

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into the Higher Education Legislation Amendment (2005 Measures No.1) Bill 2005

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National President

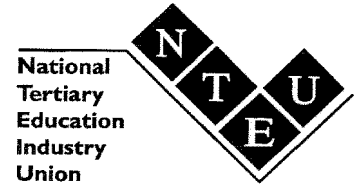
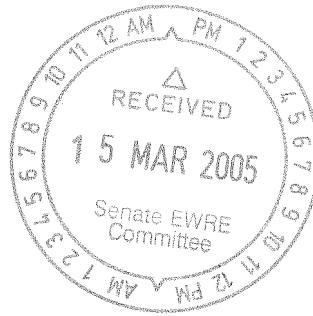
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John Carter
Secretary
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee

March 15 2005

RE: Inquiry into the provisions of the *Higher Education Legislation Amendment (2005 Measures No1) Bill 2005*

Dear John,

The National Tertiary Education Union welcomes the chance to make the following brief comments to the Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee inquiry into the provisions of the *Higher Education Legislation Amendment (2005 Measures No1) Bill 2005*.

The key focus of the inquiry is the Commonwealth's proposal to extend eligibility to the Capital Development Pool under Section 41-10 of the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* to institutions on Table B of the *Act*. These additional institutions are Bond University, Notre Dame University, and Melbourne College of Divinity.

The NTEU has on previous occasions been extremely critical of the current Government's attempts to list additional institutions for the funding under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* and its predecessor the *Higher Education Funding Act*. While the Union's precise concerns have varied according to the particular institutions in question, broadly speaking they can be summarised into three key areas.

Firstly, the Union has stressed that increasing the number of institutions eligible for public higher education subsidies, without increasing the overall size of the funding allocated by the Government, is an effective real cut in university funding.

Secondly, we have been critical of the Government's repeated failure to present any robust and transparent rationale to justify its selection of particular institutions. This has resulted in a confusing and ad hoc process that provides no basis on which to judge future claims for the inclusion of institutions and to ensure that such decisions are fair and consistent.

Thirdly, the NTEU has been concerned that many of the institutions nominated by the Government to receive increased subsidies have either not been universities or have not met the rigorous standards that the Union believes are necessary for institutions in receipt of public funding.

In relation to the Bill before the current inquiry, the NTEU must again point to the absence of a clear explanation from the Government for its decision to extend Capital Development Pool funding to Table B providers.

The Union also shares the concerns raised by others that increasing the number of institutions accessing the Capital Development Pool, without any move to increase the amount of money allocated under it, represents a real cut in university funding.

Despite these concerns, the NTEU does not oppose the extension of Capital Development Pool funding to Table B providers.

The three Table B institutions are all self-accrediting institutions, established by their own acts of parliament that define them as acting in the public interest. Bond University and Notre Dame University are also universities and presumably meet the criteria for university status set out in Protocol 1 of the *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes* in terms of research, breadth of disciplines offered and academic freedom.

Given these facts, the NTEU finds a convincing argument that all three Table B institutions need access to greater Commonwealth funding so as to create a level playing field between them and the other self-accrediting universities and higher education institutions on Table A of the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*.

The Union stresses, however, that in no way should these arguments be viewed by the Government as justifying the extension of further public funding to the third institutional category under the *Higher Education Support Act*, Higher Education Providers (HEPS).

As of writing this submission, 27 HEPS have so far been directly approved by the Federal Education Minister to access public subsidies, most importantly FEE-HELP. These include private registered training organisations, schools of theology, and a myriad of other mainly non-self accrediting degree granting providers.

These HEPS are not universities. Indeed, the Union is concerned that many would not even meet the more general standards for eligibility to greater public funding previously set out by the Union. These include guaranteed minimum levels of quality and standards (as distinct from quality assurance mechanisms), non-discriminatory admissions policies, open governance structures,

commitment to free and open inquiry, and curriculum which exposes students to, and tolerates, a variety of perspectives.

The NTEU emphasises this point in light of the current review of the *National Protocols*, and the Federal Government's agenda of seeking to lower the test in terms for accessing the title 'university' for both domestic and overseas non-university higher education providers.

If the Government can lower the test for university status sufficiently many of these HEPS, along with other domestic and international non-university providers, will no doubt be keen to harness the market advantages of university status without having to provide the full range of services expected of traditional universities.

Such a scenario will only reduce higher education diversity and drive quality down across the sector by forcing established public universities to compete against a range of smaller, boutique institutions with limited course offerings. The latter will operate on the basis of substantial cost efficiencies due to the fact that they do not have to engage in the full spectrum of activities undertaken by established universities, such as research or fostering community links.

The Union will expand on these concerns in detail in its submission to the *National Protocols* review.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carolyn Allport". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Dr Carolyn Allport
NATIONAL PRESIDENT