



The New Zealand Psychological Society

Te Rōpū Mātai Hinengaro o Aotearoa

21 May, 2012

Hon Steven Joyce- Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment

Hon Tony Ryall- Minister of Health

Cc Professor Des Gorman, Chair- Health Workforce New Zealand

Dear Ministers

Allowances for post-graduate university study

I am writing on behalf of the New Zealand Psychological Society. The Society is the largest professional association for psychologists in New Zealand with over 1200 members and subscribers.

The purpose of our letter is to express our concerns regarding the recent announcement that postgraduate students will no longer receive Government funded student allowances for their postgraduate degrees. Whilst the Society is very much in favour of support being provided for the early years of tertiary education and for low income families to access education, we are concerned at the implications of this policy for workforce development. To register as a psychologist in New Zealand requires completion of an undergraduate degree, followed by a Masters degree, and a postgraduate degree for specialisation in specific areas of psychology plus a practicum.

Our concerns are that this policy will negatively impact on the number of undergraduate students moving into postgraduate studies and registering as psychologists. The context for our concerns is as follows

- Immigration New Zealand has identified long-term skill shortages of clinical psychologists and educational psychologists in New Zealand
- Shortages of Māori and Pacific psychologists are of particular concern given the identified needs of these populations- this policy is likely to seriously impact on these groups
- Health Workforce New Zealand has recognised the need to build capacity in the mental health workforce to meet future needs and has specifically identified psychologists as one of the professional groups in which capacity building needs to occurⁱ
- The success of the recently released youth mental health policy will be reliant upon well qualified professionals- including psychologists

We can understand the short-term financial imperatives which are driving the capping of postgraduate allowances but are concerned that the longer-term result of this policy is that there will be fewer qualified professionals in much needed areas. There are likely to be both social and financial costs associated with this.

We have an alternative suggestion and that is, that this policy be aligned with other policies related to workforce development and that those professions in which current and future shortages are identified by Immigration New Zealand and Health Workforce New Zealand continue to be able to access postgraduate allowances. We also suggest that in order to address the mental health needs of Māori and Pacific people who disproportionately bear the burden of disadvantage, that postgraduate allowances be retained for these groups for postgraduate qualifications which address health, education and other social needs.

Yours sincerely

Dr Pamela Hyde
Executive Director

ⁱ Kydd, R. (2011) Towards the Next Wave of Mental Health and Addiction Services and Capability. Workforce Services Review Report. HWNZ Mental Health and Addiction Services Review Working Group