Alphacrucis College

Alphacrucis College (AC) is the national College of Australian Christian Churches (ACC), a movement of Pentecostal Churches (including Hillsong, and many less well known but similarly vibrant churches) consisting of over 1000 churches and over 270,000 constituents. AC has been preparing students for ministry for over sixty years and has a new $30 million campus in the Parramatta CBD, as well as campuses in Brisbane, Perth and Auckland. The most recent Australian National Church Life Survey indicated the Pentecostals have passed the Anglicans as the second largest church in terms of Sunday attendance, behind only the Catholic Church. The College is currently moving towards university accreditation with the addition of Faculties of Education and Business, alongside Theology. There are over 500 students undertaking TEQSA accredited Bachelor, Masters and Doctoral degrees, who currently receive no government subsidies for their education, though they do have access to the student loans scheme. The College itself receives no government funding for teaching or research.

Website  http://ac.edu.au/

Further information about the College may be found in the recently published history by Denise Austin (2013). Our College: A History of the National Training College of Australian Christian Churches Sydney, Australian Pentecostal Studies.


Introduction

Alphacrucis is a member of COPHE, and the purpose of our submission is to reinforce and exemplify the Equity-Choice-Diversity issues the peak body for non-government higher education has been raising for several years.

We welcome the reforms embodied in the draft legislation. They are needed to put the current unsustainable higher education arrangements on a stronger footing, especially improving access to quality higher education for students from backgrounds with historically low participation. The reforms flow from and are fully consistent with the demand driven system recommended by the Bradley Review, reinforced by the findings of the recent Kemp-Norton Review. Most importantly the reforms put the interests of students before other vested interests in higher education
The crucial issues for us as a College are:

**Funding of Undergraduate Students**

Students at Alphacrucis would be greatly disappointed if the extension of funding to students beyond those at public universities does not proceed as announced by the Government. Senators blocking the extension of funding would have to deal with large numbers of justly disappointed students, asking why their friends at public universities receive government funding and they do not. Continued discrimination is indefensible as both their degree program and those of their friends at public universities are now equally accredited by TEQSA. It is not defensible on quality grounds either as the quality of our business programs is, at the very least, comparable to those offered by universities.

We understand that the draft legislation suggests that degrees at existing universities be funded at higher rates than degrees offered by other institutions. If this occurs then two implementation issues become important:

1) The division between providers should not be on the basis of universities vs other institutions, but on the basis of institutions offering accredited doctoral programs vs other institutions. Such a division would better pick up the research-based and higher-level teaching that a higher funding rate is meant to be supporting, rather than reinforcing the historical advantages of the existing universities. It would also be less likely to contravene national competition policy and run afoul of the regulator the ACCC.

2) Providers receiving government funding at the lower rate should be able to recover the remainder of their costs from students. Depending on the fate of the fee deregulation part of the legislation in the Senate, if this is not allowed then the providers would be forced either to compromise quality (as the lower rate is below their existing fees) or be in the embarrassing situation of being unable to accept government funding, placing the full burden back on their students.

**University Accreditation, Competition and Foreign Student Export Earnings**

As an institution developing strongly in recent years and likely to seek University accreditation in the near future we are concerned about the current lack of clarity about such accreditation. We understand that the current provider types are under review, and agree they are problematic. The provider types (especially the ambiguous “University College” category) reflect their origins in a committee dominated by the interests of existing universities, and understandably seeking to maintain their monopoly over the title.

A clear process that allows institutions to make their case for accreditation as universities in a reasonable time frame is essential for the following reasons:

- It facilitates quality-enhancing and cost-containing competition with the existing Australian universities.
- It would be consistent with the competitive neutrality principles of national competition policy. Access to the University title on an equitable and timely basis, without prohibitively expensive processes, could reasonably be considered essential to competition in the industry.
It allows Australian private institutions to compete on an even footing with overseas universities in the important international student market. Similar institutions in the US, most Asian countries, and many other counties, are called universities. Alphacrucis has well developed networks in Asia but we are inhibited, especially with our accredited postgraduate programs, by not being able to call ourselves a university in the same way as lower quality overseas competitors.

**Research and Research Degree Funding**

Government funding for PhD and other research degrees should follow TEQSA accreditation of these degrees, in the same way as the draft legislation proposes for undergraduate degrees. Many academic staff at private providers including Alphacrucis currently supervise PhD students for the same universities who are resisting the extension of funding for research students to all accredited institutions on the same basis as the universities. Often these PhD students who initially approach the private provider about a research degree for which they have accreditation from TEQSA, only enrol at the university because of the availability of government funding there and the willingness of the private provider academic to supervise. This academic seldom receives any payment for the supervision, nor does the private provider who is paying the academic salary; instead generosity and love of learning drive the arrangement. However, the university at which the student is enrolled receives tens of thousands of dollars of government funding for the PhD student.

Australian Research Council (ARC) grants are fiercely contested and a major indicator of universities research standing. Many private provider academics are donating their time to writing grants submitted through universities, and working for free on the projects for which the universities receive the benefits.

As suggested by the Kemp-Norton review of the demand driven system of funding undergraduate places, there needs to be a similar review of non-discriminatory access to research and research degree funding. Removal of the distortions in the existing system would maximise the return on the government research dollar as funds would flow to the best projects regardless of whether they are at public Universities or private higher education institutions. Note that the extension of eligibility for PhD funding would not increase government expenditure as the impact would be on the allocation of PhD students between institutions, not the total number of PhD students. Extending eligibility to apply for ARC grants to all institutions which have the capacity to support research would similarly be cost neutral as the total pool of funds would not change, only the allocation.

**Submission Details**


Submission to be uploaded or emailed to [eec.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:eec.sen@aph.gov.au) by Monday 22 September 2014

This submission authorised by CEO of Alphacrucis College, Dr Stephen Fogarty.

A representative of the college or a group of students of the college would be happy to give evidence to the Senate Inquiry.