

3 December 1997

Mr Roderick West
Chair
Committee to Review Higher Education Financing and Policy
Location 728
GPO Box 9880
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr West

The Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia applauds the emphasis given to teaching in the recently released discussion paper, *Learning for Life*. However, it is concerned by the focus on higher education as a market-driven industry. The society believes that market forces are highly unlikely to give us the sort of higher education system this country needs. 'Profits' from a good university education are enormous, for the individual and the Country, but they can hardly be measured in dollars. While there is recognition in the paper of higher education as a 'public good', its 'commodification' is unfortunate.

The Society recognises clear positives in the document including: - the focus on the importance of student learning and life-long learning - the value placed on teaching - at least equal to that of research - recognising good teachers.

These positive aspects now require synthesis into workable recommendations. HERDSA would have liked to offer specific and detailed recommendations, however the time-frame and the time of the year have made this impossible. We would support the championing of the right of all students to quality learning opportunities. Strong recommendations are needed to ensure these opportunities are provided. The issue of accreditation of university teachers, for example, needs serious consideration. HERDSA sent its discussion paper on accreditation to the Committee earlier and would be interested to discuss this matter further.

There is little in the current document to indicate how goals to ensure excellence in teaching should be achieved. The concept of the 'teaching market' does not appear particularly helpful. The nature of this 'market' and how one might measure the value of the 'commodities' are not well articulated. The market analogy may be fundamentally flawed.

It is pleasing to see a strong endorsement of the work being done by the Committee for University Teaching and Staff Development in promoting excellence in teaching

and learning in higher education. It is hoped that the Final Report will recommend an expanded role and more adequate resourcing for the work of CUTSD. While CUTSDs continuation is essential, mainstream measures within all institutions are needed to ensure a universal improvement in teaching.

The Society questions the notion of a 'seamless' post-secondary education system. Such a system may provide maximum flexibility and choice for students but it may also leave them confused and floundering, unsure of their career direction and the nature of their professional, trade, or technical future. The 'down-side' of 'seamlessness' needs consideration. This will hopefully be addressed in part in the Inquiry into the Appropriate Roles of Institutes of Technical and Further Education due to report next year.

An entitlement to five years of post-secondary education, funded mainly paid for from public money, is laudable but it is difficult to see how this could be implemented given a government seeking to cut public spending and encourage private funding of higher education. Learning accounts (or vouchers) beg many questions. If they are definitely off the political agenda is the well worn idea worthy of further review?

Many of the suggestions in the report demand considerable scrutiny and I apologise for the brevity of this submission. As noted earlier, at this time of the year and given the short time allowed for responses, we have been unable to give greater consideration to these important matters. However, given our mandate (attached), the Society would be interested in participating in any ongoing debate.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the paper.

Yours sincerely

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Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (Inc.)

The Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia was formed in 1972. The overarching purpose of the Society is to bring together and support those people who are engaged in teaching in higher education, in the study of learning, teaching and policy in higher education, and in the continuous improvement of higher education. The goal of HERDSA is to be a scholarly society for the diverse group of people concerned to advance higher education. This diversity is reflected in its membership, which includes vice-chancellors, deans, teaching staff, learning skills specialists, staff developers, other research and administrative staff and concerned members of the community. The Society now has a membership in excess of 1,000, with representation from the TAFE and polytechnic sectors as well as universities. The Society has branches in most Australian states and in New Zealand, a recently established branch in Hong Kong, the beginnings of a branch in Singapore, and a growing membership in South Africa. It maintains a wider international affiliation through the International Consortium for Educational Development.

Each year HERDSA hosts a major conference which draws participants from around the world. The Society publishes a refereed journal, Higher Education Research and Development, a newsletter, annual conference proceedings and two series of practical booklets, the Green Guides and Gold Guides, all of which enjoy a high national and international reputation. HERDSA takes an active interest in policy developments in higher education, especially as they affect teaching and learning and research.

[\[Return to Top\]](#) [\[Return to Index\]](#)