



YOUTH WORKERS' ASSOCIATION MEMBERS CONSULTATION FINDINGS

SEPTEMBER 2012

Introduction

The Youth Workers' Association came into existence at a meeting of the sector in 2008. It was made up primarily of graduate youth workers and was strongly supported by youth work academics from Victoria University, a number of longstanding senior youth workers and members of the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria. The initial focus of the association has been twofold, firstly focusing on pay and conditions and supporting current union campaigns, and secondly on stemming the erosion of the quality and standing of youth work training by private providers offering vocational level qualifications outside of the universities (Corney 2004; Corney and Broadbent 2007; Corney, Broadbent and Darmanin 2009). The importance of establishing youth work as a profession and "carving" out a distinct identity within the human services sector continued to be the themes driving the associations' development at this time.

The sector wide meeting held in August of 2008 in Victoria led to the forming of the new professional association and the first YWA board being elected at an inaugural AGM in April 2011. The Board, with the assistance of youth work academics, has moved to develop youth work training endorsement criteria for educational providers, in order to maintain the standards of the profession and the quality of graduates and their practice. Drawing on the accreditation work of the United Kingdom National Youth Agency and the Joint Negotiating Committee on Youth Work (NYA 2010) the principles below were established.

To assist the YWA in defining the priorities for education and training providers, and to reflect what the industry thought were important components of Youth Work education and training, the YWA embarked on a consultation of its members before establishing a course endorsement process.

Principles of Good Youth Work Education & Training:

1. Pedagogy that is based on a values clarification and reflective practice model that challenges personal values and separates those from the professional values of a Youth Work practitioner.
2. An understanding that young people are the primary client of the Youth Work practitioner.
3. Bibliographies that direct students to required reading that has a focus on important practice values such as: social justice and social action, consciousness raising, empowerment, participation, human rights and advocacy; and that is reflective of Australian content.
4. Ethics education based on the Youth Work Code of Ethical Practice.
5. Content reflective of the social, economic and political structures, influences and barriers young people face.
6. Focus on the development of a framework of practice through exposure to a theoretical core of community development, sociology of youth, social structure of adolescent health and youth policy; as well as a minimum of 6 specific youth work practice or field education placement subjects.
7. An inclusion of a human rights based social justice pedagogy that includes exposure to issues such as: culture, gender, indigenous and sexuality within its framework of practice.
8. Pedagogy that reflects on the broader social structural systemic influences that impact on young people and youth work practice.
9. Qualifications and experience of staff in the Youth Work courses will also be considered and it is expected that every course will have staff that are eligible to join the Youth Workers' Association.
10. Encourages reflective practitioners that can work collaboratively in professional settings.
11. No more than 30% of the course is undertaken "on the job".

Methodology

The Board endorsed an industry wide survey which was developed using an online survey tool. Members and supporters of the YWA were notified through the current email list which has over 400 members and supporters.

The number of respondents being 91 is therefore statistically relevant forming just under 25% of our current members and supporters list.

Results

Question 1

How essential is it that Youth Work graduates understand the following:

Table 1.				
n=91	Essential	Important	Somewhat Important	Unimportant
Understand the social, economical, and political context that young people live in.	74	16	1	0
Have undertaken training in and adhere to the Victorian Code of Ethical Practice.	70	14	6	0
Articulate that young people are their primary client.	69	18	3	1
Understand how to work in a culturally diverse community and the barriers that young people may face.	63	25	3	0
Can articulate why young people are marginalised	57	29	5	0
Understand youth policy.	58	26	7	0
Be able to measure, evaluate and report on their work.	52	37	2	0
Can work within a changing policy environment.	46	38	7	0
Have a set of practices that are underpinned by community development.	43	38	8	2

Question one presented in Table 1 included 9 items on a range of elements involved in Youth Work and asked respondents to rate the importance of these to a Youth Work graduates' understanding and effectiveness in working with young people. These items include an understanding of social, economic and political factors, training and adherence to Victorian Code of Ethical Practice, Communication and Articulation Skills and Self Evaluation. Table 1 ranks these by the frequency of respondents selecting "essential".

As expected respondents rated these items as being important, with over 90% rating these skills or knowledge as either "essential" or "important". At the top of the list 74 respondents (81.3%) felt that understanding the social, economic, and political context that young people live in is essential, with a total of nearly 99% believing this understanding is essential or important. This is followed

closely by the ability to measure, evaluate and report on their own work, considered essential or important by nearly 98% of respondents, and understanding how to work in a culturally diverse community and the barriers that young people may face, with nearly 97% responding essential or important.

Other items rated as "essential" include having undertaken training in and adherence to the Victorian Code of Ethical Practice and the ability to articulate that young people are their primary client with 77.8% and 75.8% responding essential respectively.

An insignificant number of respondents (3) rated 2 of the nine items as unimportant to Youth Workers. Figures 1, 2 and 3 present the findings in percentage form so that the distinctiveness of the responses can be seen.

Figure 1

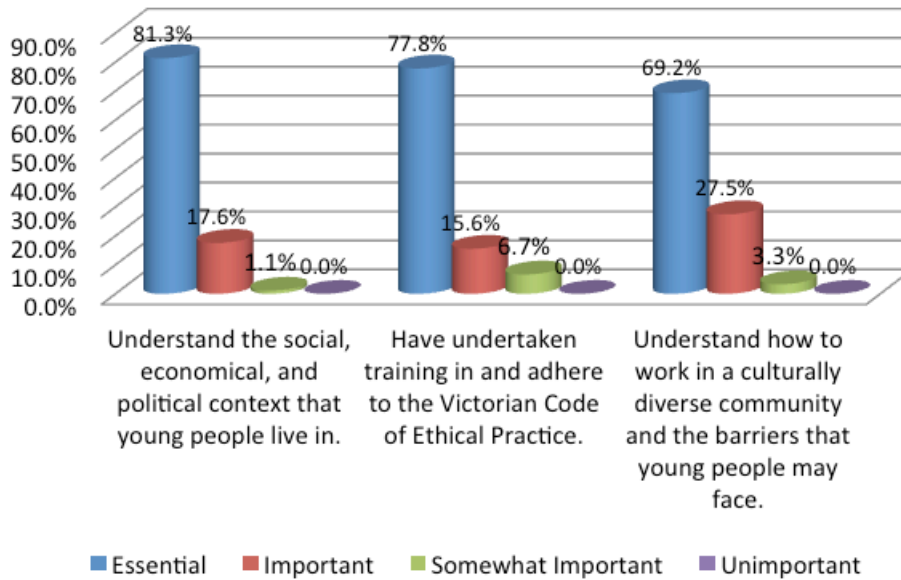


Figure 2

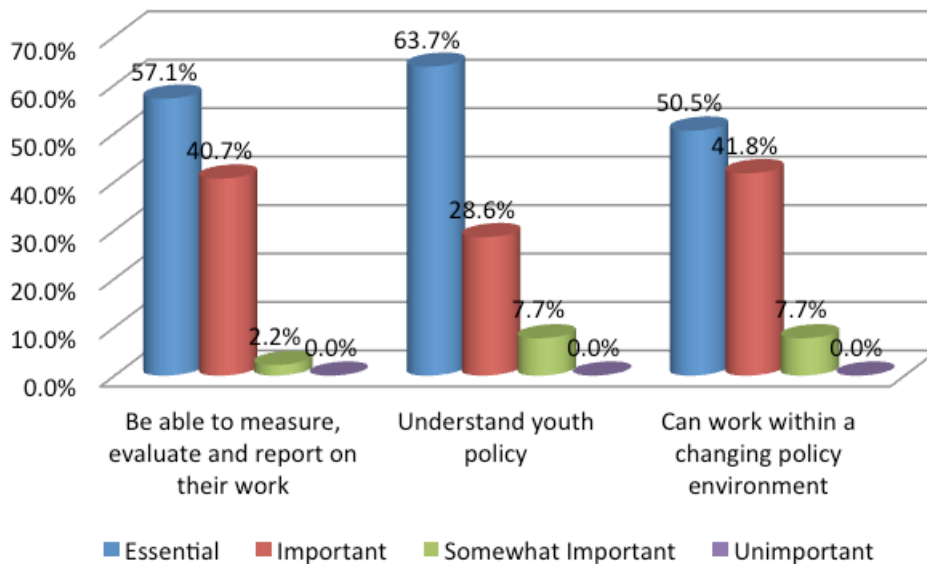
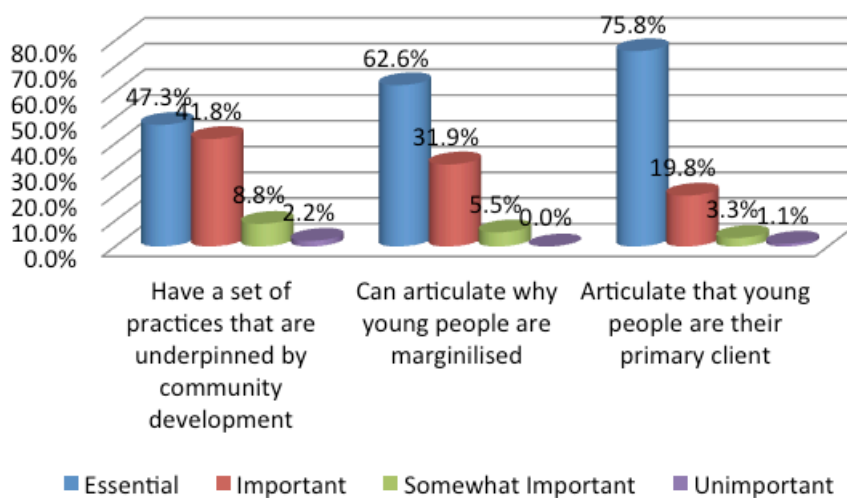


Figure 3



Question 2

How essential are each of the following content areas to youth work graduates?

Table 2				
	Essential	Important	Somewhat Important	Unimportant
Understanding confidentiality and privacy.	77	13	1	0
Professionalism: values, principles and ethics.	71	18	2	0
Understanding youth culture.	68	20	3	0
Mental health issues.	67	21	3	0
Youth suicide.	55	28	6	1
Legislation and legal issues.	49	37	5	0
Gender issues.	47	34	9	0
Community development.	42	43	3	2
Strategic planning and goal setting.	39	40	12	0
Research and evaluation skills.	38	40	13	0
Organisational culture.	24	45	20	1
Bench marking and quality assurance.	21	48	20	2

Question 2, presented in Table 2 above, included a range of content areas relevant to youth work graduates and asked respondents to rate the importance of options ranging from political and social analysis, mental health issues, youth suicide, gender issues, organisational culture, legislation and legal issues and more. Results are ranked by frequency of respondents selecting 'essential' in Table 2.

While responses were more diverse than question 1, certain content areas stood out with noticeably significant responses. Understanding confidentiality and privacy was one content area that respondents felt graduates should be knowledgeable about with 84.6% feeling it is 'essential' and a further 14.3% considering it 'important'. Other content areas that stand out include professionalism with 78% of respondents considering it 'essential' and nearly 20% 'important', understanding of youth culture with 74.7% and 22% of responses 'essential' and 'important' respectively, and also mental health issues with over 73% and 23% responding 'essential' and 'important' respectively. These results are very significant when considering over 96% of responses deemed the above content areas as essential or important knowledge required of youth workers.

Content areas that saw a weaker positive response include bench marking and quality assurance with 22% responding 'somewhat important' rather than essential or important, with the most common response from respondents being 'important' (52.7%) rather than essential (23.1%). Organisational culture was another

content area which was seen as relatively less important with 22.2% of respondents finding it 'somewhat important' and half responding 'important' (50%) rather than 'essential' (26.7%).

Content areas that saw more responses as 'important' than 'essential' included the ability to undertake political and social analysis and group work theory and practice. Other content areas that were specified by respondents are summarised in the below table and range from industry and educational knowledge to personal practice and communication skills.

Youth spirituality
A Focus on protective/preventative factors
1-on-1 counselling support
Networking with other industry professionals
Manage budgets
Understand funding and grants
Reflective practice
Communication skills
Critical thinking
Program planning and adaptation
Adolescent development
Same sex attracted and gender issues
Drug and alcohol issues
Methods of engaging with young people
Knowledge of youth and youth work background
Knowledge of disabled and learning difficulties

Figures 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 depict question 2 within the context of the percentage of respondents to each component of the question.

Figure 4

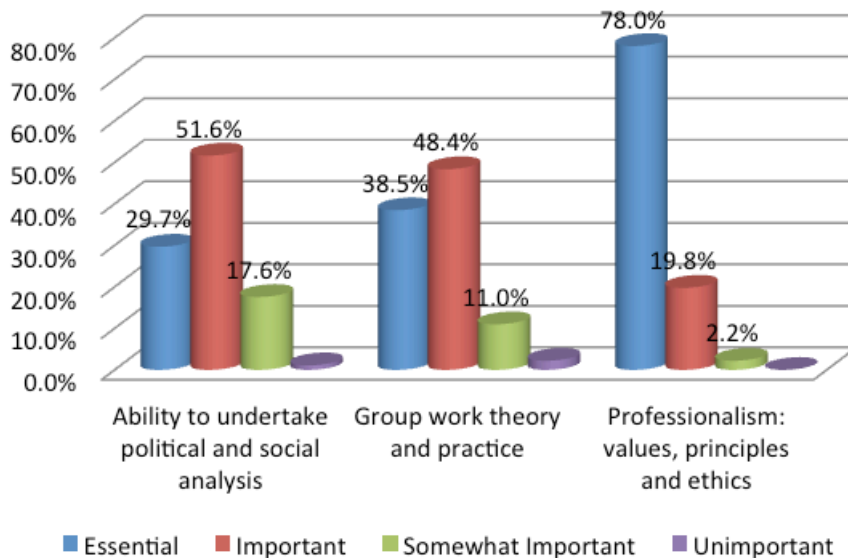


Figure 5

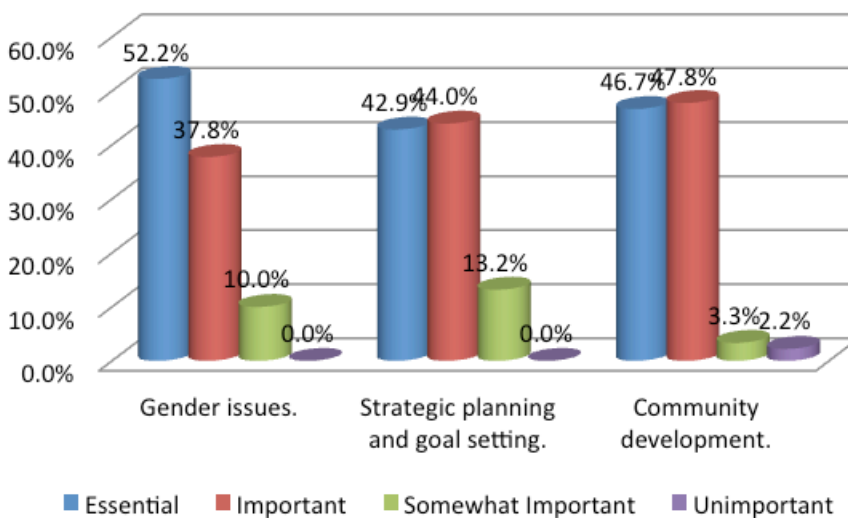


Figure 6

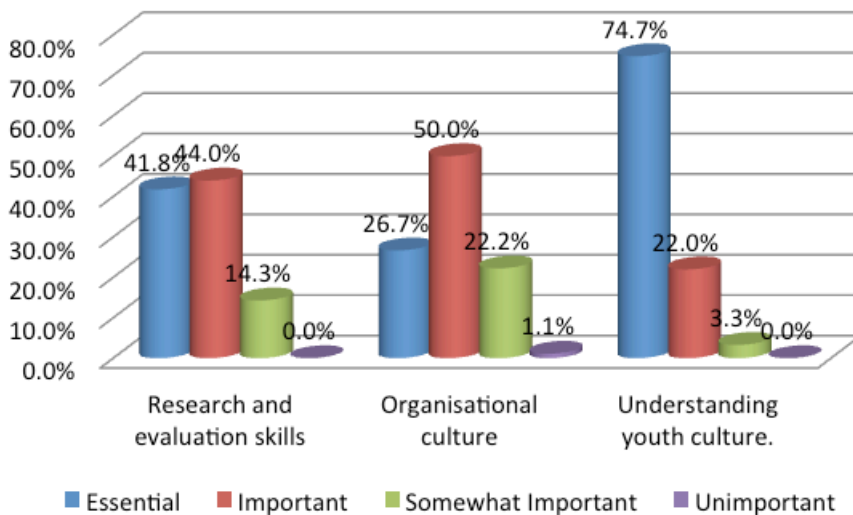


Figure 7

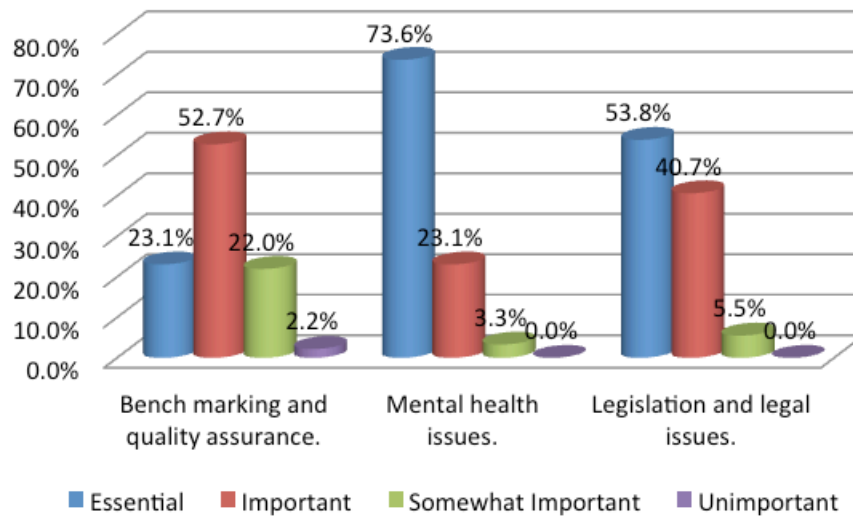
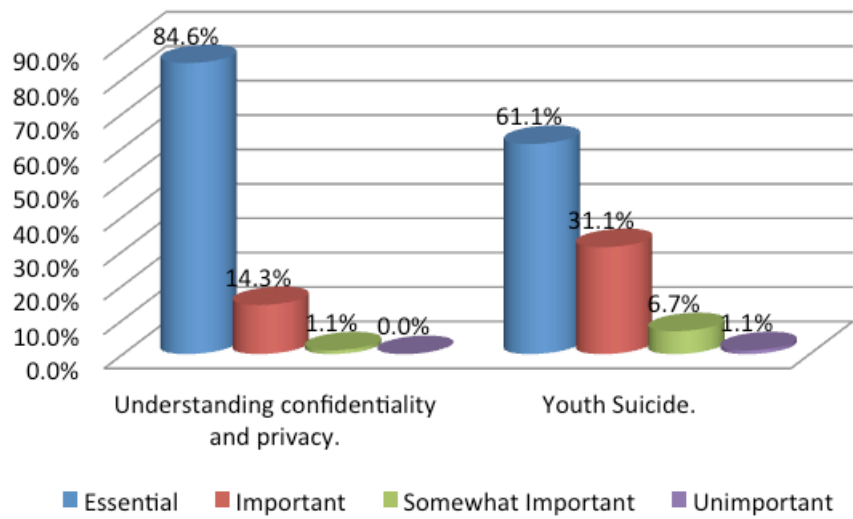


Figure 8



Question 3

What skills are essential for Youth Work graduates to possess?

Table 3				
	Essential	Important	Somewhat Important	Unimportant
Understanding confidentiality and privacy.	77	13	1	0
Communication and interpersonal skills.	70	19	2	0
Referring and working with other agencies.	67	24	0	0
Ability to work as part of a team.	64	23	4	0
Advocacy.	63	25	3	0
Mental health issues.	60	27	3	0
Networking.	58	28	5	0
Understanding of the different areas of the Youth Work Industry.	57	25	7	1
Ability to mediate, negotiate and resolve conflict.	55	35	1	0
Counselling and case management.	53	34	4	0
Drug and Alcohol.	52	34	5	0
Issues of homelessness.	52	32	5	0
Working with young people in the context of families.	48	37	6	0
Issues of gender identity.	43	41	7	0
Legislation and legal issues.	42	44	5	0
Program planning.	42	40	9	0
Evaluation methods and skill.	37	45	9	0
Report writing.	34	43	14	0
Collective action and lobbying.	21	47	22	1
Working with Volunteers.	17	48	23	2

Question 3, presented in Table 3 above, asked respondents to rate the importance of 20 different skills possessed by graduate Youth Workers in a range including counselling, mediation, communication, evaluation, confidentiality and privacy, risk factors, the youth industry and more. Once again taking a broad view of overall responses we can see the majority of responses were either 'essential' or 'important'. This one sided response requires interpretation of the relative importance placed on each skill by the weakness of the positive response ('essential' or 'important') as well as the strength of the negative response ('somewhat important', 'unimportant'). Table 3 ranks these skills by frequency of respondents selecting 'essential'.

Understanding confidentiality and privacy had the most significantly positive response with 84.6% responding 'essential' and 14.3% responding 'important'. Only 1.1% responded 'somewhat important' with none responding 'unimportant'. This highlights the importance respondents' placed on understanding confidentiality and

privacy when conducting youth work and interacting with young people.

Communication and interpersonal skills was another area that that respondents generally recognised as 'essential' with 76.9% of responses. A further 20.9% responded 'important' with only 2.2% responding 'somewhat important'. Other skills that respondents felt were essential included referring and working with other agencies (73.6%) and the ability to work as part of a team (70.3%).

Working with volunteers showed the weakest response relative to other skills in this question with less than 20% of respondents indicating they felt it was an 'essential' skill. While more than half indicated it is 'important' a further 25.6% of respondents considered it only a 'somewhat important' skill. Another skill that wasn't regarded as essential was collective action and lobbying. While more than half responded 'important', nearly a further 25% felt it was only a 'somewhat important' skill.

Most other skills were generally considered important with more respondents indicating 'essential' than 'important' as shown by responses to skills including counselling and case management, networking, mediation and conflict resolution, working in a family context, teamwork, advocacy, mental health issues, drug and alcohol, homelessness and an understanding of the youth work industry which all skewed towards 'essential'.

15 of the 91 respondents specified other skills that they felt are essential for youth work graduates to possess as summarised in the below table. Two of the more common responses were student counselling or school based work and critical thinking skills.

Positive psychology developments
Ability to write funding submissions
Youth participation
Work within community developed framework
More peak bodies
Reflective practice
Student counselling/school based work
Depends on rural/metro/regional
Group work skills
Critical thinking
Communication skills
Research
Understand intellectual needs of young people
Work with disabled

Figures 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 depict question 3 within the context of the percentage of respondents to each component of the question.

Figure 9

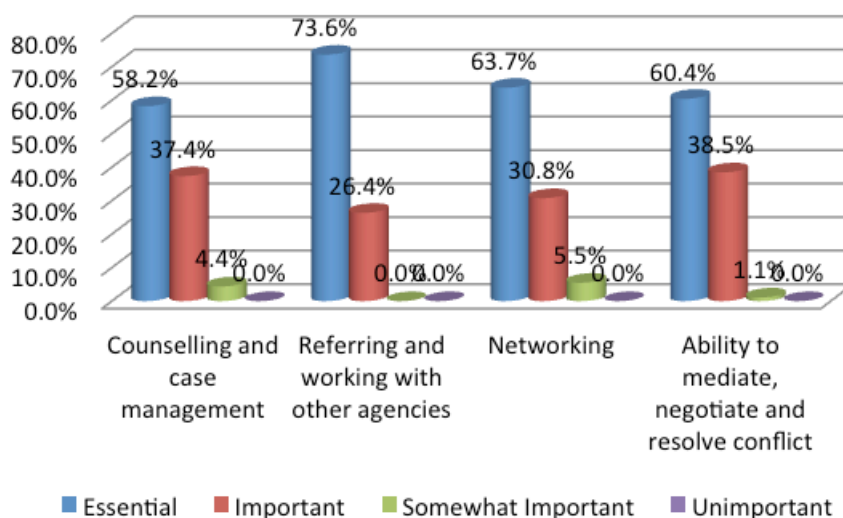


Figure 10

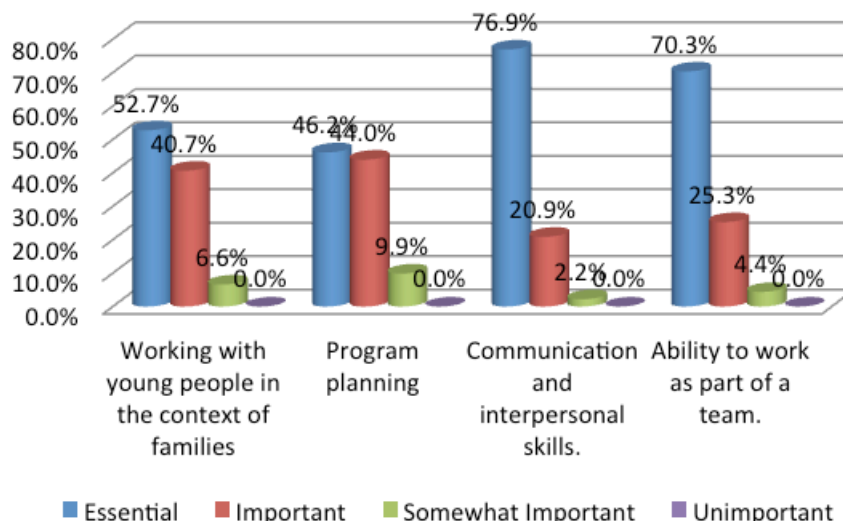


Figure 11

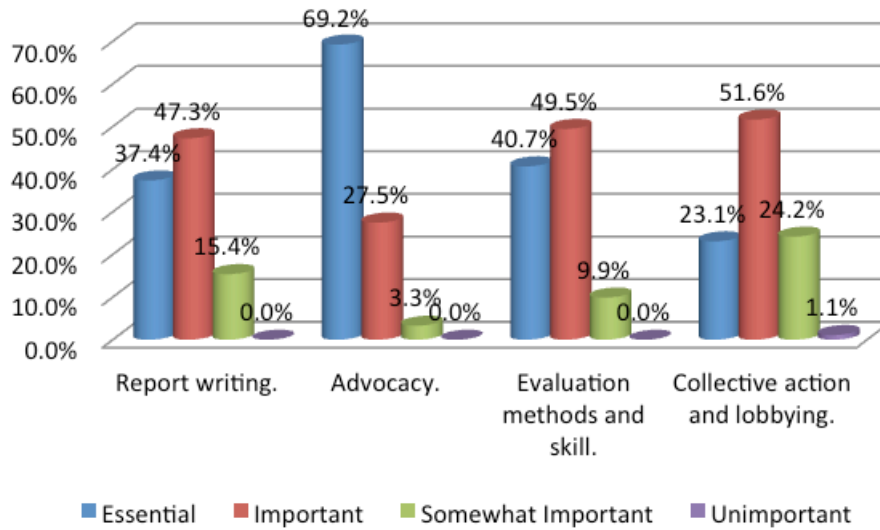


Figure 12

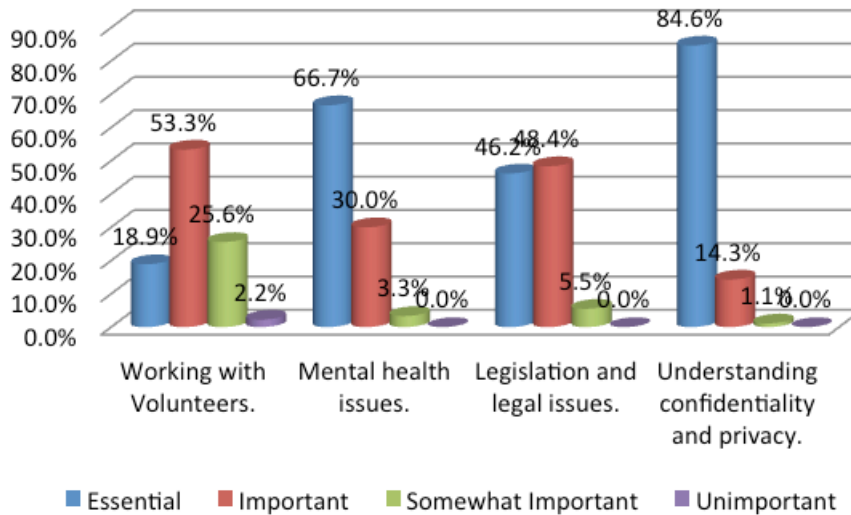
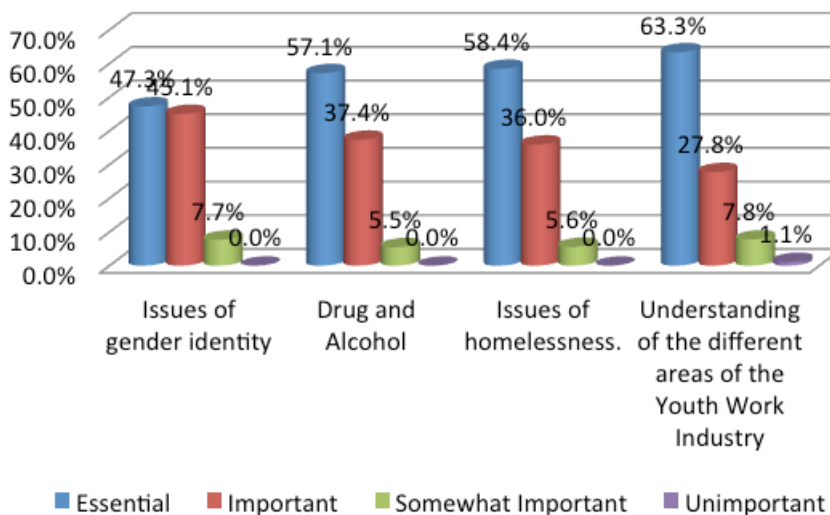


Figure 13



Question 4

What attributes do you think are essential for a Youth Work graduate to possess?

Table 4

	Essential	Important	Somewhat Important	Unimportant
Ability to engage young people and maintain rapport.	83	9	0	0
A personal commitment to best practice.	72	18	2	0
Ability to distinguish between professional and personal values and ideologies.	72	18	1	0
Problem solving.	60	29	2	0
An understanding of accountability.	54	36	2	0
The theory and skills of good organisational communication.	44	46	2	0
Details of the philosophy of community development.	31	50	8	3
The ability to undertake complex negotiations.	40	37	15	0

Question 4, presented in Table 4 above has been presented only in this tabular form. The question not surprisingly crossed over with the two previous questions on the skills and content area. The ability to engage young people and maintain rapport was at the top of Table 4 and obviously an essential attribute to respondents with 90% indicating it is 'essential' and the remaining 10% selecting 'important'. The ability to distinguish between

professional and personal values and ideologies and a personal commitment to best practice were two other attributes that respondents also recognised as very important with nearly 80% indicating they were 'essential'. Problem solving was another attribute deemed important with over 65% deeming it 'essential' and nearly 32% more responding it was 'important'.

Question 5

How essential is it that students adhere to a human rights framework of practice?

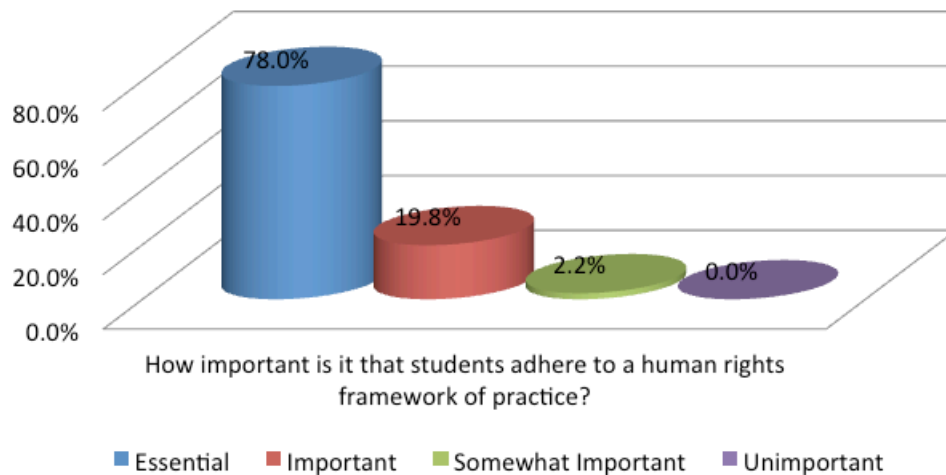
Table 5

	Essential	Important	Somewhat Important	Unimportant
How important is it that students adhere to a human rights framework of practice?	71	18	2	0

Question 5, presented in Table 5 above and in Figure 14 on the following page, asked respondents the importance of students adhering to a human rights framework of practice. Of the 91 respondents that undertook the survey 78% indicated that adhering to a human rights framework

is essentially important for students. A further 19.8% responded it was 'important' and only 2 in total responded 'somewhat important' showing a general consensus overall to adherence to a human rights framework of practice.

Figure 14



Question 6

How essential is it that the Youth Work professional association embarks on the endorsement of youth work courses as occurs in other professions such as Social Work and Psychology?

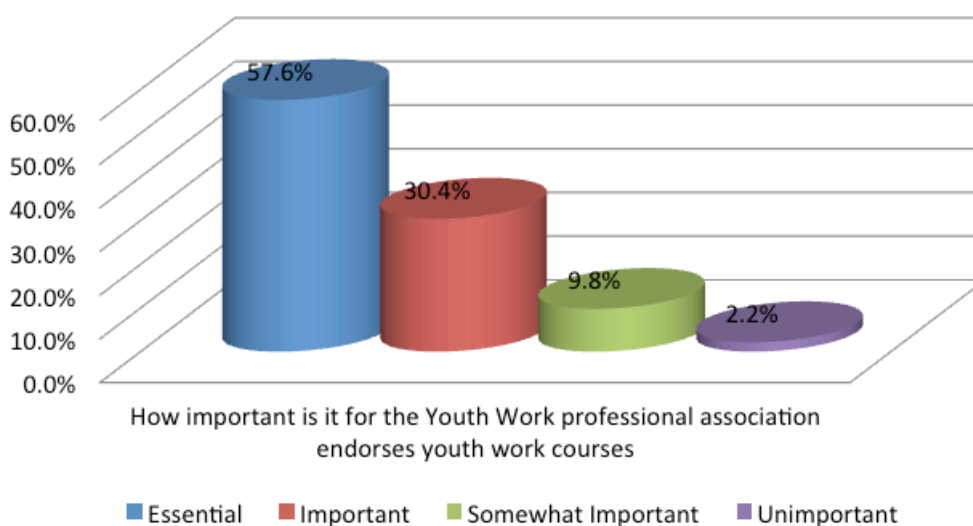
Table 6

	Essential	Important	Somewhat Important	Unimportant
How important is it for the Youth Work professional association to endorse youth work courses?	53	28	9	2

Responses to question 6, presented in Table 6 above and Figure 15 below, on the importance of Youth Work professional association endorsement of coursework, were positively skewed. We can see that more than half of

respondents rated the level of importance as 'essential' and nearly a further third responded 'important'. Less than 10 responded 'somewhat important' and only 2 'unimportant'.

Figure 15



Question 7

The process that we are considering is to establish an independent chair and a panel. Tell us who you think should be on that panel.

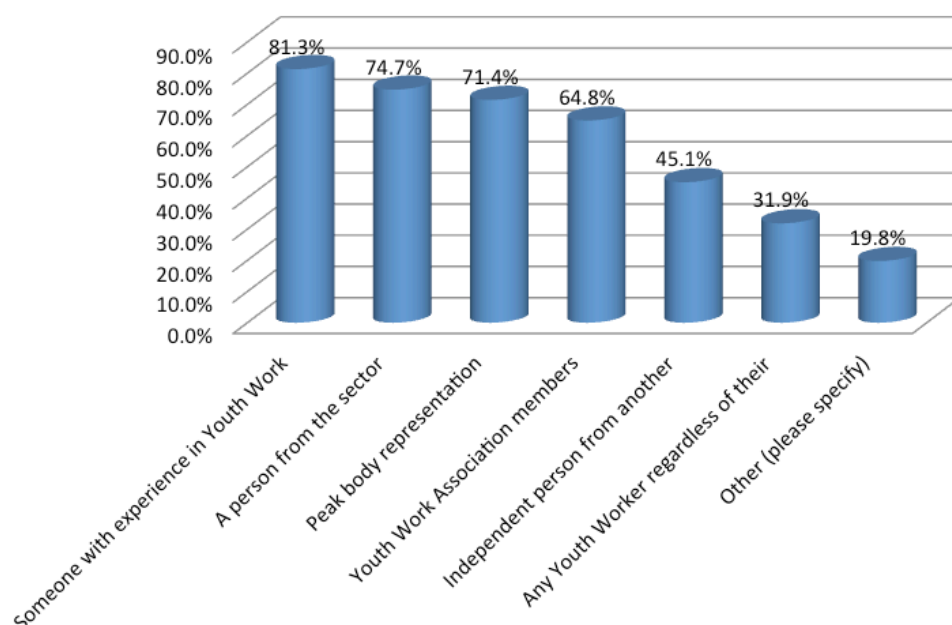
Table 7	
n = 91	
Someone with experience in Youth Work education	74
A person from the sector	68
Peak body representation	65
Youth Work Association members	59
Independent person from another profession	41
Any Youth Worker regardless of their membership status	29
Other (please specify)	18

Question 7, presented in Table 7 above and Figure 16 below asked respondents who they believe should be considered to sit on an independent chair and panel with responses ranked in order of frequency in Table 7. Of the 91 that completed the survey we can see that more than 4 in 5 felt that someone with experience in Youth Work education should be considered. This is closely followed by a person from the sector (74%) and a peak body representative (71%). More than half (64%) also indicated

they felt Youth Work Association members should be included on the panel.

18 respondents specified 'other' and from the written responses the most common theme was that a suitable young person/s should be selected to sit on the panel (6). Other suggestions included a broad holistic approach to selection and people who work directly with young people.

Figure 16



Question 8

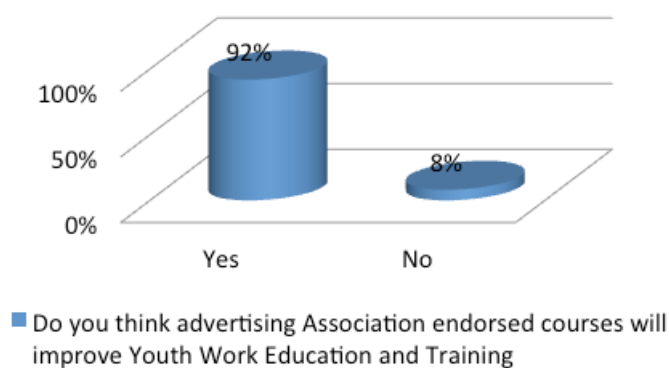
We are considering asking courses to volunteer for the process and then advertising on our new website those courses that the Association is endorsing. Do you agree that this is a process that will assist the improvement of Youth Work Education and Training?

Table 8		
	Yes	No
Do you think advertising Association endorsed courses will improve Youth Work Education and Training?	80	7

Question 8, presented in Table 8 above and Figure 17 below, asked respondents to answer yes or no to whether or not those courses that had volunteered for Youth Work course endorsement should be advertised on the YWA

web. More than 90% responded 'yes' showing a support for the volunteer and advertise process believing it would lead to improvement of Youth Work Education and Training.

Figure 17



Question 9

We are suggesting that every course should do a placement option in a youth work agency. How important is that and what percentage of the course should include placement?

Consistent with responses throughout the survey Question 9 shows there is overwhelming support for compulsory placements at Youth Work agencies. Respondents were asked how important a compulsory Youth Work placement is to learning and to indicate what percentage of coursework should include placement in the form of a written response.

Of the 91 that undertook the survey 84 respondents answered this question with a written response. Two thirds of the responses strongly indicated that they felt placement was critically important and should be made a compulsory component of the course. Of the respondents that suggested a percentage of course placement,

the vast majority indicated 25% or more as the ideal amount. Interestingly, 5 responded that more than 60% of the coursework should be compulsory placement, highlighting the few that are strong advocates of 'on the job' learning. Further responses included a minimum number of hours assigned to placement rather than a percentage figure, with most suggested a minimum of 200 hours. Other responses indicated that while compulsory placement was important the amount should be dependent on a combination of factors including course progression, individual level of ability and prior experience and/or training. Only one respondent felt that placement should be optional instead of compulsory.

Question 10

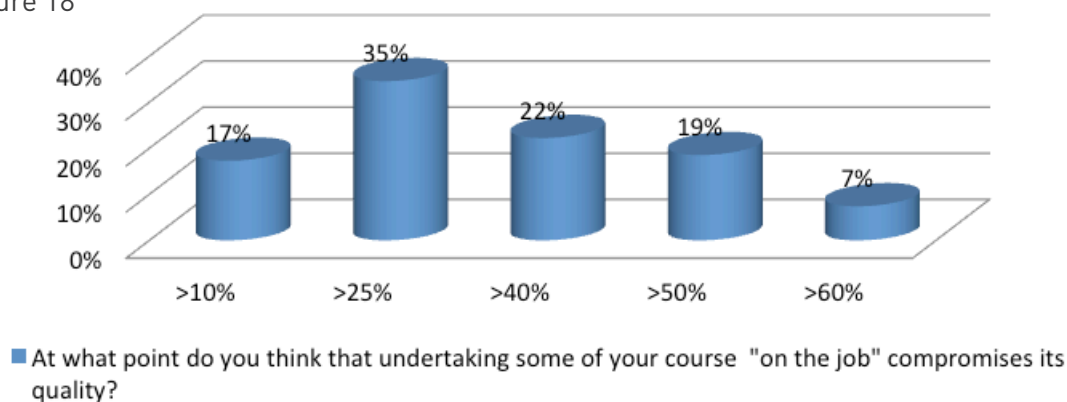
At what point do you think that undertaking some of your course “on the job” compromises its quality?

>10%	14
>25%	28
>40%	18
>50%	15
>60%	6

Following on from asking respondents the importance of compulsory placement as part of coursework, Question 10 asked respondents at which point they believed undertaking course placement ‘on the job’ began to compromise learning quality. The results, presented in Table 9 and Figure 18, find respondents selected from 5 options specifying varying percentages as shown in table 10. From the results we can see that the majority of respondents (35%) felt that undertaking more than a quarter of the course work ‘on the job’ began to compromise its quality. However, this is inconsistent with written responses that suggested the ideal amount of

placement is 25% or more. Only 17% felt that more than 10% ‘on the job’ placement was too much suggesting a perceived acceptable percentage of between 10% and 25%. As we progress along the scale beyond 25% we can see that the number of responses decreases progressively as ‘on the job’ placement increases, indicating an inverse relationship between the perceived ideal ratio of placement relative to theoretical coursework. The responses suggest a minimum level of valuable placement after which there is marginally decreasing benefit.

Figure 18



Question 11

Tell us what we missed in this process that you think is important

Common themes evident from feedback:

Professionalism and training – minimum level of qualification, emphasis on professional practice, social skills to build rapport, family/self harm training
Participation of young leaders
Networking – with endorsed organisations and other support networks
Strict selection process for an endorsed panel
Compulsory practical component for all courses

Actual feedback has been summarised in the table 10 below

Table 10	
Questionnaire hard to understand/vague questions	A greater focus on intellectual and social skills to enable youth workers to connect better with young people
There should be a survey of young people's expectations in first years	Need for a minimum level of education, such as a diploma. One respondent reported witnessing dangers to young people due to underqualified workers
The need to be more stringent on professionalism in youth workers	Increased emphasis on ethics, boundaries and professional practice. Eliminate perception youth work is about 'being mates' with young people
Increased youth participation of young leaders	The program should actively advocate courses that deserve endorsement
Evaluation of youth worker teaching staff	Constant evolution/adaptation of courses to keep up with youth trends
Placement should preferably be undertaken at endorsed organisations	All courses should have a practical component
Need for endorsed organisations to work alongside courses	In addition to a human rights framework as basis for an ethical and broad framework, youth workers should be trained for educational or harm minimisation framework depending on subjective roles
Need for a network of broader services that support young people and families	Too much talk on professionalism and not enough talk of essential aspects of youth work and practice
Greater acknowledgement of the breadth/variety of training paths/options for people wanting to work in the Youth Industry	Increased professional literacy skills as there are lots of literature reviews for youth workers
For the proposed panel there should be a very strict and transparent selection process founded on ethics	

Conclusion

Using the information outlined above, combined with the work that has been undertaken reviewing international models, the YWA Board is now embarking on a process of endorsement of Australian youth work courses in what has previously been a deregulated space for providers. Though largely funded by Governments there has been little or no scrutiny of course content or on the values and

practice frameworks that underpin youth work training programs in both the vocational and higher education arenas. The data that has been collected provides some definitive responses to direct what the industry regards as essential components of Youth Work education and training and the professionalisation of Youth Work in Australia.

References

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