

Te Rōpu Ākonga o ngā Whare Wānanga o Aotearoa  
New Zealand University Students' Association (INC)



1997 Annual Report

■ **refining our vision for tertiary education**

NZUSA has throughout its history developed and clearly articulated its vision for tertiary education in New Zealand. Our motto, 'Building a Better Education for All', neatly summarises our strong advocacy of a quality, accessible education available to all those who seek it in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In 1997 we sought to further refine our position and to imagine how it might be operationalised.

Our prompt was the government's comprehensive review of tertiary education. We initially took the Government at its word and produced a significant initial submission, *Building a World-Class Tertiary Education System*, jointly with the Aotearoa Polytechnic Students Union (APSU). This lengthy document built on earlier key developmental statements of the Association's tertiary education vision - *Out of the Past*, 1994, and *Vision of Tertiary Education (VOTE)*, 1996. Significant time and staff resources were consumed by the Federation and our constituent members in formulating *Building a World-Class Tertiary Education System* and it remains a noteworthy achievement.

NZUSA was also called upon to provide advice to consultants engaged by the Ministry of Education to work on tertiary review-related projects. These welcome sessions gave the Association a further chance to discuss our specific concerns and proposals. During 1997 tertiary education was also being reviewed in Australia and we were also asked to present information to a group representing the Australian Industries Commission, in New Zealand on a fact-finding mission. It is hard to identify any of our comments in the submission they prepared for the West Commission, as indeed we understand our Trans-Tasman sister organisation similarly found. Nonetheless the occasion was useful for us in further developing our thinking.

Following the publication of the tertiary education review white paper, we again prepared a comprehensive written submission, *Looking to the Future*. The focus of this document was a series of specific responses to proposals presented in the government green paper.

## federation officer's report

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The development of these documents was a key task completed in 1997. We sought and were granted an opportunity to discuss their contents with the officials working on the tertiary education review which enabled us to point out key messages. We also forwarded copies of the documents to nearly 100 organisations and decision-makers so that they were aware of the positions we had arrived at.

### ■ **relationships with other organisations**

To outside observers NZUSA could easily be seen as an organisation that has very little to do with the present Government. It is certainly true that our principled stance in favour of a free, quality, tertiary education accessible to all has meant we have found it impossible for sometime to support the regressive 'reform' path successive governments have been travelling. Nonetheless our work individually with Ministers and officials from several government departments has continued to produce tangible results for students. In 1997 his work included:

- bimonthly meetings with the Secretary of Education and his key officials. This gave a direct forum for dialogue with the officials leading the tertiary education review
- advice to the Inland Revenue Department which resulted in redesigned, clearer student loan information being sent to borrowers.
- membership of the Ministry of Youth Affairs Advisory Committee and the Association of Non-Governmental Organisations Aotearoa (ANGO) which enabled us to maintain regular contact with a large number of official and community-based organisations
- advice to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority on our vision for a harmonised national system of qualifications

*These links are an important way for the Federation to progress its core mission - improving the lot of individual students.*

In 1996 NZUSA was instrumental in the formation of the Public Tertiary Education Coalition (PTEC), comprising all the management, staff and student tertiary peak bodies. Sadly PTEC did not survive the Coalition talks. NZUSA remains committed to working with all other

bodies who share a vision for tertiary education. In this vein, while obviously disappointed that we could not formally maintain the momentum generated through the PTEC grouping, we did continue to work with the sector in 1997. Information sharing remains a key strategy to overcome the overly secretive manner in which governments operate in the 1990s. We thank those organisations who refused to be bullied and with whom we worked.

NZUSA's closest ally in the tertiary sector is our sister organisation APSU. In 1997 the agreement we forged back in 1994 came into its own. We worked with Rebecca Parata and her team on many joint projects and were an effective lobby. Joint work such as our initial submission to the tertiary education review, *Building a World-Class Tertiary Education System*, showed how closely our respective visions for tertiary education are in synch. There will always be differences in approach, and sometimes in perceptions, but we both care more passionately about the same things than we will ever disagree about peripheral matters. The chant goes something like '**the students united will never be defeated**' and in acting that out in a practical way on a day-to-day basis we doubled the effectiveness of both organisations. We salute APSU and wish it well into the future.

1997 was the last year Rebecca Parata headed APSU and we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge her leadership within the tertiary education sector. Her efforts have been recorded in many other for a but we wish here to also place on record our thanks for all she has done for students.

● **students with disabilities**

**In 1997 we finally managed to convince Government that additional funding was essential if students with disabilities were to be able to firstly enrol, and secondly succeed, in tertiary education.**

It was with enormous pleasure that the President was able to go to the annual NZUSA-supported Students with Disabilities Gathering (held in late August at Lincoln University), accompanied by a Ministry of Education official, and discuss ways in which we could hold institutions accountable for significant additional funding the Government agreed to provide in it's budget.

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Whilst we share disabilities groups concern about the mechanism adopted to allocate the funding it would be churlish not to acknowledge that, belatedly, Government has moved to give these students the support they so desperately needed.

It was also a year in which our relationship with ACHIEVE - the National Post Secondary Education Disability Network - grew and strengthened. NZUSA has been a financial supporter of this group, which brings together students with disabilities, employers and professional support staff, since its formation. We pay tribute here to the hard work and dedication of Diana Murray and the ACHIEVE team. Together we were able to 'achieve' what seemed impossible only a year earlier. Funding is of course only the first step and NZUSA has a continuing role, working with ACHIEVE, to hold institutions and Government accountable and to ensure that campuses nation-wide remove the psychological and physical barriers to participation.

### **● improving educational quality**

Hayden was a member of both the NZVCC Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP) and the Board of the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit (AAU). During 1997 the AAU was reviewed and the Association made a submission to the review panel, as well as giving oral evidence in person. From discussions with our member associations it is clear that these initiatives have done much to improve the quality of education individual students receive. Our presence at the centre of both groups ensures that a vital student perspective is clearly articulated. The considerable time and effort Hayden put into both bodies was a key aspect of our work.

The President was invited to speak to a group of administrators from all New Zealand universities on student expectations of university education. This provided the Association with a further opportunity to stress the importance of a good quality education for students to those with the authority to ensure any problems are corrected. Legal action, which had been mounted with the Association's support in 1996 over an alleged sub-standard course at Victoria University of Wellington, continued in 1997. The case was bogged down for the entire year in endless arguments about the jurisdiction of the Court. Our position was clear. Where students receive a poor standard of education, and no appropriate remedy is offered, we will work with them to both get

them effective justice for them and to force necessary systemic changes for the benefit of tomorrows students.

### ● **voluntary student membership**

This hoary old chestnut raised its ill-informed head again in 1997. Two private members bills were debated in the House. ACT education spokesperson Donna Awatere-Huata failed to get support to progress her bill, but a similar bill promoted by National MP Tony Steel was sent to the Education and Science Select Committee and remained there at year's end. A bill had been defeated in the previous Parliament so many members were very well informed of its negative consequences. NZUSA, and the constituent members, spent many long hours explaining the role of associations to new MPs and writing submissions. Sadly we were also forced to counter a deliberate campaign of misinformation masterminded by those with a clear agenda to silence the voices of students as a force for progressive change. On the facts alone our case has always been convincing so it was not surprising to see these underhand tactics being adopted.

As we had done previously the Federation put together a clear and concise submission for the select committee. This time we were assisted by a legal opinion from the prestigious law firm Chen & Palmer, which left the committee in no doubt that the current provisions of the Education Act was not in conflict with other domestic law and was consistent with the international agreements New Zealand is a party to.

It seems certain that this issue will not go away in the near future and we wish our successors well in safeguarding the right of students to join together to defend their interests.

### ● **maintaining our profile**

Tertiary students were a highly visible group in New Zealand during 1996, promoting clear messages and attracting considerable public support for their comprehensive vision for tertiary education. It is always difficult to maintain such a profile outside of election years but, nevertheless, students again were major contributors to the public debate in 1997. Partly this was because the new government - while initially promising via its signed Coalition Agreement to be more student-friendly (thorough its 'commitment' to reintroduce universal

student living allowances and conduct a comprehensive review of tertiary policy) - quickly adopted the behaviour National governing alone from 1990-1996 had shown to students; the tertiary education review became an attempt to legitimise already discredited ideologically-based 'reform' options and not a single additional student has received their promised allowance. The depth of the government's betrayal came when the Education Minister, Wyatt Creech, threatened to sue NZUSA and APSU for producing a poster in which he was pictured promising all students a living allowance. The Minister's assertion that he had not actually uttered the words depicted on the poster again proved to students that promises made by governments he was part of were all too quickly broken.

Students on campuses across the nation took to the streets following Mr. Creech's confirmation that his government was again going to welch on its promises. Even larger numbers of students again hit the streets following our publicity of a paper leaked to us which revealed the extent of the government's crazy ideologically-driven 'reform' agenda for tertiary education. Worse still, it soon became clear that officialdom had decided to silence voices of dissent as over a hundred students were arrested during the year, at various actions, for taking part in peaceful and law abiding protests. For the students involved this was a double indignity: firstly they had been callously lied to by the government and, secondly, they had been arrested for taking a stand and refusing to let the Coalition of the hook quietly. When citizens are prevented from taking all steps available within the law to highlight their plight the legitimacy of the state itself can no longer be assured.

*Students in 1997 paid a high price for attempting to exercise their democratic rights.*

But protest action wasn't the only string to our bow. The President took up several invitations to address significant conferences as well. Early in the year he spoke to key decision makers from across the tertiary and government sectors critiquing tertiary governance reform

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proposals. Later in the year he addressed an international gathering of tertiary administrators in Sydney on improving student feedback mechanisms.

Whilst in Australia he also took the opportunity to interact with NZUSA's Trans-Tasman sister organisation - NUS. Contacts have been re-established with NUS in recent years and with the increasing globalisation of tertiary education their usefulness will continue to grow. Michael addressed two well attended and thoughtful meetings called by Alumni in Auckland and Wellington and encountered strenuous support for our continued advocacy of the role, quality and accessibility of tertiary education. Early in 1998 the President also spoke to a conference organised by the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO. His message - that it was important to recognise and value the place of politics in the education sector - was warmly received.

These occasions gave NZUSA an entrée into groups and individuals we do not easily interact with otherwise. Winning the hearts and minds of ordinary New Zealanders is essential if we are to achieve our goals; convincing decision makers of the justice and rationality of our case through reasoned and well-argued presentations is essential if we are to turn popular will into reality.

### **● working in the service of the federation**

Much of the undoubted successes of 1997 were built on the strong team we built in the Federation Office. Hayden and Michael, together with Rebecca Parata, decided at the beginning of the year to put energy into building a supportive and empowering environment in the Federation/National Office in which our staff could excel. We also introduced a new staff induction programme which proved successful at welcoming and educating new staff members. Our efforts truly paid off.

David Choat, our new joint Research Officer, worked phenomenally hard for both organisations turning out excellent work. In particular we would like to acknowledge his efforts in co-ordinating the several comprehensive documents we prepared as part of the Tertiary Education Review.



## federation officer's report

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In 1997 we farewelled Lennie Court, NZUSA's Women's Coordinator. Lennie too was a great asset for the Federation. We would like to record here our appreciation of the work she undertook for women students and the insights she provided to those not readily familiar with the principles and practice of feminism. An old friend of NZUSA - Christina Rizos, replaced Lennie. Christina injected new enthusiasm and commitment into the role. She was an active participant in office planning meetings and popular with constituent associations.

Vanessa Moe, as in previous years, continued to provide efficient and effective administrative oversight over the joint Federation/National Office.

Our sincere thanks to all the Federation/National Office staff reflects a year of creditable achievements. Their efforts were the key ingredient.

### ● **greeting old friends**

Near the end of the year we called together over 70 of our former elected officers and staff for a reunion dinner held at the Beehive Banquet Hall. We are notoriously bad at losing track of our 'alumni' once they leave the Federation and the occasion proved to be a wonderful opportunity to reacquaint the Federation Executive with those who built NZUSA into the organisation it is today.

Marian Hobbs, our 1971 education vice-president and now a Member of Parliament, was host to the event. The highlight of the evening was an after dinner speech by Norman Kingsbury (vice-president 1957-59) who has remained a firm friend of the Federation through his many years of associated with New Zealand universities.

All at the gathering agreed it was an occasion to be repeated in the future.

### ● **passing on the baton**

They say all good things must come to an end and by year-end we were certainly ready to pass the baton to a new Federation Office team.

On a personal note 1998 was our final year in the service of students.

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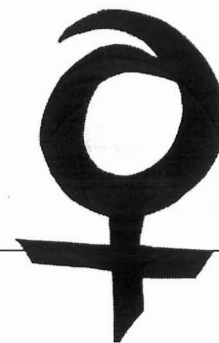
Michael became involved in the movement in late 1993, becoming aware at that time of the threat posed by Michael Laws, through his ill-fated VSM bill, to the collective voice of students. At the end of 1997 the issue had again been exhumed from its parliamentary grave by a new generation of political limelight seekers. Our best wishes for the battle to come are tempered with the sadness of seeing the issue being distorted by those who have no commitment to a publicly funded, accessible, quality tertiary education system in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Students' Associations have proudly carried that torch and now it seems as though some seek to extinguish their right to do so. Correctly it is observed that **truth is the first casualty in politics.**

To our many friends across the country who day after day experience the reality of an underfunded tertiary education system - kia kaha. To our partners - Gordon and Raewyn - thanks for your support. To the members of the Federation Executive, and to those to come, keep fighting and keep the vision - the cause is too important to falter at the eleventh hour.

It has been an honour to work in the service of students. Our lives have been moulded (some have said dominated!) by this defining experience and we are grateful for the opportunity to have made a contribution.

Students' associations are the only organisations built for, and controlled by, the youth of Aotearoa/New Zealand. A new generation, drawn from amongst those we have worked with, will one day soon take power in this land. We leave office with great hope in our hearts for the future.

Michael Gibbs & Hayden Wilson  
Federation Officers



### **1997 was a year of change and campaigns for WECA.**

In September WECA said goodbye to Helena Court who left NZUSA to travel overseas. WECA expressed their gratitude to Lennie for co-ordinating WECA and doing research and policy work, work that is needed for WECA to be an effective "voice" for women students.

Christina Rizos took over as the Women's Co-ordinator in September. Christina has had involvement with women student issues over the last five years, having been president of UCSA in 1994 and Women's Rights Officer before that.

Under the guidance of Lennie and Christina WECA undertook a number of worthwhile projects and campaigns. A campaign was run during in the middle of the year to urge women to 'vote NO' in the **Superannuation** referendum. Posters were produced and talks from politicians for and against the referendum were held on each campus.

A **women & VSM** kit was distributed to campuses in the later part of the year. Lennie and Christina jointly presented WECA's submission the Education and Science Select Committee.

**Thursdays in Black** grew in leaps and bounds with new posters and pamphlets for distribution, as well

as a new "tight fit" T-shirt. The change in the style of the shirt has bought younger women involved in the campaign. It is hoped that this campaign will grow extensively in 1998.

Two successful **women's gatherings** were held in Palmerston North and Christchurch. The aim of these gathering was to bring more women into being involved in the women's groups, this aim was achieved.

WECA continued work on the lengthy process of developing its own policy. The **policy** development process became controversial over the subject of abortion. SOUL (Student's Organisation to Uphold Life) protested strongly to WECA having a "pro-choice" stance on abortion. A vote was taken on the issue and the WECA policy was confirmed as being pro-choice.

In 1995, WECA awarded its \$3500 **scholarship** to Karryn Stewart a PhD student at the University of Canterbury. Karryn's work: "*Run me over with a Bus*" *The price of poverty: A contract with the State*. This work was presented to the third WECA conference of the year in Christchurch.

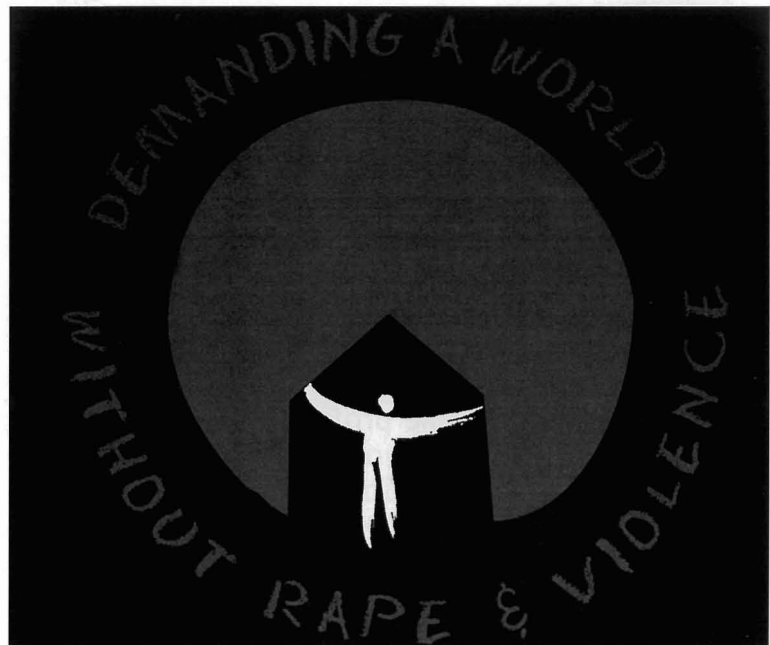
WECA participated in the submission process of the Tertiary

Education Green paper with a submission compiled by Christina.

WECA also held three successful conferences during the year on the day proceeding the NZUSA conferences in February, July and August. The WECA mailout was distributed to WECA groups between the conferences.

At the last one of these conferences Christina was instructed by WECA to begin discussions with **Te Mana Akonga** to build a relationship with the National Maori student organisation. Two meetings were held in later part of the year to construct a new understanding between the groups. This is likely to be one of the most exciting and valuable development in WECA's herstory.

**thursdays in black**



As Women's Co-ordinator for the first part of the year, Lennie again provided **training** to Women's Rights Officers, Presidents and Executives in facilitation, sexism on campus issues and group dynamics. Christina continued this education work by providing workshops at both the APSU and ASPA conferences.

It is hoped that in 1998 WECA will continue to grow in visibility and effectiveness at both at the local campus and the national levels and thereby improve the position and experience of women partaking in tertiary education.