



29 August 2016

To: The Commission of Inquiry into Higher Education and Training

PRESENTATION TO FEES COMMISSION – 5 September 2016

1. COMMENTS SUBMITTED:

[...]

Dear Sirs/Madams,

Thank you for offering us the opportunity to make a contribution towards the inquiry. We are one of the independent South African institutions offering Higher Education programmes, fully accredited and registered with the Department of Higher Education and Training.

In the light of the question whether Higher Education could be made fee-free, we would, in principle, welcome it if suitable applicants could find their way into Higher Education without being limited by financial constraints.

However, we would like to alert the Commission that creating free Higher Education would not be a fair solution if free education would only apply to studying at public institutions. Supported by the country's Constitution, there is a fundamental right for institutions to offer independent education, and for students to enrol for it, as long as regulations in terms of accreditation are met. For this fundamental right to be practised, however, there needs to remain a reasonable balance of expenditure for those involved. Free public education and cost-based expenses for independent education we would regard as unfair competition.

Already in the current situation, independent providers of education are challenged by the difference in circumstances between the highly subsidized public institutions and working without any such financial support. Depending solely on the income of tuition fees, while keeping these fees affordable, in comparison with studying at public institutions, is already a tight balance.

Should only public education become free or much cheaper, then independent institutions as well as their students would have to cope with an unrealistic and unfair financial difference. Students enrol at independent institutions for different reasons, be it because of religion, because of specific qualities or approaches found in these institutions, or because of programmes unavailable at public institutions. Many students do so with great difficulty. In our case the large majority of students go through strenuous financial times due to their studies, and only a small percentage of students seem to be able to afford their studies easily.

We would like to make a strong plea that – if public education becomes free or much cheaper – the

For the peoples of Africa • Iziko labantu be Afrika

- Centre for Creative Education

registered independent providers be included into the equation. We have the following options in mind:

- that subsidies be made available for registered independent institutions, so that these institutions can continue exercising their constitutional right without unfair competition
- that a system of bursaries be created, supporting low-income students at registered independent institutions
- that education fees become tax deductible, thus avoiding that higher-income students (or their families) pay twice: once through their taxes, supporting public education, and again through paying for their independent education

Although currently the focus of the inquiry is merely on Higher Education, we regard the above thoughts as applicable to the country's education in general. We believe that South Africa benefits significantly from the independent educational sector, in all levels of schooling, as the sector often produces graduates with remarkable levels of knowledge, skills, motivation and initiative.

At the time of this inquiry we ask the Commission to recommend that the financial injustice that is currently in place be repaired rather than augmented as part of the developments in terms of free education.

We wish the Commission well in their task.

Yours sincerely,
[...]

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND ELABORATION ON THE ABOVE:

The Centre for Creative Education is an independent provider of Higher Education (and an FET Early Childhood Development programme), fully accredited and registered with the Department of Higher Education and Training. We offer Teacher Education programmes based on a specific educational philosophy and methodology, namely the principles used in Waldorf Education. The beneficial aspects of this approach are not limited to teaching in Waldorf schools, but are also highly effective towards improving education in other (public or independent) schools. With our accredited and registered degree Bachelor of Education (Foundation and Intermediate Phases) our graduates are able to become successful teachers in any primary school.

Studying at our institution differs greatly from doing so at a public institution, as the students who will be present during our meeting on 5th September will be able to elaborate on. Aspects of studying at our institution include:

- The small size of our college and of our classes (max. 35 students) is highly conducive to the quality of the inter-personal contact that occurs during and in-between sessions. Getting to know each student, to follow their personal and professional development, and being able to respond to personal needs, increases the effect and the depth of the students' developmental growth. An atmosphere of support and shared motivation assists in bringing the best possible quality out of each student's efforts and studies.
- In addition to developing academic skills in students, the programme puts much importance on the development of practical skills, in all aspects of the role of the future teacher, and including visual and musical arts. Many of these skills are directly linked to becoming a

better, inspiring teacher, e.g. visual presentation skills, story-telling, communication skills with children, parents and colleagues.

- The levels at which our students develop understanding, inspiration and values, as future teachers, is enhanced by philosophical aspects of their studies. In a non-denominational and all-welcoming approach to religions, working with inter-human values and a holistic understanding of being human contributes significantly to levels of motivation, appreciation and understanding towards the teaching profession.
- As a result of the above, our graduates are highly motivated teachers, equipped with an in-depth understanding the needs of children and how to meet these need as educators, as well as with a broad range of practical and inter-human skills. For this reason our graduates are often sought-after and highly appreciated for the difference they make in their schools.

As an organisation, we not only differ from public institutions but also from most other independent providers of Higher Education. The following aspects of our organisation and our provision of Higher Education may be relevant for you:

- We have provided Teacher Education since our inception in 1993, and our alumni comprise a good reflection of South Africa's different communities, home languages and religions. Of our graduates approximately 50% have been appointed at schools where the National Curriculum is offered, 40% at Waldorf schools, and the remaining 10% studied further or chose other career options.
- We are a registered Non-Profit Organisation (NPO). In order to keep our tuition fees as affordable as possible, and to still make specific arrangements to accommodate students who would not be able to study without further support. As a Public Benefit Organisation (PBO) we exist for the sole purpose of bringing educational renewal and improvement. Rather than generating profit, our budget depends for a significant part on continuous fundraising.
- Due to our status as a non-public provider, our students are not eligible to apply for any government support, such as study loans (NSFAS) or the specific bursaries allocated to Teacher Education students (Funza Lushaka).
- Despite our contribution towards the provision of teachers, also for public schools, our institution does not receive any form of financial support from local or national government. A significant part of our expenditure, however, is related to compliance with legislation and regulations, such as accreditation processes and requirements in terms of annual re-registration.

Should public Higher Education in South Africa become fee-free, without consideration of the contributions made by independent providers, we foresee that independent organisations and their students will be affected as follows:

- The difference between studying at an institution whose expenditure depends on incoming fees and studying for free at a public institution will become so pertinent, that only the wealthiest layer of the country's population will still be in a position to choose independent programmes. Those who do, will in fact be paying twice: First, through taxes, for the free public system and secondly for enrolling at an independent institution.
- Once there is an option for students to enrol (at public institutions) for free, the donor organisations and non-public bursary schemes that are currently still supporting students at independent institutions are unlikely to continue offering their support.
- Many students who are currently enrolling at institutions-with-a-difference, whether it is due to a religious or philosophical component, a particular specialisation or quality that is not found in other institutions, or just the smaller size and personal atmosphere within the smaller institutions, would be forced to accept the offerings of the public institutions. These

- Centre for Creative Education

institutions, having been designed to serve many, are not equally able to provide for the diversity, flexibility and special qualities found in their independent counterparts.

- All in all, the added value that the independent providers currently bring would significantly be affected, resulting in a further decline of South Africa's education.

We therefore ask for the Commission to refer, in its recommendations, to mechanisms needed to support a continued existence of independent education. In our comments we already mentioned some possibilities, such as:

- Subsidies for registered independent providers
- Bursaries for students at independent institutions
- Tax deduction for tuition fees

3. STAFF AND STUDENTS MEETING THE COMMISSION:

Mr Willem van der Velden

Academic Head and Lecturer on the B.Ed. programme (primary education)

Ms Thozì Theko

First-year B.Ed. student

Ms Leigh Moore

Third-year B.Ed. student

Ms Stephanie Girie

Fourth-year B.Ed. student