

COUNCIL FOR THE NATIONAL INTEREST

A Submission to the Prime Minister

University Entrance - The Gap Year

This is a proposal to substantially benefit all the parties involved in the first year of tertiary education, and to significantly reduce the current wastage of resources on some first year students.

There is a high level of interest in this topic because of the big disparity between numbers of students wishing to attend university and the number of entrance vacancies.

Background

It is well established that:

- High school students going straight into first year university have a very high failure rate. About 30%.
- Students who take a year off before university, 'the gap year', perform well in their first year at university.
- Mature age students perform well in their first year at university.
- The high first year failure rate would be considerably higher if those students who changed their course were also included.

Federal Grants

In year 2000/2001 the Federal Government made grants of \$3,698 million to universities.

In the same year 56% of students received some form of financial support.

In this year there were 726,400 students undertaking higher education, of whom 285,518 were higher education commencements.

The Proposal

If the high failure rate in first year students could be significantly reduced:

- The Government would make substantial financial savings.
- It would be possible to have a higher allocation of first year entrances.
- The overall academic performance levels would be higher.
- Students motivation would improve and be better directed.
- The current substantial waste of public monies on failed students would be reduced.
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The proposal gives ways and means to encourage first year students to defer their entry for at least a year.

Details

The idea of the 'gap year' is not new and is in widespread use throughout the world. The proposed specific incentives are

11. The current course entry qualification is maintained.
12. After a suitable gap year students be given a percentage increase in their TEE score and hence qualify for entry to a better course.
13. The taxes paid by the student while working in the gap year be refunded or, less preferably, be credited towards their HECS payments.

There are many other incentives that the Government may wish to add to enhance the appeal of this proposal but it is essential that the potential student sees the incentives as real and meaningful to them.

Conclusion

The important thing about this idea is that everybody benefits. Students, business, taxpayers, universities and the Government all gain from students who are better motivated and oriented, who achieve better academic results, who spend less time obtaining their degrees.

Recommendation

The benefits of this proposal will have wide appeal across the community. We earnestly recommend that the Government adopts and implements this proposal prior to the next academic year.

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Chairman CNI - WA