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22 December, 1997

The Secretariat,
Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy,
DEETYA Canberra

On behalf of the Australian Society for Classical Studies we wish to convey our deep disappointment with the "Policy Discussion Paper" of the Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy.

Our disappointment is all the more keenly felt because at brief moments the paper appears to address our deeply-held concerns about humanistic education when it mentions such ideals as "inculcating a profound respect for scholarship". However, the body of the paper does not even sketch measures that might give effect to the "Ideals" listed under the heading of a "Vision for the Future". The paper calls for strong commitment to such ideals yet has little to offer except obsessive repetition of all-too familiar shibboleths: "competition", "markets" and "privatisation". In its disturbing poverty of thought the paper appears indifferent to the fostering of the nation's cultural heritages and to upholding the shared community of transmitted values that makes a civilized nation as distinct from a free-for-all market-place.

We strongly reject the Paper's bland assumption that "low demand disciplines that are regarded by many to be of great cultural significance" could flourish or even survive in a system dominated by demand-driven economics if they are left to the vagaries of decisions by individual institutions to cross-subsidise them. Abundant evidence continues to accumulate to prove that this do-nothing policy is not working. The paper invokes in this context a vague example of unspecified "private institutions overseas" Presumably reference is meant to a small number of wealthy, elite institutions in the United States. Here, as elsewhere, the Paper ignores the wider questions of the public good of the Australian community. We urge the committee therefore to take up the challenge of formulating advice that will both define and advocate the Commonwealth Government's responsibilities to safeguard our universities' role as custodians, through their teaching and research, of our culture and of our share in humanity's intellectual endeavours.

We would be glad to support, and in fact already, we believe, uphold in practice many of the aspirations that appear briefly in the paper, such as lifelong learning or the primacy of the students' needs. Yet in its narrow

focus and unexamined assumptions, the Paper seems to unresponsive to the pressing need of students and staff for an end to the siege-like conditions in our universities, which will come only when a committee to advise upon the future of Australia's universities ceases to be indifferent to the underlying problems except in so far as by indifference or design it exacerbates them.

Yours faithfully,

(Dr) D.H. Kelly,
President

(Mr) R.A. Pitcher,
Secretary

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