



SUBMISSION ON STUDENT AMENITIES GUIDELINES

Thursday 19th February, 2009

COMPILED BY:

Shane Cuow

President

0400 424 933

president@ecuguild.org.au

Supported by Edith Cowan University

Introduction

ECU has been the worst hit in WA by both rounds of VSU. The split campuses make engagement difficult and services hard to promote, and the Guild has at one time been liquidated and services taken on by the University.

The WA Guilds are a very effective case study on the effects and lessons of VSU, having experienced it before; and thus it is encouraged that the lessons we have learnt are considered in this debate.

Student Organisations are flexible and receptive to the needs of students, and have been proven across Universities to be the preferred providers of campus amenities and services. We at ECU strongly believe that well resourced student representation and advocacy is a vital part of campus service provision, and that all student organisations should play a strong role in the provision of campus amenities and services.

We wholeheartedly endorse the WA Model of Amenities & Services, and recommend either a full repeal of the Federal Legislation, allowing the WA Legislation to become effective again; or an adoption of a similar model in the Federal Guidelines for the Student Amenities Legislation.

The Impact of VSU at Edith Cowan University

When considering the impact of VSU in WA Universities, it must be understood that WA has undergone VSU previously as a state. Between 1994 – 2002 state based VSU saw drastic impacts on student support and student life at ECU and other WA Universities.

1992 – 2002

In this period of VSU, the ECU Student Guild suffered a complete bankruptcy. The University Administration took on guild services and support until the Guild was put back on its feet as an organization, albeit at much reduced operational capacity. Furthermore, poor management support from the University and poor administration meant that new avenues of funding other than Amenities and Services Fees were not explored or utilised to any great extent.

In this period, Guild Services lost included:

- Guild Tenancy & Advice Service
- Guild Tavern
- Equity Rooms (Safe Information & Support Centres for Women and Students of Diverse Sexuality and Gender)
- Guild Outlets
- Job Seeking Service
- Accommodation Support Services
- A reduction from 28 Staff Members to 8 Staff Members

- Sport and Recreation Facilities
- Funding for Post Graduates Association and International Students Association

2002 – 2005 (A&S FEE - \$50 per semester)

With the amendments to VSU by the Gallop Government in Western Australia, students support and student organisations were placed in a new system of funds, which was negotiated by Universities, Student Organisations and the Government. This model was designed to be politically inoffensive and was welcomed by the community and students, to great effect. In today's climate, it is still held by Universities, Student Organisations and the State Minister for Education to be the preferable model of VSU repeal.

In this time, the Guild regained:

- Guild Shop Services
- Guild Legal Service
- Guild Activities & Clubs Support
- Queer Department
- Bunbury Guild Services Building

2005 – Now (A&S FEE - \$25 per semester)

Since the Federal Introduction of Voluntary Student Unionism, the Guild has again seen a significant reduction in services. However, with the introduction of better management, reporting and administrative structures under the WA model (2002 – 2005), the Guild was better positioned to plan for sustained services at a reduced level.

Financial Impacts

Since the federal introduction of VSU, the ECU Student Guild has seen:

- A reduction in operating budget from 1.4 million to \$680,000
- A reduction in Amenities & Services Fees collected to 5% of students (\$98,000)
- Transitional Service Level Agreement funding from the University (Once off \$400,000 grant)
- Withdrawal of \$100,000 from invested surplus of budget prior to VSU

Attempts to gain commercial sponsorship, community or government grants has been unsuccessful in large. Students only paid for membership when they needed to access specific services, and most didn't know about the fee or what it entitled them to. The Guild will be proposing the increase of A&S Fees back to \$50 per semester for 2009 in order to sustain services.

With the end of the 2007 Service level agreement the ECU Student Guild faced possible closure having not secured enough independent funds to maintain staff and services. Due to the decision of the University Council to continue funding at a reduced level, the Guild has dropped a few services and been able to continue

on its path to hoped financial independence. However. Even if it met this goal it would see the commercialisation of most services, and very little provision for the return of vital welfare, health, tenancy, accommodation and food services.

Changes in Service Provision

Since the introduction of Federal VSU, the ECU Student Guild has had to give up:

- Guild Legal Service
- Guild Shop & Access Centres on all campuses
- Bunbury Guild Services Building
- 2 Staff Positions

Additionally, funding for the Post Graduates Associations and the International Students Council has been significantly reduced, and has resulted in the closure of the Post Graduates Association.

Despite service closure, 2008 has seen the re-introduction of the Equity & Diversity Student Board (voluntary positions), Guild diaries & publication, and the establishment of a user pays second hand computer program.

Without any change to VSU, services will continue at the current level or significantly decrease, dependent on the Guild's ability to sustain higher levels of financial membership or to secure community or government grants.

All current funding is prioritised in keeping the activities, finance, communications and education/welfare staff on board, making 70% of our budget; and on running essential advocacy, welfare and social support services.

Prior to VSU, Guild services were run entirely on sales (5%), investments (5%) and Amenities & Services Fees (90%). The University put no funding into Guild services, instead redirecting it to the Universities own high financial burdens. **By funding the Guild's essential student services, the University is less able to cater for its own significant financial needs.**

The biggest impact of VSU is seen in the student life and support on campus. Students have bigger financial burdens, and cannot access the cheap services and financial support they used to be able to access from the Guild. Vital services such as second hand books, clothes co-op, heavily discounted food, drink and amenities, and book subsidies / emergency loans made education accessible for independent students.

Students now have to work full time jobs in addition to study, and as a result student numbers and performance rates have dropped at ECU. There is a very significantly high rate of students who drop out in their first year because they

cannot sustain life at University. Low engagement and no ability to access community engagement, prac opportunities, skills training and welfare support of the Guild have made University a burden and a trial instead of an experience.

Student Representation & Advocacy

Since VSU, welfare and representation services have been reduced; Student Guild representatives on University Committees reduced, and legal and tenancy advice/representation services lost.

Loss of student guild dedicated positions on University committees is of great concern to us, as supported guild senators have a broader range of student experience and contractual obligations to engage with and consult students; ensuring fairer, less biased and broader student opinions and contributions to University policy.

Model for Sustainable Student Services

The ECU Student Guild, with the support and recommendation of Edith Cowan University, wholeheartedly endorse the WA Amenities & Services Fee Model. This position is supported by the other Universities and Guilds of Western Australia and endorsed by the State Education Minister Mark McGowan.

Essential Services

We believe students support and engagement should be managed by a student run engagement organization, and we define essential student services as follows:

- Advocacy & Representation Services
 - Ed Welfare Officers
 - Legal/Tenancy Advice & Support
 - **Independent, Well Resourced Student Representation**
 - Student Guild Advocates
- Health & Welfare Services
 - Equity & Diversity Department
 - Sexual Health Support & Referral
 - Health Referral, Engagement & Advice
 - Centrelink & Welfare Assistance
 - Emergency Loans
 - Book Subsidies
 - Student Accommodation & Support
 - Childcare services
- Social & Cultural Activities
 - Skills Training
 - Community Programs & Engagement

- Social Engagement Programs
- Campus Events & Activities
- Clubs, Societies & Associations Support
- Sport & Recreational Activities
 - Sport facilities
 - Drama & events facilities
 - Equipment Hire
 - Activities Officer
 - Competitions & Sport Programs

Since VSU, new services we didn't have previously but desperately need are childcare and student accommodation.

The Preferred WA Model – Provisions Endorsed for Legislative Guidelines

The model of student services support developed by the Guilds, Universities & Government of Western Australia is wholeheartedly endorsed by the Guild and our Affiliates. It is defined as follows:

- Guild Membership is optional, and separate from the fee
- The fee (No more than \$120 at any WA University) does not overly burden students, is recommended by the student association and subject to the University Council's approval
- Fees allocated to the Guild must be more than the percentage of students that are Guild members and at minimum more than 50% of fees collected, ensuring constant presence and administration.
- The circumstances of individual universities and Guilds can be taken into account. For example, ECU's Guild has a relatively limited history and has experienced liquidation, a period under administration and several changes in relevant legislation;
- Services provided by student associations are funded by students – this requires no diversion of University or government funds to support student activities;
- The cost of services is shared by all students, consistent with a community approach to service provision.

As a model developed to remove political issues and to ensure adequate services, we agree it is the best model for progress; it has proven itself in WA, and because of it and the management and reporting structures introduced we

now have **the most sustainable and financially independent student associations in the country.**

Conclusion

The ECU Student Guild and the students of Edith Cowan University have suffered greatly because of VSU, and this affects the students AND the University. Student loads are dropping, quality of education is reduced by burdens and financial strain, and student support is massively reduced.

The WA Model has proven itself as the best model for us, costs the taxpayers nothing, and endorses a community approach to service provision. We endorse and recommend it for a Federal Model, that the membership percentage provision be included in the guidelines for the proposed legislation.