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22 SEP 2003

18 September 2003

Douglas Webb
Telecommunications Commissioner
Commerce Commission
PO Box 2351
WELLINGTON

Dear Douglas

Removing a barrier to education – unbundling the local loop

The Tertiary Accord of New Zealand understand you will shortly release a draft recommendation on whether competing telecommunications providers will be able to buy access to Telecom's last mile of copper network.

As the organisation whose five learning institutions serve more than 100,000 tertiary students, TANZ strongly supports local loop unbundling as a means of ensuring open access to educational information.

Recent Government initiatives are aimed at building a greater level of e-learning capability within the Education environment and grants have been made available to facilitate the development of systems and capability within providers.

These initiatives have huge implications for the development of accessible education and for the developing of pathways from secondary to tertiary through curriculum alignment strategies.

Increasingly students are being required to take part of their course of study on line, and as the internet capabilities develop, more and more students will turn to the internet for access. The enormous growth in e-learning based technology courses such as Computing for Free is improving the New Zealand students' ability to pick up more and more learning on line.

New Zealand's education sector is growing in international regard. As can be seen from the increasing number of foreign students living and studying here, New Zealand represents a safe, quality destination for people to study. We are proud to be a growing export industry, producing knowledge workers.

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It is of concern, however, that students arriving in New Zealand find they do not have the same access to competitively priced broadband services they enjoy at home. This setback does nothing for our reputation as an internationally competitive education provider.

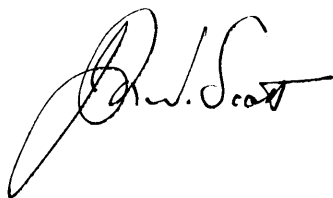
For students and staff the internet is a key education platform. Increasing volumes of course materials and subject matter are located on line. High-speed access to this is essential when it comes to course work and effective research, and while this is possible on campus it is not always the case from home.

The situation is especially unhelpful to remote students whose study is done totally on line and largely from home.

At present, there is inequity in broadband services, with students fortunate enough to live in parts of Christchurch or Wellington where there are competing networks receiving high speed internet services at a competitive rate.

TANZ supports unbundling of the local loop so there is equal opportunity for all New Zealand based students, regardless of where they work or live.

Yours sincerely



John W Scott
Convenor

cc Jack MacDonald, MIT
Paul McElroy, UCOL
Paul Grimwood, TOPNZ
Robin Day, Otago Polytechnic