



The New Zealand Psychological Society

Te Rōpū Mātai Hinengaro o Aotearoa

22 January 2014

Attn: MPs, Universities and other agencies

Dear.....

The cutting of student allowances and the impact on psychological services

The New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists and the New Zealand Psychological Society have on a number of occasions indicated to Government Ministers, Health Workforce New Zealand and others our concerns about the impact of the cutting of student allowances on the future delivery of psychological services in New Zealand. We did so with an awareness of the shortage of clinical and educational and developmental psychologists in particular in New Zealand. Both these groups feature on the long-term skill shortage list of Immigration New Zealand and have done so for a number of years. We are aware also of the increasing need for psychological assessment, diagnosis and treatment, the 'tail of underachievement' among school-age children and one of the highest prison population rates per capita in the world. These are all areas of need in which psychologists make valuable contributions.

Many health professions e.g., nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and others, complete their training partially or entirely within an undergraduate degree. Psychologists are one of a few professional groups whose training occurs *after* they have completed a non-professional undergraduate degree e.g. a BA or BSc with a major in psychology. Professional registration is via a minimum of Masters plus a post-graduate diploma. The professional training of psychologists is therefore directly impacted by the cuts to postgraduate student allowances.

Impacts on postgraduate students

We have conducted surveys on postgraduate clinical psychology students and on undergraduate students in conjunction with the universities to determine the impact of the student allowance policy change. We found, (and anecdotal evidence from individual students supports this) that the loss of student allowances is causing hardship to postgraduate psychology students and is very likely to prevent some postgraduate students from completing their degrees and becoming registered psychologists. We are very concerned also that there will be undergraduate students who will not continue their postgraduate studies in psychology because they cannot afford to do so. We know from our research that the student allowance makes the difference for some between being able to take on postgraduate study or face a level of hardship that makes this option unaffordable.

Of the 106 postgraduate clinical psychology students who responded to our questionnaire in which we asked them how having the student allowance in 2013 would have assisted them.... 54% indicated that they would have been able to study more and work less, 36% said that the allowance would have reduced the financial stress they were currently under, 36% said that the allowance would have helped them with their living expenses such as heating, food and transport and 32% said that the allowance would have reduced their debt e.g. student loans etc. We have noted previously that unlike other postgraduate degrees, some components of the professional training of psychologists can usually only be undertaken full-time as they involve a demanding combination of practicum placements and academic work. The Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at The University of Auckland, for example, is a three year full-time postgraduate programme. This limits the opportunities for students to work to cover their costs while studying. Some students also do not get paid during their required internship of 1500 hours.

Impacts on undergraduate students

We recently undertook a survey of 556 undergraduate psychology students to determine whether the cutting of student allowances would impact on them. It was pleasing to see that 75% (389 students) of these students were contemplating undertaking postgraduate study in psychology. This included study in clinical, counselling, health, educational and developmental psychology and other areas of psychology. However of these students 75% (n=272) indicated that the cutting of student allowances would affect them. Further research is required to determine the nature of the anticipated impact on these students but it is likely that they too expect to experience the impacts noted by postgraduate students if they enrol in postgraduate psychology programmes. Our concern

is that the financial barrier presented by cuts in student allowances may deter them from choosing psychology as their future career. This is likely to impact on the future mental health workforce capacity.

Impact on Māori and Pasifika students

We are particularly concerned that Māori and Pacific students may disproportionately find the loss of this allowance a barrier to further study in psychology and to registering as psychologists.

Professor Gorman, Chair of HWNZ has rightly voiced his concerns to us about the lack of Māori psychologists, particularly Māori male psychologists. The Government acknowledges the importance of Māori postgraduate success by double-funding Māori postgraduate completions. Māori are already underrepresented at postgraduate level at universities and are among the groups most likely to have qualified for student allowances. In our research 82% (n23) of the undergraduate Māori psychology students indicated that the student allowance cuts would impact on them.

Further research is required to determine the exact impact that the allowance cuts will have on these students but it is reasonable to assume that the cuts will increase the financial hardship experienced by Māori. Likewise, Pasifika students will also be disproportionately impacted by these cuts. The future workforce implications of these two groups of students being disadvantaged as a result of the cutting of student allowances are very concerning.

Workforce development impacts- summary of our concerns

Our concerns can be summarised as follows....

- The loss of Māori and Pasifika students to postgraduate study will impact on the diversity of the psychology profession and its ability to meet the needs of Māori and Pasifika in the future. Likewise socially disadvantaged students of all ethnicities will be impacted by this policy
- The rates of mental illness in New Zealand are increasing. Between 2001 and 2010 the rate of clients seen by Mental Health Services has increased by 19% (Ministry of Health)¹. Depression is the leading cause of disability as measured by the *Years of Lived with Disability* and the 4th leading contributor to the global burden of disease in 2000 (WHO). In addition, by the year 2020 depression is projected to reach 2nd place of the ranking of

¹<https://www.google.co.nz/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCoQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.health.govt.nz%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2Fdocuments%2Fpublication%2Fmental-health-addiction-factsheet-2009-10.doc&ei=fZCKUsm1CeXOIaf1tYQC&usq=AFQjCNHrii28Wbf7HX12DhT9Y3S2EJCROg&sig2=SUAEl1rdW97zLGt92T5MA&bvm=bv.56643336,d.aGc>

Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYS) for all ages and both sexes. Today depression is already the 2nd cause of DALYS in the age 15-44 years for both sexes combined².

- The student allowance policy runs counter to the work of Health Workforce New Zealand in its mission to “heal the health system” by ensuring that there are and will be sufficient numbers of well-trained professionals- including psychologists to deliver services to New Zealanders

In conclusion

We are drawing your attention to this issue because we believe that the longterm impact of the cutting of student allowances is likely to seriously impact on the delivery of psychological services to New Zealanders in the future in an environment of increasing need. We seek your support in making the Government and Health Workforce New Zealand aware of the short-term and long-term consequences of this ill-considered policy so that we can ensure that students are supported to complete their qualifications and psychological services are available in the future for those who will benefit from them.

Acknowledgements

Our thanks to the New Zealand College of Clinical Psychology, Josh Faulkner and Victoria University of Wellington for their contribution to the student allowance study noted.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P Coleman', with a stylized, cursive script.

Peter Coleman
President

² http://www.who.int/mental_health/management/depression/definition/en/index.html