



**National Council of
Women of New Zealand**

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Wahine O Aotearoa

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**Submission to the Ministry of Education on the New Zealand Curriculum Draft
Consultation Developing The Second Tertiary Strategy 2007**

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organization representing 43 Nationally Organised Societies and national members. NCWNZ has 31 branches throughout the country to which women from 150 societies are affiliated.

The function of NCWNZ is to serve women, the family and the community at local, national and international level. Consequently the Government's proposals for economic transformation, families, young and old, and national identity have been studied with care. This response is drawn mainly from NCWNZ policy developed over 110 years.

A summary of major points is as follows:

- The Tertiary Education Strategy (TES) is a document of promise. How the promise is fulfilled depends on how it is interpreted and implemented.
- There could be tensions between and among the different goals e.g. in lifelong education where there is a need for a scaffolding approach which includes funded, low level learning at the start for adult learners and the Government's goal of preventing waste through funding and investment mechanisms focused on completed qualifications; in promoting innovation which is high-risk and monitoring for specific low risk outcomes.
- In the Discussion Document from the Office of the Minister of Tertiary Education there is a lack of background statistical data and clear Government targets. This means that institutions could shuffle their programmes without real change and reform.
- The STEP suggestions are very general and idealistic without benchmarks e.g. increasing the numbers of young people completing qualifications or advancing to higher qualifications, and solving the problems of poor adult literacy and numeracy in the workforce.
- The monitoring and evaluation of outcomes is essential but unless carried out in a climate of trust and cooperation could stifle creativity and innovation, and encourage caution rather than risk taking.

Responses to the Questions for Consultation

1. *What are your views on these contributions and their underpinning areas of focus?*

NCWNZ supports the general contents of the TES contributions. The benefits will appear in their application. The case of Early Childhood Education (ECE) is cited as an example of how the system could work well:-

- NCWNZ fully supports life-long learning but stresses that success for learners lies in establishing the basics in ECE and at primary school level. All children should have access to good ECE and primary education. The implications are that, given the lack of enough ECE Centres and Kindergartens throughout the country, Playcentres and Playgroups need to be adequately funded. Playcentres and Playgroups rely on parent fundraising in the main. Because of this they are excluded from the 20 hours free weekly education. According to figures from the NZ Playcentre Federation, more than 15,000 children attend Playcentres. One of the reasons why Playcentres/Playgroups are not funded is because the parents are not trained ECE teachers.



- However the Playcentre Federation provides opportunities for parents/caregivers to study for a NZQA registered training programme. This fits the Government's strategy for life-long learning and should be supported. But will Playcentres be supported by adequate funding under the Strategy criteria?
- Playcentres and Playgroups are important for rural communities where distance and lack of trained personnel make formal ECE impossible. Will the Strategy make some institution responsible for meeting these community needs?
- Government policy should support innovation in all places including in parent-led Playcentres and Playgroups in order to meet the Government's goals for families and communities.
- The scaffolding nature of life-long learning must be acknowledged e.g. parents learn parenting, communication and management skills through helping their children learn social and cultural skills in Playcentres and Playgroups. They may use these opportunities to build confidence to enter more formal training and work opportunities when their children move to the next level of education.

The TES will be first rate if in practice it meets lifelong learning needs, grass-roots innovation and connects communities and tertiary education organizations as shown in the example of ECE.

2. *Will the actions outlined for the government and the tertiary education organisations be sufficient and suitable to achieve the direction proposed in this discussion document? Explain.*

- NCWNZ supports the underlying theme of prudent management to ensure accountability and value for money, focused on providing a well trained, quality work force to meet economic, social and cultural needs.
- The provision of boundaries between different tertiary institutions and tertiary types should prevent wasteful duplication. However some NCWNZ members considered that there could be tensions between the Government's goals to promote innovation, collaboration and meet community needs and this goal of preventing waste through the funding and investment mechanisms.

3. *What are your views of these priorities and how do these priorities fit with the distinctive contributions of different tertiary education organizations?*

- The four proposed priorities for STEP are aligned with NCWNZ's priorities for sustainable development and building a non-violent society based on equal opportunities for access to prosperity and a reduction of poverty.
- The goals are very general and idealistic. Specific targets are lacking.
- The PBRF system has the effect of constraining research through the implication that only certain types of research qualify as 'real' research.

4. *What are the most important areas to monitor the progress of the TES and STEP?*

- NCWNZ supports the concept of evidence-based strategies and the strategies of monitoring and auditing but notes that there could be difficulties in collecting reliable evidence in the scenario presented by the consultation document. The four categories of evidence above rely on the tertiary institutions developing a trusting relationship with Government which is what the Government wants. Yet the Government's system of funding based on monitoring and auditing may not inspire trust.
- NCWNZ also supports the focus on key shifts in performance through a small number of key quantitative and qualitative indicators.



- One concern expressed by some members is that the monitoring will cover very subjective features such as quality, excellence, relevance, access/opportunity and value for money. Definitions for these terms need to be provided for consistency across institutions. Descriptions of measuring and monitoring instruments must also be provided with input from the stakeholders involved.

5. *Will the TES and STEP priorities help you to make choices about tertiary education as a provider, student, employer or parent? Explain.*

The TES and STEP priorities should provide critical guidelines for providers especially as regards accessing the funding stream. The priorities should also help students, employers and parents firm up their expectations of tertiary institutions and increase confidence. Long standing policies of NCWNZ support the general directives of the TES and STEP. However the document would have been more powerful as a future-defining instrument had it included some statistical basis for its basic assumptions. For example, what research shows why students fail to complete qualifications? What are the key areas of skill shortage? What are the areas of secondary student weakness which prevent them moving on to tertiary education? What are the strategies that have been found to be successful in reducing adult literacy and numeracy weaknesses in the workplace?

It will be difficult to solve these problems without this knowledge. NCWNZ is aware that Ministry of Education supplementary documents provide much of the data required. However some targets would have given the Discussion Document more focus and authority.

The Government is to be commended for its willingness to consult and especially for engaging Synergic Ltd to research responses of the tertiary education organisations to the document. It is to be hoped that the feedback from the community will be made public and fed into the Strategy to make it more specific.

NCWNZ thanks the Ministry of Education for the opportunity to comment on this very important document. In expressing its wish to negotiate the parameters of targets and programmes with the tertiary education sector, in acknowledging the need for trust and in identifying an investment approach to tertiary education, the Ministry of Education implies that the next five years will see a joint Government – tertiary sector working relationship that aims to solve some of the country's most pressing economic and social problems. Such a united effort would be greatly supported by NCWNZ.

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