiar with community organisation principles and they occasionally have a chance to apply them when they spend some of their time in working towards a better adjustment between community resources and community welfare needs. A much greater emphasis, both in social work education and practice, on community organisation as a social work method could pay large welfare dividends. The Australian social welfare scene badly needs professional help to become better organised. There is little doubt that in terms of its purposes much of it is not very efficient – it lacks regular evaluation, much of it is excessively paternalistic, much of it has a narrow view of its responsibilities, and considerable potential community resources are as yet untapped.
A ‘community development’ movement has tentatively begun in Australia. In the last decade, partly because of the ineffectiveness of wholesale external financial assistance to less developed countries, the subject has received a great deal of international attention. Its emphasis is on helping communities to change and develop in ways which they themselves desire. This is, of course, easily recognisable as the social work approach in community organisation, which, however, has generally been a social work method used in an urban environment where living levels are relatively high and social services relatively developed. It has been largely applied to social welfare organisation, whereas community development has usually been concentrated on the rural areas of less-developed countries, and has been concerned with improving the community’s living standards in general. The close relationship between the professional social work method of ‘community organisation’ and the principles and techniques of ‘community development’ has been discussed in international forums. In Australia, as yet few social workers could contribute to such a discussion. The community development movement here has received its stimulus largely from agricultural extension work and adult education. As the movement extends its interest to urban community development, the social work profession has an especially important part to play because of its knowledge of this kind of environment.

Social welfare administration as a social work method is beginning to receive specific attention. This is not surprising because a group of senior social workers administer social casework agencies, a small, though growing, number of qualified social workers administer other social welfare programmes, and all social workers, because they are employees, work within an administrative context. Moreover, as revealed in a recent survey, the teaching of organisational or administrative theory for people in many fields – business, industry, education, and the public service – is becoming common in Australia. There is, however, some confusion arising from the term ‘social administration’. This, as an identifiable university subject, is essentially concerned with the historical and present development

of collective action for the advancement of social welfare. It is not primarily concerned with administrative structures and processes as is ‘social welfare administration’.

The most influential piece of social welfare research undertaken in recent years has been the survey of civilian widows in Australia. Its main research worker was an experienced English social worker, who received considerable help from the local social work profession; The local scene provides little money for this kind of research, but it is also severely hampered by a shortage of both social scientists and well-qualified social workers to undertake it. The same is true of social work research, that is, study related more closely to the profession’s actual functions. The profession must become more research conscious if it wishes to further its social welfare goals and improve its effective professional performance.

There are signs that the profession is trying to work out its proper role in relation to another social work method – social action. Through its professional association it has set up a standing committee on the study of Australian social welfare, one result of which should be better informed social action. In addition, the association is giving serious thought to setting down principles to guide its social action.

The final method by which social work may achieve its goals is through teaching people who will be engaged in casework, group work, community organisation, social welfare administration, research, and social action. Some educational principles are similar to social work principles, but teachers in the social work courses, as in most other university courses, have rarely had any formal instruction in educational methods. Well-qualified (that is from a subject point of view) teachers are so few that thought could be given to this. It would also be more advantageous if fewer social workers in the field had to teach students, while those who did were used more intensively.

Although social workers of the future are unlikely to confine themselves to only one aspect of their work, the profession and its clients would benefit from more specialisation. Individuals need to perform fewer functions than at present, and could be more evenly

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10 Jean Aitken-Swan, *Widows in Australia*.
spread amongst the various social work methods, and each method needs to be more closely connected in professional education and practice with a developing body of knowledge.

The social work profession has to be on its guard against encouraging a hierarchy amongst its methods. First-rate practitioners are needed to concentrate on each method and they should be paid accordingly. One possible danger is that as relatively highly paid administrative positions become available, social welfare administration will be seen as the highest form of professional life and will drain experience and talent away from other fields.

Whatever the future holds in terms of social work methods, social work practitioners will still need to have an abiding concern for the welfare of the individual, perhaps the sort of concern which can only be imparted by at least some supervised social casework experience.

Wide Availability?

The availability of the services of the social work profession and the extent of the need for them throughout the community is a subject worthy of study, even if it concentrated only on the direct professional service of social workers to people with personal and social problems. Such a study would need to consider the number and experience of available qualified social workers, their location geographically and in types of agencies, their hours of work, the size of their job, the attitudes of various social groups to social work help, the public images of the social worker, the attitudes towards and knowledge about social work of potential referral sources, the incidence of problems amenable to social work assistance, where people seek help at present, the role of other professional groups, the role of non-professional services.

From general observation, Australian social work services continue to be concentrated in the hearts of the larger cities, especially those with established social work schools, the number of available qualified people is small, and the degree of public acceptance of professional social work is hindered by false images or by ignorance of its existence. Again from general observation, it seems that the kinds of personal and social problems social workers are trained to help with are widespread throughout Australia’s 11 million people. A recent
pilot study of general medical practice in New South Wales supports this. Modern social workers have been professionally educated for the complex task of helping people with their social and personal problems. It is naive to expect that in the near future all Australians, wherever they live and whatever their socioeconomic group, will have access to social work assistance and will feel free to use it, but this could well be a long-term goal to bear in mind. An odd feature of the profession’s position is that it needs to become more available up the socioeconomic scale and possibly to introduce fee paying, as has happened in the United States, while the older established professions need to become more available down the socioeconomic scale, and possibly depart to some extent from fee paying.

There are some indications that the social work profession is becoming alive to the question of availability. In both New South Wales and Victoria there has been serious discussion on the decentralisation of social work agencies in the urban metropolises, country districts in Victoria are becoming interested in employing social workers; in South Australia there is a new unconventional street work youth service; some agencies are working staggered hours to reach their clientele more effectively; and, as will be mentioned in the final section of the chapter, the question of numbers coming into the profession is receiving some attention. Yet these are only beginnings.

One important aspect of the question of availability is the most effective use of existing qualified social workers. Partly because of the underdeveloped state of social welfare administration as a subject, social work job analyses which isolate professional social work functions from tasks requiring less or different skills are rare in Australia. It is very likely that a full-scale employment analysis would show the wasteful situation of many Australian social workers who have to undertake tasks auxiliary to their main functions and skill which would be more economically performed by other workers. In some overseas agencies, welfare assistants, social aids, or case aids have been appointed to work under the direction of the qualified social workers. They may undertake receptionist duties and do some early

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11 Preventive Medicine Committee of the Australian College of General Practitioners (NSW Faculty), *Social Work and Medical General Practice: A Pilot Study*, 1961.
and other interviews where information or a service is required but not social diagnosis or treatment, they may make various arrangements for clients, they may undertake straightforward ‘welfare’ visiting where greater skill is not required, they may take responsibility for various administrative procedures, they may undertake play group and other allied work. These things require social work attitudes and simple interviewing skill, but they do not call for social work skill, and it would seem to confuse the issue to describe as social workers those people who do them.

If auxiliary social work is performed by others, there is a greater likelihood that the qualified social workers can demonstrate their professional skill and for this to be recognised as such. The Australian social work profession is, however, uneasy about this development, and certainly much of its effectiveness would seem to depend upon the quality of professional practice and direction the social workers can provide.

There are still Australian social work employers who do not provide sufficient clerical help for recording, correspondence, and filing, adequate office accommodation, or reasonable transport facilities, all of which contribute to an uneconomical use of a social worker.

The complex question of inter-professional boundaries has an important connection with the subject of availability. Ideally the education of all professional groups should include knowledge of cooperative relationships with complementary professions. Social workers frequently work in teams with other professional people or consult them, and their education specifically recognises this. Some professional education, however, neglects this important aspect of practice, and moreover, there is a noticeable trend, despite, or perhaps because of, an age of growing specialisation, for individual professional groups to talk about considering and treating ‘the whole person’. The social work profession, whose education and experience make it expert in personal social relationships and the use of community resources, can find itself excluded by this kind of thinking. Of course a shortage of social workers may induce other professional workers to undertake social work, in much the same way as a shortage of psychiatrists has

induced some psychiatric social workers to undertake a psychiatrist’s functions. Such expedients should, however, be recognised as such and the foreign though allied functions should not be incorporated into the proper practice of the profession.

Better Modes of Organisation?

The most appropriate organisation depends upon the numbers and the aims of the people involved. Informal organisation relying upon individual personalities may be an appropriate form when numbers and aims are few. As described in previous chapters, social work in Australia has been moving towards more formal modes of organisation, in keeping with the continuous responsibilities it assumes. The two most substantial achievements are a nation-wide general association to which all qualified social workers in employment may belong and provision for special groups within the association. But the Australian Association of Social Workers, at both branch and federal levels, requires much more settled and efficient machinery if it is to fulfil its purposes effectively. It also needs greater membership interest, particularly in New South Wales, and a more stable membership. The profession’s leaders should take the initiative in achieving greater interest, higher fees, salaried executive officers, and adequate accommodation. A higher proportion of men, and deliberate action to retain the membership of women when they marry, would ensure a more stable membership.

Amongst other things, a better organised professional association could become much more effective in looking after social workers’ industrial interests. At present the association’s federal council is examining the extent to which its members have joined other organisations, the public service associations, to achieve better working conditions. The association has not been strong enough or effective enough industrially to prevent this development. It must, however, continue to take an active interest. It could still have an important coordinating and servicing role in relation to various negotiating groups, and a direct role for those, mainly in non-government agencies, who have still not joined forces with other much larger and richer industrial organisations.
A crucial aspect of organisation is, of course, communication. The Australian Association of Social Workers has always provided important channels of communication between qualified social workers – through its meetings, its committees, its conferences, and its journal. Despite some recent improvement, the *Australian Journal of Social Work*, which is in a key position, has a long way to go before it nationally covers developments in all the profession's fields, discusses and reports social policy and social service changes, informs members regularly of the association's activities, and has a considerable proportion of the profession contributing articles. This kind of journal could only be sustained with far greater support from association members and this could partly be achieved by a reorganisation of the management of the journal so that all the profession's major areas of interest are systematically covered.

The better organisation of social work involves more than that its practitioners should be better organised professionally. Each of the schools of social work needs to have settled means of communication with its local field, with the professional association, and with other schools, but most of this still remains on an informal level in this country. Unless the various responsible bodies establish regular machinery for mutual discussion, misunderstanding and confusion are increasingly likely because of the growing numbers of people and the probable establishment of new schools of social work.

In addition to the organisation of the educational authorities, there is the organisation of the fields within which social workers are employed. Some mention has already been made – in the discussion on community organisation, social welfare administration and the identification of social work’s functions – on the great amount of room for better social welfare organisation. A recent event which holds out hope for the future strengthening of the general coordinating body, the Australian Council of Social Service, was its third national conference on ‘The National Income and Social Welfare’. This achieved high-level participation and, if it is adequately followed up, may have placed this body onto a new level of effectiveness.

Organisation may become an end in itself, yet without it in a complex society gains are likely to be only fragmentary and temporary. Australian social work needs to concentrate far more on cumulative achievement. Moreover, where there are reasonably settled ways
of doing things, clear lines of communication and recognised allocations of authority, there is less likelihood of highly personal conflict between people engaged in social work. Such conflict not only interferes with the job but is poor publicity for a profession which specialises in human relations.

One invaluable gain from better organisation could be the compilation of relevant statistical information – in relation to the profession and social work education. Without this, planning tends to be very haphazard.

More Social Workers?

The final major issue which demands discussion is the question of the numbers in the social work profession. Much of the previous discussion is connected with this issue. Complex social work organisation needs substantial numbers to spread social work services more evenly among the social work methods, to spread them geographically and into new groups of clients, and to lighten the load on many existing services and to allow greater specialisation. Without them, the amount of first-class talent will be insufficient to provide Australian social work with its leadership in social work theory and practice. Community recognition and acceptance can only come when substantial numbers are engaged in the work.

In 1962 the Department of Social Work at Sydney University held a seminar with social work employers to discuss the shortage of social workers, and recently the Victorian branch of the professional association was studying the subject in cooperation with the Victorian Council of Social Service and Melbourne University’s Social Studies Department. Apart from changing the level of social work education and redefining social work jobs, which have already been considered, there are in fact three main ways of increasing the numbers of social workers available for social work employment – increase the numbers entering the social work courses, minimise student wastage, and minimise professional wastage.14

14 See R.J. Lawrence, Statement prepared for a Seminar at the Department of Social Work, Sydney University, held on 24 May 1962.
The most dramatic example of the effect of improved career opportunities on social work recruitment, especially male recruitment, has been in Victoria – although the recent great increases in Melbourne are also a result of the general rapid rise in university student numbers, and the previously small Melbourne social work student numbers must be remembered. The main responsibility for improving career opportunities rests with social work employers, but the professional association has a part to play and the social work schools need to bear in mind actual employment positions. Improved opportunities could include better initial and eventual employment conditions, greater ease of transfer to provide greater promotion and variety, more policy-making and senior administrative positions open to members of the profession, higher professional status within some agencies and in the community, and the removal of the traditional notion that social work is women’s work.

More attractive and extensive schemes of financial aid, a responsibility of social work employers and the government, may increase the number of social work students. The present trend of scholarships and Cadetships which tie students in advance to particular agencies is, however, undesirable. No potential social work student should be debarred because of finance from undertaking the course. Insufficient government assistance has left the way open for employers to remove a money bar to professional social work education, but at the cost of severely restricting the professional choice of those students who must rely upon outside help. Consideration should be given to the establishment of general cadetships in both federal and state public services, so that students are not tied to a particular department. This would also encourage the respective public service boards to examine and compare the social work positions available in different parts of the public service.

Schemes of financial aid which allow older matriculated people either already in social agencies or in other work to become full-time social work students should be seriously considered. Usually such people, if they become students at all and if it is permitted by the school, undertake the social work course on a part-time basis. A substantial proportion of part-time students has been a distinctive feature of Australian universities, but existing evidence indicates that the chances of a part-time student to complete a university course are much less than for a full-time student. Moreover, the quality of the
passes he achieves are likely to be lower and his extra-curricular experiences poorer than those of the full-time student.\(^{15}\) He in fact represents a wasteful employment of educational resources which are increasingly scarce in relation to the demand for them, and some Australian universities are beginning to recognise this.

At particular points of time, for example when a large government department adopts the idea of full professional social work training for many of its staff but cannot release them for full-time study, there may be a strong case for temporary part-time social work education. The arguments against part-time study, however, apply here at least as much as in other university courses, and perhaps more, because of the spread of reading required, the difficulty of fulfilling the considerable fieldwork requirements, and because good fieldwork supervision is particularly scarce under existing arrangements and therefore should be conserved.\(^{16}\)

Many people in the past have claimed special advantages for the recruitment to social work of the older person rich in life experience. It is difficult to generalise about this, but long experience may mean that there is more to unlearn, and the reasons why a person has not found a satisfying niche in some other work may require close examination. Entry of suitable people into the profession at a later stage should certainly be open, and a potential recruitment source is with educationally qualified, married women past their mid-30s who wish to become qualified for a professional job.\(^{17}\) But this cannot and should not be the profession’s main source. Social work has to compete with the established professions at the point where most talented people are choosing a career, that is, in their late teens.

Systematic attention is beginning to be given to regular social work recruitment, especially in New South Wales, and employers, the professional association, the schools of social work, the general community employment agencies, and the state and independent schools must all play their part in this. Social work as a career for young men is not, at present, often considered, and because of the


\(^{16}\) The development of student units in the field under direct university supervision is still slow, although it is likely to be hastened by the pressure of numbers.

favourable demographic situation and the expanding opportunities for social work it is now an ideal time to attract more students. Recruitment should not be seen, however, only in terms of increasing numbers. Whatever the current student and employment situation, all potentially suitable people should know about social work, as they should know about all the other careers for which they may be suited.

Once students have entered the social work courses, there is the problem of reducing student wastage. Much of the dramatic new deal for social work employment in Victoria promised by the greatly increased student numbers has not eventuated because of a high drop-out rate.\(^{18}\) Student failure rates are a general university problem, most acute where numbers are high. Schools of social work with expanding student numbers may well give careful thought to this matter.

The question of professional wastage could be tackled on three main fronts: a very much larger proportion of men in the profession, the improvement of career opportunities which not only will help recruit people but will retain them, and the encouragement of married women who are qualified social workers to return to social work.

All these issues call for a great deal of cooperative thought, study and action on the part of the social workers themselves, their professional association, their employers, their professional schools, and people in the wider community. Out of this could come a substantial, well-qualified and organised social work profession, engaged in by both men and women, and providing a variety of widely available services. But it will not just happen.

\(^{18}\) E. Hamilton-Smith, The Scarcity of Social Workers, an address to the 1964 Annual General Meeting of the Australian Association of Social Workers (Victorian Branch).