



**BUILDING THE
FUTURE OF
THE SOCIAL
SERVICE
SECTOR**
FOUR
YEARS OF
PROGRESS



CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Executive Summary | 2 |
| Introduction | 4 |
| About FSSI | 6 |
| Our initiatives | 8 |
| Keeping our Sector Strong – A summary of the scholarship programs and associated initiatives | 8 |
| Scholarship enrolments and outcomes 2017 to present | 10 |
| Workforce Training Initiative Fund (WTIF) NDIS Future Workforce Capability Project | 11 |
| Associated workforce development initiatives | 11 |
| Key outcomes | 12 |
| Increased supply through improved completion rates | 14 |
| Greater student capability | 14 |
| Placements and employer support | 15 |
| Innovative models attracting, retaining and supporting to completion a diverse student cohort | 16 |
| Student supports | 16 |
| Sector intelligence supporting improved course content and pedagogy | 18 |
| Course content development | 18 |
| Teacher characteristics and pedagogy | 19 |
| Future research opportunities | 20 |
| Engaging diverse learners using remote learning | 21 |
| The cost-benefit of wrap around support for diverse learners | 21 |
| Long term impacts of workforce development initiatives | 21 |
| Teacher capability and capacity | 21 |
| Placement and employer supervision | 21 |
| System challenges | 22 |
| Conclusion | 24 |

FSSI acknowledges the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nation on whose unceded lands we conduct our business. FSSI respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present. FSSI also acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and their Ancestors of the lands and waters across Australia where we conduct our business.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Future Social Service Institute (FSSI) received funding under the Keeping Our Sector Strong Initiative in 2016 to introduce innovative scholarship models that build the supply, capability and diversity of the disability sector workforce.

The models, which consisted of a scholarship program and wrap around support to undertake a Certificate III in Individual Support (Disability and Aged Care) or a Certificate in IV Disability, were refined and enhanced over time in response to student and industry feedback.



The scholarship initiatives, and associated curriculum and teaching reforms, produced a range of outcomes that strengthen the social service sector including:

- **improved completion rates**, meaning more students graduating and qualified to enter the workforce. Around 127 additional graduates have completed the scholarship programs since 2017, with completion rates, on average, double the industry average,
- **increased student understanding of the sector**, increased student capacity and satisfaction driven by involvement of people with lived experience,
- **improved placement experiences** leading to heightened desire to enter the social services workforce, particularly the disability sector. Students report being better prepared to enter and remain in the social services workforce, awareness of new career pathways and desire to lead change within this workforce,
- **attracting, retaining and supporting to graduation a diverse student cohort** including groups that are under-represented in the disability workforce such as culturally and linguistically diverse students and older workers,
- **innovative and supportive training delivery** that engaged students and built their confidence, including through remote delivery, and
- **improved course content co-designed** by industry, former students and people with lived experience that is relevant to changing industry needs.

The report highlights that a supported approach to training, with increased emphasis on establishing belonging from early on, can enable a range of diverse learners to successfully complete qualifications and prepare them for work. It shows how co-design can help build user experience into curriculum development, with the end result being learners that are able to empathise with service users, have aligned values and a preparedness to work in the social services sector.

The report also highlights systemic challenges both within the vocational education system – including the failure of many training packages to meeting emerging and rapidly changing industry needs, and the

social services system – including the disjuncture between best practice learned in the classroom and what is experienced on practicum, especially in the aged care sector.

The report highlights key successes and challenges, and opportunities for improvement.

The Keeping our Sector Strong Initiative was a key funder of and impetus for the scholarship model. The model exemplifies the pivotal role played by FSSI in linking together government, the social services sector and education bodies.

FSSI has and will continue to draw on the findings of this report to inform and scale models of delivery.

INTRODUCTION

Keeping our Sector Strong outlined a vision for a transformed disability workforce.

Keeping our sector strong: Victoria's workforce plan for the NDIS (KOSS) is Victoria's plan to build the disability workforce of the future: a workforce that is skilled, diverse and dynamic, delivering high-quality, innovative support to achieve the best possible outcomes for people with disability ([vic.gov.au/keeping-our-sector-strong#building-the-workforce-of-the-future](https://www.vic.gov.au/keeping-our-sector-strong#building-the-workforce-of-the-future)). The plan invested \$26 million on workforce development, training and skills initiatives.

The Future Social Service Institute (FSSI) received funding under the Keeping Our Sector Strong plan to drive world-leading education, training and research for the disability and social services sector. A key pillar was to develop, trial and implement more relevant and tailored models of training that engage a wider cohort of students, and provide students with leading edge curriculum and pedagogy that improve their capacity as care workers.

The models, which consisted of a scholarship program and wrap around support to undertake a Certificate III in Individual Support (Disability and Aged Care) or a Certificate IV in Disability, have been refined and enhanced over time in response to student and industry feedback and policy changes. The models have also given rise to new initiatives to expand education and employment pathways for the social services workforce.

This report highlights key successes and challenges, and notes opportunities for improvement across sectors.

The report draws upon a breadth of reports including FSSI progress reports and internal program documentation. More extensive data was collected on the Certificate III program as this program was subject to redesign, and trialled with several diverse student cohorts.

The report highlights the benefits of a supported approach to training, in encouraging and retaining diverse cohorts, ensuring values alignment between future workers and the sector, and supporting quality outcomes (for employers and service users).

Accompanying this report will be short fact sheets that identify key outtakes from four years of progress for the VET sector, Government and social service employers. Our aim is that this report serves as a resource to support continual workforce transformation across the social service sector.

ABOUT FSSI

Established in 2016, FSSI is a partnership between RMIT University and the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) supported by the Victorian Government.

FSSI drives innovation in education, training and applied research to enable the growth and transformation of the social service industry. FSSI works to create opportunities and pathways for people to become qualified and to join the social service workforce with a particular focus on supporting diverse cohorts, including people who face barriers to training and employment.

FSSI ensures that people who are directly affected including students and people with lived experience are at the centre of our work: setting priorities, designing solutions, leading and guiding service approaches.

FSSI's contribution has focused on the following key areas:

- 1 More people in the workforce and improved workforce retention to meet ever growing demand,
- 2 A diverse workforce that reflects the communities that it serves, in the places where they are needed,
- 3 Workers that have knowledge, skills and capabilities to deliver high quality, person-centred services,
- 4 Leadership equipped and enabled to navigate unprecedented growth and transformation, and
- 5 Insights and knowledge to inform, support and strengthen sector growth and transformation to better respond to community needs.



OUR INITIATIVES

Keeping our Sector Strong – A summary of the scholarship programs and associated initiatives

FSSI received investment through KOSS for a range of initiatives including vocational education scholarships, PHD Scholarships, Industry Research Fellowships, Evaluation and Outreach and Advocacy. This report focuses on the intersection of the vocational education scholarships and evaluation. Scholarships were provided for eligible students undertaking the Certificate III in Individual Support (Disability and Aged Care) and Certificate IV in Disability.

The table (right) provides an outline of what made up the scholarship offerings, noting that not all students required all items.



ASPECTS OF SCHOLARSHIP OFFERINGS



Scholarship enrolments and outcomes 2017 to present

Intake across the Certificate III in Individual Support (Disability and Aged Care) and Certificate IV in Disability varied over the four year period, with different cohorts targeted. For example, initially take up of scholarships was low and a decision was made to offer places to Diploma of Nursing applicants which resulted in additional enrolments.

The 2019 Certificate III cohorts trialled an enhanced curriculum (discussed in the course content section), designed to engage students more deeply in the content, draw on lived experience and create better prepared graduates. The introduction of Free TAFE, which commenced in 2019, removed one of the major barriers to accessing education and training for people seeking to work in the social service sector. In 2019, RMIT supported tailored delivery models and funded additional support for targeted student cohorts.

The two cohorts were the East African Women’s Group and the City participants, who undertook the Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing and Disability) utilising the new co-designed curriculum developed by FSSI as part of the NDIS Future Workforce Capability Project which was funded under the Workforce Training Innovative Fund (WTIF) scheme (see below).

Table 1 highlights enrolments under the scholarship program. 210 scholarships were offered, of which 178 students commenced.

Workforce Training Initiative Fund (WTIF) NDIS Future Workforce Capability Project

FSSI’s extensive sector consultation and research found current social service training programs are not always fit-for purpose.

In January 2018, FSSI secured \$1.2 million in funding through the Workforce Training Innovation Fund (WTIF) for the “NDIS Future Workforce Capability Initiative”. FSSI worked closely with the sector and experts by experience to co-design curriculum products to fill immediate skill and knowledge gaps in the training of care workers, making them ready for work in the new NDIS consumer-directed care environment.

With support from the WTIF, in 2018 FSSI began ‘renovating’ Certificate III curriculum programs to address gaps in the training of social service workers. Together with the sector and experts by experience, FSSI co-designed five new value-based curriculum areas for inclusion in the curriculum to better prepare workers:

1. The Ethics of Care



2. Human Rights-led Practice



3. Power and Abuse



4. Working with Diversity



5. Enabling Technology



Following knowledge reviews of these areas and co-design workshops an innovative curriculum was developed including:

- Twenty-four high quality videos containing interviews with service users and providers.
- Two virtual reality experiences were designed to immerse students in everyday interactions from the perspective of a service user.
- The traditional work placement model was overhauled to encourage more effective consolidation of new learning.

This curriculum was piloted by the 2019 cohorts and was made available to all Victorian Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).

Associated workforce development initiatives

While FSSI’s initial focus was on providing initial uptake of scholarships, the Institute pivoted to address growing the workforce in a range of other ways after the introduction of Free TAFE removed a major financial barrier to training. The Higher Apprenticeships Project, Innovative Traineeship Program, Reach, Train, Employ Project and Community Traineeships Pilot Project are all examples of new pathways and models to grow the workforce that FSSI is helping to design, implement and/or evaluate.

TABLE 1: Scholarship recipients enrolments and outcomes

| Course | Enrolments | Graduated | Course completion rate (%) | NCVER, Completion rates Victoria 2018, all providers (%) |
|--|------------|-----------|----------------------------|--|
| Certificate III in Individual Support Sub-Total* | 93 | 69 | 74 | 33 |
| Certificate IV in Disability Sub-Total | 85 | 58 | 68 | 28 |
| Certificate III in Individual Support + Certificate IV in Disability | 178 | 127 | 71 | |

(includes likely graduates awaiting placement delayed due to COVID-19)



KEY OUTCOMES

The scholarship initiative, and associated curriculum and teaching reforms, produced a range of outcomes that strengthen the social service sector workforce including:



Increased supply through increased completion rates, meaning more students graduating and qualified to enter the workforce. Around 127 additional graduates have completed the scholarship program since 2017, with completion rates, on average, double the industry rate;



Increased student understanding of the sector, increased student capacity and satisfaction driven by involvement of people with lived experience,



Improved placement experiences leading to heightened desire to enter the social services workforce, particularly the disability sector. Students report being better prepared to enter and remain in the social services workforce, awareness of new career pathways and desire to lead change within this workforce,



widening the entry gate - attracting, retaining and supporting to graduation a diverse student cohort including groups that are under-represented in the disability workforce such as culturally and linguistically diverse students,



innovative and supportive training delivery that engaged students and built their confidence, including through remote delivery, and

Improved course content co-designed by industry, former students and people with lived experience that is relevant to changing industry needs. The following section discusses the key outcomes, including the enablers and challenges.

Increased supply through improved completion rates

FSSI has offered a total of 210 scholarships – 99 scholarships to students not currently in the sector and 111 to upskill students currently employed in the sector. These offers translated to 178 enrolments across the two qualifications over the past four years (See Table 1). The course completion rates for the cohorts have been high – for all cohorts they were well above the standard industry average and the standard TAFE average. Overall 127 students have graduated or are close to graduating from the scholarship program (30 students are currently awaiting placements delayed due to COVID-19).

Completion rates vary between cohorts for a range of reasons – including course content, student life circumstances and, particularly for the Certificate IV which involved current employees undertaking training, levels of employer support.

The completion rates were higher for some diverse learner groups, such as East African Women (projected 86% completion rate) than the cohort average. This indicates that, with sufficient flexible individualised support, a diverse workforce can be recruited and trained. Factors supporting the improved completion rates – such as provision of financial and educational assistance, new course content and different teaching styles/pedagogy will be explored in the following sections.

“I will be modifying some of our team’s policies and processes to provide more flexibility in our services / supports”

STUDENT



Greater student capability

There was a significant change in student capability over time. Students, when on placement, felt that they were more prepared than other carers in the workplace. Students reflected that they had a greater knowledge of the sector. The course assisted students to develop an affinity for people accessing services.

The inclusion of people with lived experience in the delivery and later co-design of the course was integral to the building of student capacity, as well as attracting and retaining students in the course. Students undertaking the 2019 course were less likely to raise that they felt underprepared than in earlier cohorts. They had a greater understanding of why service users may respond differently, and how their actions and language can empower or disempower service users.

East African Women’s Group students, in particular, provided feedback on how well prepared they felt as a result of the Certificate III course. Students reported they had:

- a very strong understanding about the needs of people with a disability;
- an extremely good understanding of their role as a care worker; and
- a very good understanding of career pathways and a good understanding of how to get a job.

This contrasts to feedback in first year of the revised curriculum, where students raised concerns about their understanding and capacity to support service users, such as people with dementia, and expressed difficulties understanding job search techniques.

Students reported a deeper and often new and transformative appreciation of the experience of living with a disability.

Learning from lived experience

While treating people with a disability respectfully has often involved a sense of otherness and a tendency to go out of their way to offer help. Hearing from speakers with lived experience provided students with insights into how the people they care for are feeling, their hopes and frustrations and how they want to be supported. This broke down the sense of otherness and helped the students to better understand the needs and wants of people with a disability. A student who cares for a family member with a disability felt that the course had made them a better carer by helping to differentiate between carer and family relationship roles.

Students undertaking the Certificate IV were able to immediately apply their skills to the workplace.

In the Certificate IV course students felt better equipped to work with people with disabilities and were implementing changes at both individual practice and organisational levels. Practice changes included using more diverse communication methods and an increased focus on self-advocacy. Students could draw on course theory and understand the need to service access and delivery including to prioritise the rights of people with a disability. At an organisational level, students were initiating reviews of policies and practice in their work teams.

Student capacity was attested by employers and placement supervisors.

“Being a lot more aware of offering different communication styles as an option to clients as they may feel more confident in writing, drawing, etc rather than spoken language”

STUDENT

“a subset of the course would be great for all carers to do; as a carer it’s easy to get caught up in the role and the course helped to sort out differences between roles.”

STUDENT

Placements and employer support

The gradual and supported placement model was viewed as a strength in lowering student anxiety about entering a workplace. Prior to the placement students expressed reservations about their capacity to cope:

Strong student-teacher relationships based on mutual respect and trust were crucial to supporting students to gain confidence to enter the workforce. In the Certificate III a RMIT teacher supported an initial 18-hour group placement at a residential aged care facility, following which students completed two separate individual 60-hour aged care and disability care placements. A RMIT teacher visited students during their independent placement and students were encouraged to telephone or email their teacher immediately if issues arose during their placement.

Employers played a major role in ensuring students had a positive experience. Certificate IV students were already engaged in the workplace, but benefited from employer encouragement, support to attend classes and being provided with time for the completion of assignments. Certificate III student placements were not offered at sites where RMIT teachers had concerns about an organisation’s culture or practices. Despite this, students commonly reported seeing practices inconsistent with the values they were learning such as person-centred care, most often raising concerns about practices in aged care settings. This points to the need for further leadership development in some settings, to attract and retain the workforce.

The result of the placement experience was that more Certificate III students, who were open to working in either sector prior to placement, identified a desire to enter the disability sector. This reinforces the importance of employers creating good placement experiences, in order to secure their future workforce.

“I have the skills to do my job better”

STUDENT

“I was freaking out and nervous and thought I wouldn’t be able to do it but once I went into placement it was a lot easier. I thought it would be difficult/hard but it ended up being the complete opposite; ending with me enjoying it more than I thought I would and not wanting to leave.”

STUDENT

innovative models attracting, retaining, supporting and graduating a diverse student cohort

The initiative revealed that it is possible to successfully attract, support and graduate a diverse student cohort.

A variety of models were used to attract students to the Certificate III course (unlike the Certificate IV course that was targeted at employers and existing workers). This included advertising of the courses, direct approaches to students who were unsuccessful in gaining entry to nursing (at RMIT), and working with community organisations supporting cohorts of potential students – such as East African Women.

Widening the entry pathway to training meant existing enrolment systems were too narrow and not easily accessible to all. Additional supports were provided to assist diverse cohorts to negotiate systems, such as enrolment, whilst feeding back recommendations for improvement of systems for future cohorts.

Students benefited from early advice about class times and course materials. Clear and early advice about class scheduling was vital to students' capacity to attend class. Program managers and teachers made themselves aware of the challenges facing students from diverse cohorts, including the competing priorities students faced with work, family, caring and sometimes health commitments. As will be discussed later, improved pedagogy and relational teaching styles went hand in hand, with teachers providing academic and motivational support for students.

The student journey from application, to enrolment, to commencement and completion varied for different students depending on their personal circumstances. RMIT and FSSI staff individualised support to maintain student engagement and maximise likelihood of course completion.

Student supports

There was a focus across the courses on establishing a sense of belonging. The small group nature of the programs encouraged a sense of belonging. Students felt empowered to ask questions. T-shirts were provided to add to the sense of 'group belonging' on placement. The re-design of the curriculum placed an even greater emphasis on belonging for the first two weeks of the course. This is consistent with a range of research on diverse cohorts that shows establishing a sense of belonging is key to retention.

Financial supports were crucial for some learners to be able to attend and complete training – from provision of MYKI cards, food vouchers, and the loan of laptops and access to WIFI, particularly when learning moved to remote delivery during COVID-19. Transitioning to online learning posed new challenges around computing skills, working in full households, screen fatigue, and subjects being more prescriptive with closing dates set by program managers

Courses focused on meeting students where they were at – physically and learning need wise. This included scheduling classes at a convenient local venue in the case of the East African Women's Group, enabling students missing classes to catch up, integrating literacy and numeracy classes into group work, and rescheduling placements. Making sure the course was accessible to students with a disability and students with mental and physical health issues was also a focus. Over time the courses embedded aspects within them, such as literacy support and employability support, as students were unlikely to access RMIT supports on campus for these skills due to lack of time given the block nature of studies, inability to attend campus and/or absence of an established relationship. This accords with earlier RMIT research on the journey of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Off campus students who studied in an alternative venue or online, and students who studied in block models felt more aligned to their group than the institution and did not access other services like the library or career support.

One hypothesis the initiative tested is that you can widen the entry gate to courses and, if you provide sufficient individualised support, students from a variety of backgrounds with barriers to learning can succeed. The flow on of this would be intercepting a lifelong cycle of unemployment or insecure work for marginalised students.

Students support needs were assessed as part of the project. Across the four years a range of students with multiple and high support needs have been enabled to complete, including students with a disability, and students from Language Backgrounds other than English. An inclusion index, developed as part of this project, revealed that students with high and multiple types of disadvantage were more likely to succeed, if supported, than other learners who did not receive additional supports.

Quantifying student marginalisation – the inclusion index

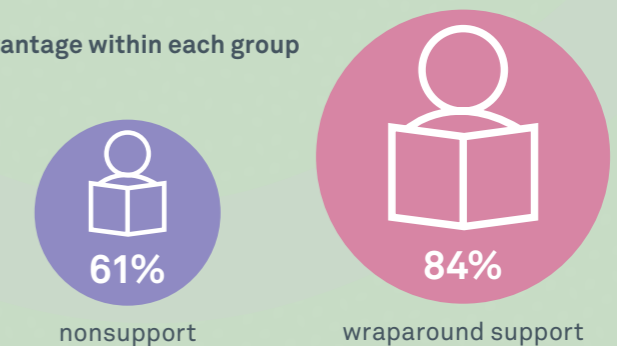
An inclusion index was created to ascertain and quantify the barriers facing students undertaking training, such as low levels of English, low levels of prior education and regionality.

The hypothesis is that, with extra support, students with a range of barriers can be assisted to succeed in education. The inclusion index measures how many factors that may limit a student's capacity to learn

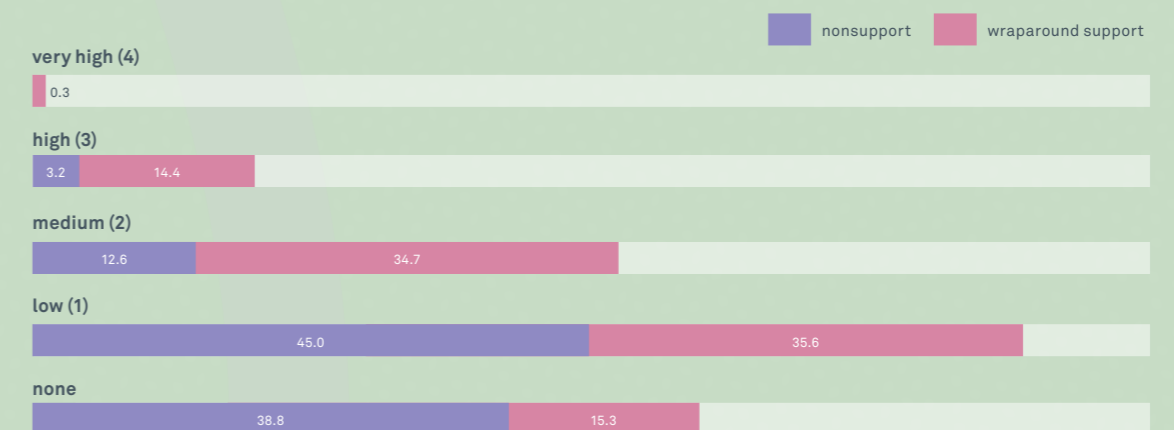
are affecting students. The graph below shows the differing levels of disadvantage for the East African Women Group (labelled wrap around) and the City Group (labelled non wrap around).

Indicative findings

Percentage of students facing any disadvantage within each group



Percentage of level of disadvantage within Wrap Around and Non-Wrap Around Cohorts



Targeted courses can play an important role in the broader labour market. Given that most jobs in the next five years will require post school qualifications¹, wrap around courses can support a wide range of learners to gain the skills they need to gain employment. We know that young people who are not in full time employment by the age of 25 are unlikely to be in stable employment throughout their lives². The scholarship model appears to be a chance to break this cycle by supporting skill and employment acquisition for cohorts of students.

¹ www.joboutlook.gov.au

² Lamb, Stephen and Huo, Shuyan (2017) *Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education*. Discussion Paper. Mitchell Institute, Melbourne, Victoria.



Sector intelligence supporting improved course content and pedagogy

A key contributor to improved engagement and completion has been improvements to course content and pedagogy.

Course content development

Over the four years, and especially with the introduction of the updated Certificate III curriculum, students were presented with new and more engaging material that was co-designed by people with lived experiences.

Course content development was subject to cycles of reflection and improvement. Changes to course content and pedagogy served to make the courses more engaging, to encourage deeper learning and ultimately improve workforce preparation. However, they occurred incrementally and often in a piecemeal series of work arounds given the difficulty in amending rigid training packages.

Initially students in both courses indicated that engagement would be enhanced if teachers provided more time for discussion and reflection and focused less on transmission of knowledge. Changes were accommodated in a variety of ways – from offering extra content and experiences outside of the regular curriculum such as talks and videos from people with lived experience to changes in delivery modes includes using videos and flipping classrooms to focus more on discussion of pre-reading content. Experiential learning, such as wearing blindfolds and gloves, helped students to empathise with how vulnerable care recipients can feel and reflect upon the language they use in their contexts.



The NDIS Future Workforce Capability Project redesigned content and pedagogy, with a greater focus on reflective practice. As part of the project a range of scholars spearheaded the knowledge reviews on the following areas, bringing together and translating academic knowledge:

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| The Ethics of Care | |
| Human Rights-led Practice | |
| Power and Abuse | |
| Working with Diversity | |
| Enabling Technology | |

Curriculum was co-designed with people with lived experience, and a focus on a strengths-based approach with users at the centre. Course developers drew on the experiences of existing workers and former students to ensure the course prepared students for the lived experience as a care worker.

The curriculum was designed to be delivered in a much more immersive and reflective manner, with students invited to co-create knowledge. A range of values driven curriculum products were produced, such as short courses and micro credentials. The result of this was that students reported feeling prepared and excited to work – particularly in the disability sector.

Students reflected that they were better prepared to enter the social services sector as they had greater insights into the lives of care workers.

Utilising modern teaching techniques worked well for students from a variety of diverse backgrounds. Experiences such as VR enabled students to ‘live’ what it is like to be woken up as a dementia patient and better understand and respond to the experiences, and reactions, patients have. This reduced the level of shock felt on placement, and enabled more rapid building of relationships with service users.

Teacher characteristics and pedagogy

Teachers were key to the success of the courses. They formed an additional and support for students, as well as providing a safe space for discussions. Teachers led class conversations and empowered students to share their views, including drawing on their own social services workplace experiences and encouraging students to share their workplace and placement experience.

Teachers motivated and encouraged students and performed outreach to students who were disengaging. Academic and personal issues often conflated – students had to look after ill children or parents and miss vital classes, or have placements deferred. Students confidence in their academic ability, and their capacity to complete assignments, was further challenged due to external stressors. Students related to their cohort and teacher, rather than the institution per se, and were supported with outreach by a trusted teacher to stay on track.

Teachers elected to partake in the program. They were accessible and responsive - students reported they could approach teachers with concerns including about their personal circumstances. Teachers were accommodating and non-judgemental, and provided encouragement when students needed it:

“you know because of (teacher) I finish this course, to be honest... the routine is too hard class I couldn’t concentrate, and I don’t know the English, I say no, why kid myself like, I couldn’t do it, you know, I was thinking I can’t. But (teacher), she said, don’t worry you will do it. Your English is good. You just need only to learn how to spell. And then she, like she encouraged me and I start to say, Okay, and then after one month, two months, and I start to like it more and Thank God I finish”

Some teachers reported being run off their feet providing additional support. Where quantified, teachers provided between one to 36 of additional support per student.

Videos and VR experiences played a key role in helping students to both understand the perspectives of service users, and to reflect on the emotional aspects of the role as a worker.

They served to build empathy that ‘these are people, who you are dealing with, and trying to understand their point of view or situation rather than just a job’

‘People’s experiences told us what Really mattered. It’s wanting to be seen, wanting to be heard, wanting to be a full person in their own right.’

Learners reported watching the videos crystallised what they had read and that the images in the videos helped them retain their learning.

The teaching staff reported that while it is usual for Vocational Education students to need additional support a higher proportion of the Cert III scholarship students need additional support and had challenges that impacted on their capacity to study. Support from teaching staff included encouragement to complete outstanding assessment tasks, opportunities to discuss and resubmit assignments that weren’t initially up to standard, encouraging students to talk to staff about any personal circumstances limiting their capacity to study, following up students not attending classes and assistance with resolving administrative problems.

FUTURE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

This report provides a wide range of insights into how learner experiences and outcomes have improved through the four years of the scholarships program.

This report also raises a range of issues that have emerged and would benefit from further research to enable better targeting of support, particularly to diverse learners. These areas are outlined below.



Five areas for future research

01

Engaging diverse learners using remote learning

02

The cost-benefit of wrap around support for diverse learners

03

Long term impacts of workforce development initiatives

04

Teacher capability and capacity

05

Placement and employer supervision

Engaging diverse learners using remote learning

During COVID-19 learning shifted online. Learners faced additional challenges such as lack of space to study, lack of technology, screen fatigue, missing the organic nature of discussions and, in some cases, feeling less empowered to talk. Other FSSI projects concur with these findings, including that women in particular faced competing demands with caring responsibilities.³

The move to online learning in 2020 posed challenges for learners who were new to education and in need of support to access the online learning environment. Students faced challenges with access to technology as well as quiet places to engage in study, combined with caring responsibilities for children and/or parents. It was more difficult to build one on one relationships during remote learning but also more vital, as learners were not likely to seek additional support from across RMIT.

A challenge remains as to how to build a sense of allegiance with the broader community so students access the services they need, or models of remote outreach that can engage students. Remote learning provides the opportunity to reach more students, but further research is needed on how the multiple support needs of diverse students can be met in a remote delivery environment. This aligns with recent research which highlights the challenges faced by low socio-economic students switching to online learning.⁴

The cost-benefit of wrap around support for diverse learners

The research demonstrates that learners from a range of diverse backgrounds can be attracted to training and supported to completion. This approach yields benefits on multiple fronts – from building a more skilled, numerous and diverse workforce to helping to break the cycles of poverty in communities. Additional research is needed to quantify the cost of the additional support provided, and the resultant economic and social benefits of the employment outcomes.

³ <https://www.futuresocial.org/completed-projects/stories-into-evidence-project/>

⁴ <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/latest-news/articles/new-teqsa-report-details-student-experiences-switch-online-learning>

Long term impacts of workforce development initiatives

The scholarship model concludes at the point at which learners finish their course. Whilst many students identify a desire to work in the care industry and initial indications suggest many students gain work, longitudinal research is needed to identify if students completing these courses transition to the sector in greater numbers than other graduates, are better prepared once employed in the sector, and whether they stay in the sector for a longer period of time. Longitudinal research could also highlight the pathways into manager and senior leader positions – and whether additional support is needed to navigate into these higher-level roles. The current Higher Apprenticeship Pilot Program will feed into this knowledge gap.

Teacher capability and capacity

The scholarship model's high completion rates are heavily dependent on the capability and capacity of teaching staff. Teachers who participated in the program chose to work with the different student cohorts. They brought their industry experience and expertise, as do all VET trainers, but also a capacity to relate to, motivate and encourage learners of different backgrounds. To scale up a model that can support a diverse range of students, further research to create a skills profile of teachers that can produce exceptional outcomes is required. Consideration needs to be given to how to reduce teacher burden and spread support needs, to reduce levels of teacher turnover and burnout. A communities of practice model could assist in providing a support and professional learning network.

Placement and employer supervision

The scholarship model touched upon the importance of quality placements, including the active role that needs to be played by employers as supervisors and mentors. Especially in aged care, students are turned away from the industry sector if their placements did not live up to the values they were learning. If students are to be prepared for the workplace, and to lead change to implement user centred practice, they need access to high quality placements with engaged mentors and supervisors. Further work is needed to examine and understand the key components of a good placement experience.

SYSTEM CHALLENGES

The report raises several system challenges, both for government and the care industry.

The scholarship initiatives have been supported by the Victorian Government over the last four years. This continuity of funding has enabled continual refinement of the curriculum and pedagogy. The desire to commence delivery quickly meant curriculum changes were modest until the WTIF funding enabled a wholesale review of the Certificate III.



The difficulty with changing training packages and their lack of responsiveness to changing industry demand was apparent in this project. A range of curriculum products were designed to support the curriculum delivery, and a series of bolt-on solutions such as extra-curricular activities and key talks to supplement reported weaknesses in the qualification. Changes to pedagogy, such as using VR and videos, helped diverse students to understand content better. Issues remained with assessments that could not be contextualised, were difficult to understand and deemed as less relevant to industry needs but necessary for compliance. Some students wanted additional learning in areas, such as mental health and dementia, but this was difficult to accommodate in a broad qualification. There remains a need for rapid skill development and availability of skills sets that can be stacked, to build breadth and depth of student understanding.

Further work is needed to understand and document what it takes to implement inclusive education at scale, and develop a replicable model that can be used by other training providers. Consideration of scale across different elements of the social service and care sector, different levels of qualifications and more broadly where the model could be replicated across the training sector. The current small-scale bespoke models show immense promise, but further work is needed to understand what supports are needed, and when, and how these can best be funded and delivered. This points to a broader question on the capability and role of the public provider in enabling a wider range of learners to succeed in education.

A systemic issue is the discrepancy observed by students between the levels of care they aspire to provide to care recipients and the reality on the ground. Students commented in particular that there was less evidence of a 'rights-based' model of care in the aged care settings in which they undertook their placements. Students also felt they would be challenged to implement changes at practice level given funding restrictions and demands on their time. If students understand and seek to provide a higher level of care but are unable to do so, this may cause them to leave the workforce and lead to continual workforce churn.

CONCLUSION


The report raises several system challenges, both for government and the care industry.

The scholarship initiatives have been supported by the Victorian Government over the last four years. This continuity of funding has enabled continual refinement of the curriculum and pedagogy. The desire to commence delivery quickly meant curriculum changes were modest until the WTIF funding enabled a wholesale review of the Certificate III.




The outcomes align with the KOSS goals, increasing supply with 127 highly qualified workers that have greater capability and aligned values for the workforce. Models have been piloted and remodelled over the four years, with the result being qualifications that provide workers with an understanding of the experiences of people in care, as well as the demands on carers. Sector intelligence has been harnessed with a greater understanding of student experiences of training, integration of service user experience and a realisation of the pivotal role played by placements in shaping students' employment preferences. Innovation in service design has created a new evidence base on how inclusive approaches can support students' retention and completion. Future challenges include to track graduates to see the impact of their training on their longer-term workforce participation, and to scale the models across qualification levels, industries, and workplaces.


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