

AusSchol

INCORPORATED

SUBMISSION TO REVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION

AusSchol Inc wishes to draw to the attention of the Review Panel, some of the difficulties encountered in obtaining the assistance of universities in its objective of helping to improve the management of charitable organisations.

AusSchol notes that the Discussion Paper prepared to guide discussion on the Review of Higher Education quotes, with approval, the 1990 DEET paper “A Fair Chance For All” (p.28). That paper stated:

The overall objective for equity in higher education is to ensure that Australians from all groups in society have the opportunity to participate successfully in higher education. This will be achieved by changing the balance of the student population to reflect more closely the composition of the society as a whole.

AusSchol is seeking to address the urgent need for further education, development and training of the staff, and in particular the officers and managers, of charitable organisations, who have very limited opportunities to participate in the higher education sector.

AusSchol is a not-for-profit charitable organisation recognised by the Australian Taxation Office as a deductible gift recipient. It is run by a volunteer Council, the members of which devote a considerable amount of their time to AusSchol’s operation.

Australians as a whole donate generously to charitable organisations which provide a wide range of essential services in health, welfare, education and family and other support. Those organisations believe, correctly, that they have an obligation to spend the funds donated on the primary purposes of the charity. They do not, generally, believe that they should spend those funds on staff training and development. It is a characteristic of the charitable sector that there are only very limited opportunities for staff training and development in general, and even more limited opportunities for training and development in areas relevant to the roles and operations of charitable organisations. It is also widely acknowledged that there is an urgent need for improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of charitable organisations in Australia.

AusSchol is dedicated to providing scholarships to help managers and financial officers of charitable organisations enhance their knowledge and skills, and to improving the management and accountability of charitable not-for-profit organisations. AusSchol has received a great deal of support from private higher education providers, and others. In the short time since it set out on this task – less than 12 months – AusSchol has been able to gain access for its

scholars to education and training programs which have an annual value of more than \$500,000. The University of Adelaide has also been an enthusiastic supporter of AusSchol, but other universities have had difficulty surmounting the bureaucratic difficulties involved in granting reductions in fees for AusSchol scholars.

AusSchol understands that regulations relating to fee waivers and fee exemptions are necessary to ensure equity amongst students and the proper use of government funding. However, the current regulations act as a serious impediment to organisations such as AusSchol which seek to provide opportunities for staff employed in charitable organisations to obtain university level education. The people it is seeking to help are, generally not well paid and they cannot afford higher education fees, even with Fee-Help and other financial support. Within the private sector, AusSchol acts as a broker obtaining access to education and training programs for scholars from the charitable organisations. AusSchol also seeks to work with universities on a fee-sharing basis which ensures that the universities are not out-of-pocket when they enroll an AusSchol scholar.

The universities with which we have discussed this proposal have been strongly supportive in principle, but with the exception of the University of Adelaide, have found it difficult to join with us in this worthy endeavor because of the restrictions on granting fee waivers.

We urge the Review Panel to undertake - or at least to recommend - a review of the current regulations relating to Fee Waivers and Fee Exemptions, with a view to giving Universities a wider range of ways to carry out their community service obligations by, for example, the use of fee waivers and fee exemptions for the staff of charitable organisations.

Further information on AusSchol and the scholarships currently available may be seen at www.ausschol.org.au .

For the Council of AusSchol Incorporated
Murray Wells
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