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## WEA SCOTLAND

### RESPONSE TO 'A CHANGING LANDSCAPE FOR TERTIARY EDUCATION AND RESEARCH IN SCOTLAND' CONSULTATION.

15 July 2004

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The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) is a national, democratic, voluntary organisation. For over 100 years the WEA has promoted the right of adults to have access to lifelong learning regardless of their economic, social or educational background.

In Scotland, WEA works as a single national institution, with a proven ability to deliver high quality adult education in the community and in workplaces throughout Scotland. Through partnership working and involving learners in the design and delivery of a wide range of organised and progressive learning, WEA makes a unique contribution to adult education services.

With an annual programme of 1000 courses (some of which can be accredited through Scottish Qualifications Authority Units), delivered in around 200 localities, involving 14,000 enrolments, the WEA's work complements the Scottish Executive's strategy for post school education by

- closing the gap in the strategy, ensuring an appropriate breadth of provision for adults learners;
- creating a new bridge to further learning by targeting the needs of adults with low levels of attainment, qualifications and essential skills;
- addressing equality of access for learning, for adults of whatever age, wherever located;
- overcoming barriers, real or perceived, of confidence, cost, and the demands of other responsibilities carried by adults e.g. caring;
- taking learning to the learner whether in the community, or the workplace;
- addressing the demand side weaknesses by enabling participation, achievement, and encouragement to continue learning, in those who missed out, for whatever reason, and are not ready to access other opportunities;
- providing opportunities for participation and access to accreditation in a wide range of non-vocational studies.

As a major, voluntary sector, public service provider of adult education, whose work with trade unions, employers and communities has been recognised in the Scottish Executive's Strategy for Lifelong Learning, WEA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation paper on the Tertiary Education (Funding etc.) (Scotland) Bill.

## **DEFINITION OF TERTIARY EDUCATION**

**WEA welcomes the definition of tertiary education provided in the draft Bill.**

This creates the opportunity for Ministers and the proposed Tertiary Education Funding Council to consider *the full range of lifelong learning services, gaps and future needs*, in seeking to achieve coherence and co-ordination of tertiary education in Scotland, through encouraging collaboration between providers, based on parity of esteem, regardless of sector.

**We agree that the distinctiveness of institutions is a strength of the system.**

That strength can only be enhanced by the proposed new powers to recognise, for the purpose of funding provision, strategically important, complementary, services delivered outside the formal institutions.

Such providers must be capable of working to the high standards of service adults are entitled to expect from publicly funded provision.

**WEA welcomes the move to achieve parity of esteem between the sectors working in Tertiary Education.**

This should include appropriate national public service providers in the voluntary sector.

The WEA's work makes an important contribution to widening participation and to motivating and drawing into learning a diverse range of adults who are under represented in other post school provision.

**We welcome assurances that Ministers recognise, and will continue to recognise, the distinctive status, character and mission of HEI and Colleges.**

This commitment should be extended to any new specified tertiary education providers.

*Ministers should ensure that the new Tertiary Education Funding Council, is empowered to fund providers, in a way which is appropriate to their status, character and the nature of the service they provide.*

## **SPECIFIED TERTIARY EDUCATION PROVIDERS**

**WEA welcomes the proposed powers contained in the draft Bill for Ministers to specify other providers for the purposes of funding provision of lifelong learning.**

This is entirely consistent with the definition of Tertiary Education. It will be an important factor in achieving the aims of a post school education service which is strategic, co-ordinated, contributes to social inclusion, widens access and the diversity of learners engaged in tertiary education.

It will enable Ministers to exploit specialist expertise, maximise the benefit of innovation and success, from whatever sector, for the benefit of learners whatever their circumstances and wherever geographically situated.

A greater diversity of providers contributing to the national plan for post school learning will enrich the service and create a range of routes to learning for a greater range of learners than presently benefit from the services of current nationally funded post school education providers.

It is essential that there is a national strategy and national funding available for a wider range of adult learning to ensure that all of Scotland's people can realise their potential as members of families and communities, and as workers. In the changing demographic and economic context, adult access to learning throughout life is of equal importance as the range of initiatives designed to ensure that our young people are able to realise their potential.

An investment in the quality of generic skills is essential to building the confidence and ability of the workforce to acquire new skills throughout their life, gain the confidence to engage, from a stand point of informed and critical understanding, with the issues of our times, and participate in the cultural and social life of Scotland.

There is no shortage of evidence of the benefits of programmes, such as the NHS and Social Care, workplace based, Return to Learn programmes, support by the Scottish Executive and delivered by the WEA in partnership with UNISON. Programmes like these and our community based pre-access and community training courses, are constrained by short-term funding. They should be part of the mainstream national strategy for lifelong learning.

## **CONDITIONS FOR ACHIEVING STEP STATUS**

Scottish Ministers and the proposed new Tertiary Education Funding Council will have a responsibility to ensure high quality services. The conditions for achieving STEP status will be an important factor in this.

*Scottish Ministers should ensure that funding and reporting regimes are as rigorous as you would expect of services provided from the public purse, but are appropriate to the nature of the provider, their provision and the learners they serve.*

## **CONCLUSION**

The WEA welcomes the broad definition of tertiary education; hopes that Ministers will use this to strengthen the public post-school sector in a quality assured way, by recognising strategically important adult education services, and appropriate public service providers in the voluntary sector, to the benefit of participants, society and the economy.

Ministers must ensure that the funding council is able to fund providers according to their status, character, and the nature of the service they provide. Rigid adherence to common, formulaic funding, applied to all, regardless of circumstance can be detrimental to services undermining the characteristics which contribute to their success.

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