

# Tertiary education should be free as a right

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Getting a university, polytechnic or apprenticeship qualification means that society, as a whole, is more educated. We all benefit. Everyone benefits from having plumbers who understand the entire pipe system thingy, scientists who understand the problem and can effectively deal with it (whether it is bio-security, nuclear reactions, or finding a cure for AIDS), accountants who can book-keep properly or teachers who can actually teach your children. This is beneficial for everyone. No one benefits from poorly done jobs, it is annoying and costly. Having a highly trained workforce means that no one needs to worry about quality, we become more efficient as a whole.

By giving free tertiary education, the government would provide a level playing field for everyone. Many would argue that the loan scheme achieves this. It does not. People from poorer backgrounds are less likely to burden themselves with debt as, relative to what they have lived their lives of, it is higher. They are frightened away from taking on too much debt (comparative to their parent's income). They thus do not get a tertiary education. The student loan scheme works to keep poorer people out of university, not to get them into it.

Reducing the cost of tertiary education would also reduce unemployment. Many of those who are long-term unemployed are so because the skills they previously used working in state-subsidised industries are no longer desirable or useful in this 'information age'. Retraining former railway staff to be able to work in a 21st century workplace would be beneficial to all. By providing free education, many more people will up-skill and unemployment will be able to fall even further. There is currently a skills shortage in a number of sectors, but there are also numerous people unemployed who do

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not have the skills for these positions. Giving these people free tertiary education is a good thing for everyone as GDP will grow, there will be fewer unemployment benefits, and the newly employed person will of course have more money and move out of poverty.

By making tertiary education cost money, thousands of New Zealanders have been driven overseas. As thousands leave, the 70% investment that the government currently provides (in subsidising fees), is wasted. For slightly more money from the government, they would get the full return on their investment as fewer people would go overseas. It would also relieve the debt burden from New Zealanders. These people are delaying house ownership, they are delaying having children, they are delaying saving for their retirement, to get out of their student loan debt. This is obviously not helping the general population.

The liberal belief in the market should not be the centre of policy making. The decision to let 'market forces' control fees has not worked. The theory was that the market would force fees down, it has not; the market has failed. The creation of a 'tertiary education market' has resulted in students being 'consumers' and institutions 'providers'. There is no quality control, indeed it is the lowest price, and thus probably the worst, that wins out. As Garth Morgan points out (<http://nbr.infometrics.co.nz/column.php?id=214>), tertiary education in New Zealand has been 'dumbing down' since the market reforms of the 1990s. Anyone can get a 'degree' for a price, there is no attempt to ensure that there is quality within the market. There is no academic rigour within the 'market', tertiary institutions have become more focused on money instead of research and the quality of their degree. Only <https://assignbuster.com/tertiary-education-should-be-free-as-a-right/>

when the two overlap will they try to improve their quality, but often it does not.

Free tertiary education is affordable. The government could afford to fund it. While this may result in higher taxes, it is worth it. Those paying the highest taxes will be those with the highest education (usually). Thus we will return to paying for tertiary education throughout one's lifecycle rather than through the loan scheme. They will not be burdened with debt, but instead will pay for it through normal taxes.

The government already funds pre-school, primary and secondary education for free. There is no logical reason as to why it should stop there. All three provide for people to be educated and to be able to get a job. Tertiary education is no different. It provides an education, it provides for people to be able to get a job, it just does it at a higher level. If tertiary education, the highest level of education, charges fees then why not the others? Simply because you cannot deny children the right of education, and so to can you not deny it to adults.

If everyone has a tertiary education then as a whole we will move forward. The better trained our workforce is, the better output we have. The more educated we become, the more innovative we become. The more knowledgeable we are, the better we live, argue and communicate. New Zealand as a whole would be better off given a free tertiary education system. And Sweden does it, too!