

**NATIONAL UNION OF
GREEK AUSTRALIAN STUDENTS
(NUGAS)**

POLICY

EDUCATION

**PREPARED BY:
DENNIS APOSTOLOPOULOS**

1993

1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 1.1 NUGAS believes for education to fulfil a socially responsible role in society that it:
 - 1.1.1 Should be available to all people irrespective of gender, race, class, socio-economic background, age, sexual preference, disability, national origin, or geographic location;
 - 1.1.2 Must be free, secular, public, democratic and socially accountable;
 - 1.1.3 Should be part of a life long process that will provide people with the opportunities to develop their interests and skills, and serve the social needs of communities.
- 1.2 NUGAS believes that the aims of a universal higher education system should be to serve the social, cultural and economic needs of society by:
 - 1.2.1 The creation, preservation and transmission of knowledge in a democratic and socially responsive manner through the development of curricula, teaching methods, and the conduct of research which reject militarism and environmentally corrosive ideologies and challenge racist, sexist and ruling class ideologies;
 - 1.2.2 Providing students with technical skills and an awareness of the modes of production and complex operation of society in which these skills are defined and utilised;
 - 1.2.3 Providing students with a critical awareness and analysis of established ideas and social institutions and the inequalities in society reproduced by these institutions and ideas;
 - 1.2.4 Providing students with the necessary intellectual tools to develop alternative solutions to social problems and contradictions;
 - 1.2.5 Contributing to the restructuring of the Australian economy in order to redress social and economic inequality;
 - 1.2.6 The development of decision making structures and processes that are democratic and socially responsible and ensure co-operation and exchange with the wider community.

2.0 ACCESS TO TERTIARY EDUCATION

- 2.1 ACCESS ADID PARTICIPATION IN POST SECONDARY EDUCATION
 - 2.1.1 NUGAS recognises that currently, those from privileged backgrounds in terms of wealth and status, are over-represented in higher education This reflects the distribution of social and economic power that exists in current society where inequality and poverty are prevalent and on the increase. However, for this situation to begin to change, there must be fundamental changes to the higher education system itself. Existing barriers to access must be abolished and mechanisms established to ensure that social groups traditionally under-represented enter and succeed in higher education.

- 2.1.2 NUGAS believes that access to post secondary education should be based on an individuals willingness to undertake such an education not on her/his ability to pay. Therefore NUGAS condemns the application of so called “user pays” principle to education in any form, i.e., HECS, up-front tuition fees or through a student loans scheme. NUGAS believes that to extend access to education, student financing must be a direct grants scheme universally available to all students with the aim of guaranteeing a minimum income for all students.
- 2.1.3 NUGAS believes that funding for post secondary education must be significantly increased to provide institutions with the capacity to increase access to education by:
- (i) Increasing enrolments;
 - (ii) Allowing the development of comprehensive and adequate part time study programmes;
 - (iii) Expanding course options;
 - (iv) Relaxing entry requirements;
 - (v) Development of more and expanded special entry programmes;
 - (vi) Development of flexible time tables and staff arrangement to cater for special needs;
 - (vii) The development of preparation courses, English as a second language needs;
 - (viii) Undertaking substantial capital and building projects;
 - (ix) Providing an expansion of low cost on campus student housing;

2.2 SELECTION AND ENTRY INTO HIGHER EDUCATION

- 2.2.1 NUGAS believes that selection and entry criteria into higher education should serve to breakdown existing inequities within society, to counteract discrimination, and should be part of a comprehensive approach to providing real educational opportunities for socially and educationally disadvantaged groups.
- 2.2.2 NUGAS believes that selection and entry criteria should also reduce workforce segmentation, structural barriers between education sectors and encourage greater mobility between the workforce and formal education.
- 2.2.3 Further changes to selection and entry criteria must be undertaken to improve the participation of under-represented groups. Assessment should include recognition of workforce participation and life skills.

2.3 CREDIT TRANSFER

- 2.3.1 NUGAS believes that improvement in credit transfer procedures is an essential part of any serious attempt to eliminate social inequality and improve mobility within the post secondary education system, in particular between TAFE and higher education.
- 2.3.2 NUGAS believes that credit transfer arrangements should ensure international credit transfer between post-secondary institutions. Expand to include credit recognition specifically to Greece and Cyprus.

- 2.3.3 NUGAS believes that there must be improved arrangements for granting credit to TAFE students wishing to enrol in higher education. In particular:
- (i) all transfers between courses at Associate Diploma level and above in TAFE and higher education institutions should be regarded as tertiary transfers and be given entry and credit at the appropriate level;
 - (ii) all transfers from certificate level in TAFE should be treated at least equivalent of completion of year 12, with additional credit as appropriate;
 - (iii) higher education institutions should establish agreements for cooperation with TAFE institutions to assist and improve curriculum coordination.

2.4 AWARENESS OF TERTIARY EDUCATION

2.4.1 NUGAS believes that the level of awareness a community has of tertiary education, particularly in relation to tertiary education as a viable post-secondary option, is one of a number of vital factors in determining the level of access that community has to education.

2.4.2 NUGAS believes that the provision of quality information regarding tertiary education is primarily a Commonwealth and State responsibility, but believes that the student union movement should also play a significant role.

2.5 SECONDARY SCHOOLING

2.5.1 NUGAS believes that decisions made at the secondary school level are perhaps the most vital in ensuring a broadening of access to tertiary education.

2.5.2 NUGAS therefore views it as imperative that the student union movement and the tertiary sector generally have close links with the secondary system, and have clear policy goals with regard to secondary education.

2.5.3 NUGAS believes that State and Commonwealth Governments and institutions should provide detailed information on:

- (i) tertiary courses work-load requirements career options;
- (ii) work load requirements;
- (iii) career options;
- (iv) selection procedures;
- (v) special admission schemes;
- (vi) bridging courses;
- (vii) support services;
- (viii) HECS;
- (ix) financial support;
- (x) student organisations.

2.5.4 Furthermore to ensure equity and quality of education in the state school system the Federal Government should place limitations on class sizes and teachers work load.

2.5.5 More attention should be given to curriculum and other needs of students from Hellenic and other Non English speaking backgrounds.

2.5.6 Furthermore the education system should ensure that all students are given a broader and less biased education. NUGAS therefore supports curriculum developments along the lines of those in the Victorian Certificate of Education curriculum such as Australian studies.

2.6 INDIVIDUAL FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

2.6.1 NUGAS believes that society in general enjoys a considerable benefit from higher education and that this education should be free and accessible to all. Therefore NUGAS rejects any system whereby students pay for all or part of the cost of their education, merely because they are users of the system. These systems are particularly unacceptable because of:

- (i) insurmountable problems in defining and apportioning costs to 'users';
- (ii) the inability of 'user-pays' systems to take account of other costs borne by users, such as income foregone and general taxation paid;
- (iii) the definite effects any increase in 'user' costs must have on those, on the margins of participation in education;
- (iv) the financial disincentive 'user-pays' schemes have on sections of the workforce seeking to upgrade skills and qualifications.

2.6.2 NUGAS believes that education should be free and accessible to all and hence rejects all forms of individual 'user-pays' systems. NUGAS believes that society in general accrues considerable social, cultural and economic benefits from higher education that outweigh the social cost of providing such an education. NUGAS rejects the philosophical basis of the arguments for individual 'user-pays' schemes as being too narrow and abstract to reflect real social relations. NUGAS therefore opposes the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS), the imposition of up-front fees and loans, and the widespread practice amongst institutions of charging fees for specific course-related purposes.

2.7 TAFE

2.7.1 NUGAS believes that student organisations in TAFE should be recognised as a valid representative and service provider and that the following principles should apply:

- (i) the full range of student services should be provided at TAFE institutions and therefore NUGAS rejects the notion of user pays service provision;
- (ii) TAFE students' organisation should be formed with representation on state governing bodies;
- (iii) TAFE student organisations have the right to levy union fees;
- (iv) TAFE student organisations should have control of amenities and service fees.

2.7.2 NUGAS rejects the introduction of fees and charges for TAFE students, particularly in regard to paying for basic training costs.

2.7.3 NUGAS believes that TAFE governing bodies should include at minimum two elected student representatives.

- 2.7.4 NUGAS believes that TAFE apprentices should be treated equally with all other TAFE students.
- 2.7.5 NUGAS believes that TAFE students should be treated as equal partners in the development and evaluation of the TAFE curriculum.
- 2.7.6 NUGAS believes that in principle, the Commonwealth should have greater involvement in the TATE system to ensure adequate funding and better curriculum development.
- 2.7.7 NUGAS will particularly work to oppose moves by State Governments to introduce fees for vocational courses, except as directly funded by employers.

2.8 STUDENTS' RIGHTS

2.8.1 NUGAS believes students should have the right:

- (i) To receive from their institution, prior to the commencement of teaching, documentation clearly explaining course structure and requirement; unit options; and general unit objectives, content and requirement and the options for study in other schools I faculties I departments as well as their school of enrolment;
- (ii) To undergo consistent, prompt, objective and anonymous forms of assessment established only after agreement has been reached between students and staff;
- (iii) To be informed how each part of the course, and each activity or assessment, relates to the objectives of the course, and to scale the individual components of the course by their degree of importance;
- (iv) To have in any unit a choice of assessment options;
- (v) To receive an extension of time to submit work, where misadventure has occurred;
- (vi) To be notified if at risk of failing a course;
- (vii) To receive a full explanation of a grade or result from the assessor which should be prompt and constructive;
- (viii) To appeal a grade or result (without financial charge or other automatic penalty) to an independent third body;
- (ix) To have reasonable access to members of staff to discuss course related matters outside teaching hours;
- (x) To have complete access to their own personal files;
- (xi) To be free from discrimination on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, age, socio - economic, background, disability, sexual preference, marital status, political or religious belief or geographical location, and to be able to bring any suspected discrimination to the attention of the institution without fear of retribution;
- (xii) To receive appropriate remuneration for work performed as part of assessable work, for another agent outside the institution;
- (xiii) To have free and open access to student support services such as financial, educational, medical, commercial, childcare and accommodation services, necessary for the successful completion of a course study;

- (xiv) To have independent student representation on all administrative and decision making bodies within the institution. Such representatives shall be adequately resourced, to an extent no less than other members of these bodies;
- (xv) To travel to and from, and around campus, and study free from any form of sexual harassment;
- (xvi) To contribute to course planning and assessments of teaching;
- (xvii) To expect that education, being a public good, shall be freely and readily accessible to all;
- (xviii) To have a unified appeals structure across an institution.

2.9 STUDENT FINANCIAL SUPPORT GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 2.9.1 NUGAS believes that the Commonwealth has a responsibility to ensure that all students can study with a reasonable standard of living;
- 2.9.2 The primary means by which this should be done is through student financial assistance programs such as Austudy and Abstudy;
- 2.9.3 NUGAS believes that the primary rationale for schemes such as Austudy should be to ensure that no student is denied access to or continuance in education because of financial factors.
- 2.9.4 NUGAS rejects the Commonwealth notion of Austudy as consisting of income support and believes that Austudy and other such schemes should provide a reasonable standard of living without reliance on other sources of income.

2.10 REFORMS TO AUSTUDY

- 2.10.1 NUGAS calls on the Commonwealth to reform Austudy in the following ways:
 - (i) reduce the age for independent status from 25 to 18;
 - (ii) reduce the workforce qualification to 2 years out of the last 3;
 - (iii) provide extra assistance for those students technically not 'independent' but not in receipt of any parental support;
 - (iv) raise independent levels of Austudy to provide a reasonable standard of living, above the poverty line, and index Austudy levels with CPI;
 - (v) raise the personal income threshold to at least \$5000.00
 - (vi) raise the Maximum Adjustable Family Income to at least average weekly earnings;
 - (vii) liberalise the rigorous spouse income test which discriminates against many female Austudy applicants;
 - (viii) Provide Austudy recipients automatically with non-cash such benefits such as a Health Care Card;
 - (ix) liberalise the academic progress criteria;
 - (x) liberalise the assets test provisions, so as to take account of situations where disposable income and net asset value are not related;
 - (xi) broaden access to client services through on-campus offices or local services.

- (xii) examine the role of the benefits control unit, including insuring that it targets professional fraud and examining concerns about the behaviour of ex-police officers concentrated in some areas of the benefits control unit;
- (xiii) improve the staff numbers, training and resourcing of Austudy services;
- (xiv) establish a fourth broad course level through which tertiary students may progress and continue to receive assistance, to encompass TAFE associate diplomas which are currently considered to be of the same level as an undergraduate degree;
- (xv) allow students in the final two years of secondary education to be eligible to apply for Austudy.