



15/11/2013

SUBMISSION re the Tertiary Education Strategy (TES)

1. Introduction

1.1 This submission is made on behalf of the **Grey Power New Zealand Federation Inc.**

1.2 The contact is Jan Pentecost 03 312 9331 – jan.pentecost@gmail.com

1.3 Grey Power New Zealand Federation (Inc.) is a non-sectarian and non-party political advocacy organisation that aims to advance, promote and protect the welfare and well-being of people 50 years old+.

1.4 Grey Power New Zealand Federation (Inc.) is made up of some 74 individual Associations with an overall membership of approximately 68,000.

1.5 Grey Power New Zealand Federation (Inc.) thanks the Ministry of Education for the opportunity to comment on the Tertiary Education Strategy

2. General Comments:

2.1 In general Grey Power supports the concept of a tertiary education strategy but believes that the current TES document appears to reduce the function of education to providing labour skills to sustain economic growth and that older people are practically invisible. In other words it seems that the basic premise of the TES document is “that the skills people develop in tertiary education ... [must be] well matched to labour needs” (Priority 1) and much focus appears to involve the young (Priority 2.)

Whilst Grey Power members are certainly not adverse to the provision of the best education possible for their children and grandchildren many are aware, as the MSD’s research paper on the ‘Business of Ageing’ and its subsequent up-date points out, that numerous older New Zealanders will continue to work until well after the current superannuation entitlement age for a variety of reasons, including the necessity for this cohort to assist in increasing productivity and economic growth. For this to occur older people will need to up-skill especially if they have been made redundant.

Unfortunately as many of our members have remarked, there is now very little assistance for up-skilling through tertiary education. In 2011 the government removed living allowances and student loans, except for course costs, for those over 55 years old and also chopped funding for adult and community education. As well, this year, student allowances for post-graduate study have been abolished even though the TES promotes a vision of a world-leading education system that equips all (my emphasis) New Zealanders with the knowledge, skills and values to be successful citizens in the 21st century and to produce high quality research to respond to the needs of the economy and to address social and environmental changes¹.

2.3 Interestingly although the main thrust of the TES appears to be in providing the necessary skills to ensure minimal labour shortages, priority 1 notes that “it is also important

¹ Tertiary Strategy 2010-15 – www.minedu.govt.nz/TertiaryEducationStrategy

that the TES focus on developing the core personal skills that will serve students well post-study, whichever career they follow. One of the most crucial outcomes of study is the development of the capacity to process information, and think critically and logically. It remains true that any qualification provides important general skills as well as the knowledge specific to that qualification.”

Grey Power is thankful that the TES recognises the above but would hope that education to fulfil that sentiment was readily accessible to older people rather than them facing the barriers that now exist.

It is also noteworthy that the New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy, states under Employment Opportunities, Goal Nine, ‘the elimination of ageism’ and the recently published government document ‘OLDER NEW ZEALANDERS Healthy, independent, connected and respected’ confirms that the government is committed to the vision and positive ageing principles outlined in the positive ageing strategy. It is therefore worrisome that the TES appears not to be more inclusive of older New Zealanders.

Recommendation:

That the TES include older people by incentivising them to acquire qualifications; not only will this benefit New Zealand’s economy generally but health and aged care costs may be reduced because attendance at night classes, polytechnics or university can provide older people with a sense of well-being and hope which can lessen social isolation.

Further points not discussed in this document but covered by Age Concern’s submission are fully endorsed by the Grey Power Federation.

The benefits of life-long learning not only provide an economic return for the country, its benefits for physical and mental health are priceless.

Written by Jan Pentecost