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The Carrick Institute for Learning and
Teaching in Higher Education

Learning Outcomes and Curriculum
Development
Physiotherapy Project

Professor Mike Woods and Ms Helen Owens
Productivity Commission
Locked Bag 2, Collins St East
Melbourne VIC 8003

5 May 2005

Dear Professor Woods and Ms Owens

I am aware that the Productivity Commission is in the preliminary stages of a study that will examine issues impacting on the health workforce over the next ten years.

I, and a project team, have just completed some research into physiotherapy education, which includes material that is highly relevant to your study. I am therefore sending you a copy of the report of the project, 'Learning Outcomes and Curriculum Development in Australian Physiotherapy Education'. The research was funded by the Australian Universities Teaching Committee (AUTC) and the report was approved by the Minister for Education, Science and Training, Dr Brendan Nelson, on 19 April 2005. It is available on the website of the Carrick Institute of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education at: <http://www.carrickinstitute.edu.au/carrick/go/op/edit/pid/19>

Physiotherapists play a front-line role in keeping the workforce healthy and active, and in the provision of aged care. Not only are they practitioners of first contact in the community with significant responsibilities for decision making in health, but they also make an important contribution in multidisciplinary health care teams.

For many decades, there has been a recognised shortage of physiotherapists in Australia. This shortage is reflected in metropolitan areas and even more acutely in rural and remote locations. In the last decade the numbers of Schools of Physiotherapy and the number of physiotherapy students have increased but there is inadequate recognition of the costs of the biomedical sciences and clinical education components required to prepare these primary contact health practitioners. Experienced physiotherapists, who at present provide the clinical education component of physiotherapy courses in hospitals and other organisations, are finding that they simply can no longer perform this function on top of their normal patient services workload. Queensland Health physiotherapists withdrew their voluntary service in March/April 2005. This is illustrative of the inadequate funding nationally for this vital educational component in the preparation of beginning practitioners in physiotherapy, and is indicative of the growing tension around the issue.

Australian physiotherapists are recognised as world leaders in physiotherapy education and practice. This high reputation was hard won and needs to be safeguarded. As this report demonstrates, employers of recent physiotherapy graduates are currently well satisfied with the graduates' professionalism but they foresee difficulties ahead.

Key recommendations of this report have been endorsed by all the Australian Heads of Schools of Physiotherapy, by the Australian Council of Physiotherapy Regulating Authorities and by the Australian Physiotherapy Association. In particular they advocate increased funding for the education of physiotherapists. I would be pleased to discuss the report and other issues relating to the supply of, and demand for, physiotherapists in the context of your Australian Government study.

Yours sincerely

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