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Dear Mr Carter

**Higher Education Legislation Amendment
(Student Services and Amenities, and Other Measures) Bill 2009**

The University of Sydney is pleased to make a submission to the Committee's inquiry and to provide any further information that the Committee may require as it considers the legislation under a very tight timeframe.

The University regards its various student representative and sporting organisations as integral parts of the fabric of the University. These organisations add enormous value to campus life by representing the interests of students and by providing services and amenities that enhance the overall quality of the educational and social experiences available to all students. We have worked hard with our student organisations to ensure that they flourish at Sydney, notwithstanding the threats posed to their activities by the introduction of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU).

Since the introduction of VSU, the University has been forced to divert general university funds in order to support the representation and services aspects of the student experience. In 2007 and 2008, the University's support for services and amenities managed by its six student organisations amounted to \$19.37 million (\$8.2 million and \$11.17 million respectively). Its significant 'in kind' support has also been stepped up during this period.

The current arrangements are, however, not sustainable in the long term. Despite the University's belief in the importance of the services historically provided by student bodies, it cannot commit indefinitely to supporting them by diverting funds from competing teaching, research and other priorities. While the University would be dismayed to see the services provided by student organisations reduced even further or withdrawn, this is a very real possibility unless institutions have the capacity to raise funds from students specifically for these purposes. Many of the student services the University has supported for the last two years are unlikely ever to be financially self-sustaining, while funding demands of other activities and proposals will always be significant.

The \$250 fee is therefore a welcome, and arguably only minimally sufficient, contribution to future sustainability of quality services.

As presented, the legislation removes key issues of contention from the previous arrangements. If passed, students will face no up-front cost as the Bill allows for payment of the fee to be deferred through the proposed SA-HELP scheme. Arrangements will be put in place to ensure that funds collected may only be used to support student services, amenities and independent student representation. Support for *partisan* political purposes will be prohibited and there will be clear requirements about the precise types of activities that the funds can be used to support. The concerns expressed by some student organisations, that advocacy and representation may be jeopardised, appear to be unwarranted.

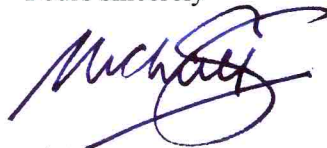
The University is therefore strongly of the view that the Senate should pass the legislation, reserving Senate's right to disallow the subordinate guidelines when they come before Parliament at some future date.

We expect to commence discussions with our student groups shortly about how best to manage arrangements if the legislation passes in its current form or with some modifications. In these discussions, as always, our focus will be on trying to find the most efficient and workable ways to provide our students with services, amenities and representation of the highest quality possible.

One issue of particular importance is the ability of individual universities to make arrangements with student groups about the provision of services. While some services, such as student clubs and representation, must clearly be student led, other services such as food and beverage provision are arguably best delivered either by the University or by the University and student groups jointly, perhaps in cooperation with commercial providers. We have been addressing these issues with our University of Sydney Union since the introduction of VSU and have been discussing with the Union the possibility of greater University involvement in the provision of catering and commercial services to ensure continuity of high quality provision. We would be reluctant to see any legislative guideline that could distort such negotiations.

If the Committee requires any further information from the University of Sydney about the legislation or our experience since the introduction of VSU in 2006, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Michael Spence', written in a cursive style.

Michael Spence

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