

The Secretariat,
Review of Australian Higher Education,
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601

July 30th 2008

Letter in support of the Submission from the
Committee of Deans of Theological Consortia and University Departments

We are writing to indicate our full support for the submission made by the Committee of Deans of Theology. There is a considerable overlap between these bodies: all of the institutions represented on the Committee of Deans are ANZATS members, and one of my tasks as ANZATS Executive Officer has been to assist the Committee in drafting its submission. A letter such as this was therefore felt to be more appropriate than a separate submission, not least for the sake of Secretariat members.

While all the recommendations made in the submission have the support of ANZATS, two in particular affect its member colleges:

1 Accreditation processes for Higher Education Providers not listed in Table A or B

At the July ANZATS Council meeting, the matter of accreditation processes by State bodies was discussed in some detail, since most HEPs in the theology sector are not listed in Table A or B of the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*, but are non-self-accrediting.

There is a growing inconsistency in registration, accreditation and annual reporting requirements between the states. Some ANZATS State representatives reported considerable difficulties with delays in accreditation processes, which had a very negative effect on course planning and student recruitment, but which in their experience had little to do with education and learning.

Additionally, considerable overlap exists between these processes and CRICOS registrations, mutual accreditation in other states, and the need to submit annual reports to states other than the one in which a HEP is registered. All these procedures could be nationalized in a way that included the states if necessary, and local management, but excluded unnecessary repetition and diversion of resources to take account of minor variations, along with the need to consume significant quantities of paper.

ANZATS therefore supports in particular the following recommendation of the Committee of Deans of Theology:

- ◆ **Accreditation:** That, in order to reduce the overall costs of mounting and maintaining higher education programs, accreditation processes should be nationally coordinated or centralised and merged with quality audit processes, with cost structures that take into account 'capacity to pay'.

2. Articulation from VET to Higher Education

The issue of articulation from VET to Higher Education courses is another matter of growing importance to many ANZATS members. Several have initiated courses, or regularised long-standing ones, for students whose access to post-school education is limited (those from non-English speaking backgrounds, refugees, mature adults for example) as well as providing competence-based learning generally.

While ANZATS recognises that articulation from skills to conceptual learning needs to be done with care, these aspects of education cannot be separated completely, as is recognised in the university sector where such articulation is possible. Articulation from VET to HE can be authorised in some states, but is excluded in NSW. ANZATS believes that careful attention to this issue at the national level is urgent, not only for the theology sector, but for Australian education generally.

ANZATS thus supports in particular the following recommendation of the Committee of Deans of Theology:

- ◆ **Articulation from VET to HE:** That where impediments to credit transfer between the VET sector and the higher education sector exist that should be reviewed to allow for greater flexibility.

The theology sector suffers from not having equal access to competitive government research grants. We believe that competitive grants should be that – open to competition from all HEPs in Australia qualified to offer research degrees.

ANZATS thus supports in particular the following recommendations of the Committee of Deans of Theology:

- ◆ **Research funding:** That access to research training funding, including Australian Postgraduate Awards, the Research Training Scheme and the Institutional Grants Scheme, should be made available to the private sector on the basis of a demonstrated and benchmarked capacity in research training.
- ◆ **ARC Grants:** That access to Australian Research Council funding should be available to the sector on the same competitive basis as currently exists in the higher education sector.
- ◆ **Endeavour scholarships:** That Endeavour Scholarships for overseas students pursuing Higher Degrees by Research should include a Living Allowance on the same terms as those provided for students holding Australian Postgraduate Awards.

We look forward to the outcomes of the Review.

Yours sincerely,

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Dr Robert McIver,
President, ANZATS