

**Response by the National Council
for Open and Distance Education**

(NCODE)

to the

Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy

Discussion Paper

'Learning for Life'

December 1997

This response by NCODE

- recognises Mat discussion paper is a working document that contains several options being seriously considered by the Committee;
- responds to Be expectation of robust debate on the options canvassed; and
- focuses on those issues related to open learning and distance education that are of central concern to NCODE.

With respect to tile Discussion Paper, NCODE applauds the visionary position of the foreword, especially the prominence given to learning and teaching, lifelong learning, the focus on student needs, near-universality of access and the importance of connections across the whole post-secondary education sector.

The most disappointing aspect of the Paper is that it fails to progress the ideas of the foreword to a model or models of what changes might be anticipated in the nature of reaming and teaching and hence the nature of the university. The Paper moves to possible funding models of higher education without ~ any way clarifying what it is that should be funded.

NCODE would welcome positive consideration of the following views in the final report.

NCODE *supports*

- lifelong learning and an emphasis on generic skills in higher education;
- visionary planning and leadership as the forces shaping education rather than the dictates and vagaries of the market;
- the maximising of study options for students taking account of financial realities;
- systematic staff development and He formal accreditation of university teaching;

NCODE *rejects*

- the view of the university solely as a business;
- dominance of consumer market-driven education;
- the view that using technology is necessarily cheaper;
- the differentiation of universities seen principally as differentiation in course price;
- that the case has been made for the reduction, and fragmentation of funding of higher education, through the transfer of funds from institutions to students;
- that opening the sector to private providers will necessarily improve the system;
- the prevalence of the view that the value of open learning and distance education is simply the bottom line ie they are cheaper;
- the contention that there is a logical link between higher quality teaching and cost reduction through competition;
- a common admission process as both unworkable and expensive;

NCODE *questions whether*

- stated demand trends and proposals for student based funding are consistent with the emergence of lifelong learning;
- industry demand should relate to training rawer Man to higher education;
- likely peripheral charges associated with being a student may be beyond students' capacity to pay;

- opening the market through funding the client rather than the university will not lead to wasteful inefficiencies.

NCODE *recommends*

- the role of the university in society be fully defined;
- the distinction be made between universities and other providers, including the range of private providers;
- a judgement be made of the ratio of public good to private benefit of universities as defined in the report;
- any funding model take account of the need to balance stability of institutional capability with responsiveness to client demand;
- greater consideration be given to the diversity of the student population in drawing conclusions, which at present have a marked school leaver emphasis;
- Greater consideration of the benefits of open learning / distance education in meeting the needs of lifelong learners.
- the issues of intellectual property rights of academics and of copyright payments in creating multimedia documents be fully addressed;
- higher education be regarded as investment for the information age and be funded accordingly ie increase not decrease total funding;
- undergraduate courses remain HECS funded and user contributions to postgraduate education attract favourable tax concessions to promote lifelong learning and investment in knowledge;
- the final report be of three parts: i) the outcomes expected of the higher education system at five year intervals from five to twenty years; ii) the means by which these outcomes will be achieved; iii) the mechanisms and sources of funding required.
- the cost of maintaining a regulator body be justification enough for restricting the higher education sector to self regulating universities;
- the Carnegie Foundation categories of scholarship as a basis for defining and rewarding academic work and for the appointment and development of academic staff;
- the manner in which universal student access to IT is to be achieved be explained, including safeguards to ensure already disadvantaged groups are not placed in greater relative disadvantage;
- the relationship between competition, collaboration, cooperation and collusion be fully considered in the context of the competitive neutrality principle;
- public universities be exempt from competitive neutrality requirements:

NCODE appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Discussion Paper and looks forward to further dialogue following publication of the final report

For and on behalf of NCODE

IF Barnard
Deputy Chair