



Media statement

Embargoed until 2:00 pm

Sunday 12 October 2008

UnitedFuture's bold policy to abolish tertiary fees

UnitedFuture leader Peter Dunne has proposed a bold new approach to tertiary education policy, which would see New Zealand as a nation that finally offers free education to its citizens from the age of 3 years old, right through to university and beyond.

Speaking at UnitedFuture's campaign launch in Auckland this afternoon, Mr Dunne said, "We want a zero-fees policy for tertiary education in New Zealand, accompanied by a push to increase the quality of tertiary education and protect the value of New Zealand degrees.

"Under UnitedFuture's policy, from January 2010, tertiary education fees will be free for New Zealanders whether they are learning part-time or fulltime at tertiary education institutions."

Mr Dunne said a zero-fees policy addresses the true cost of education to learners, rather than giving a grant or allowance to try and offset the ever changing cost of living.

"This will benefit all students, not just full-time students who are the only ones eligible for the grossly unfair student allowance system, and will mean those in the workforce can up-skill and study part-time for absolutely no cost.

"In that sense, it offers more than universal allowances, because they do not help part-time learners.

"We believe this approach is fairer, and will be welcomed by students and parents.

"Many parents already do their best to pay off the fees component of their children's student loans, and this policy will be a big benefit to them, as well as their children," Mr Dunne said.

Mr Dunne said that zero fees would be delivered together with a focus on keeping high achievement standards at universities.

“We want to see more New Zealand universities ranked in the top 100 universities in the world.

“Australia has 6 ranked in the top 50 – we only have one in the top 100 – and this needs to change,” he said.

Mr Dunne said United**Future’s** policy could be achieved by rebalancing current priorities.

“The revenue fees for domestic students amounted to \$576m in 2006, while expenditure on student allowances was \$373m.

“Based on these figures, if we transferred the money on allowances to tackle the fees issues, a zero fees policy would cost only \$203m.

“However, a move to universal allowances would cost \$597m per year, so we see it as a simple choice between \$597m per year for universal allowances, or \$576m for zero fees.

“We would still permit students to borrow up to \$150 a week for living costs, and we would retain interest free loan repayments.

"This would mean the maximum debt a current student would incur is only \$5,700 a year, which not only makes the cost of tertiary education far more manageable, but also has huge equity and access advantages," he said.

Mr Dunne said eligibility for United**Future’s** policy would be dependent on students achieving a set level of academic attainment each year.

Ends

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Examples:

At a maximum debt of \$5,700 a year it means:

BA/BSc	maximum debt \$17,100
BCom/LLB/BA (Hons)/BSc(Hons)	maximum debt \$22,800
Medicine	maximum debt \$34,200