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Senate

Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

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

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Executive Summary

This submission argues:

1. That Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) has led to a significant, if not catastrophic, decline in student services whether those services related to political activities or not and that the loss of funding has placed additional financial burdens on already strained university budgets;
2. That while the introduction of VSU may have had the legitimate goals of lessening the financial burdens upon *some* students and preventing mandatory union membership, it has increased overall costs for most, if not all, university students who make use of non-academic services at university;
3. That the impact of VSU has been felt most keenly by regional and rural universities where students have less access to, *inter alia*, medical, childcare and mental health facilities outside of the university;
4. That Australia remains exceptional in having a federally imposed prohibition on universities' collecting fees for 'non-academic student services'.¹
5. That it is in the interests of Australia to have a dynamic and vibrant higher education system and that this can only be accomplished if students are supported alongside their studies and encouraged to participate in non-academic activities;
6. That while it is reasonable to expect student representative bodies (whether unionised or otherwise) to source some funds from sources other than compulsory student fees – such as sponsorship and voluntary subscription fees – the most common source of large scale sponsorship is from the hospitality industry. Such sponsorship encourages, through event hosting and discounts, drinking behaviour which undermines the Government's endeavour

¹ *Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-Front Student Union Fees) Bill 2005*, Explanatory Memorandum, 2.

to tackle alcohol abuse amongst teens and young adults and the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) *Australian Alcohol Guidelines*.²

7. That the *Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities, and Other Measures) Bill 2009* addresses the ideological opposition to Universal Student Unionism (USU) by maintaining the prohibition on mandatory membership of a student union while also providing for a system whereby the up-front cost of the proposed amenity fees can be deferred under a 'HECS-style' loan scheme: SA-HELP.³ The proposed maximum 'student services and amenities fee' (SSAF) of \$250 per annum appears to be a reasonable cost bearing in mind the general income level of students.
8. That the Government should, however, have provided draft copies of the proposed *Student Services and Amenities Fee Guidelines* and *Student Services, Amenities, Representation and Advocacy Guidelines* (the 'guidelines') earlier than one day before the close of submissions for the Committee inquiry.⁴ These guidelines form part of the contextual framework for the amending legislation and may limit which services can be funded in the future through a SSAF and this submission only briefly considers these documents.

² NHMCR (2001) *Australian Alcohol Guidelines*, http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/_files/ds9.pdf accessed 19 February 2009.

³ Although the Higher Education Contributions Scheme (HECS) was renamed as the Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) the phrase 'HECS-style loan' has become a, common phrase now applied to suggest schemes for disaster relief loans through to 'exceptional circumstances' farmer assistance. In this submission the term HELP is used where reference is made to the legislation while HECS may also appear in cited materials. The terms should otherwise be considered interchangeable.

⁴ The Hon. Kate Ellis, *Securing the future of university support services* (Media Release), http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Ellis/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_090219_165421.aspx accessed 20 February 2009.

Introduction and Background to the Author

The author welcomes the opportunity to comment upon the proposed *Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities, and Other Measures) Bill 2009* (the proposed bill) and to support moves by the Australian Parliament to ameliorate the impact of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU). This submission focuses primarily upon the bill as proposed and does not seek to cover, in-depth, matters already dealt with (more expertly) in comments to the discussion paper into the *Impact of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) on Services, Amenities and Representation for Australian University Students* and, more recently, the findings of the *Review of Australian Higher Education* ('Bradley Review').⁵ This submission is informed by the author's experiences during six years of tertiary education at the University of Sydney (2003) and the Australian National University (ANU) (2004-08). During those periods the author held various elected and appointed roles including President of a Residential Hall (2006), appointed delegate to the National Association of Australian University Colleges (NAAUC) (2006), elected delegate to the National Union of Students (NUS) (2006-07) and as a non-politically affiliated office holder within ANU's Students' Association (ANUSA).⁶ These years saw the introduction of VSU and the immediate impacts of those reforms. NAAUC, particularly, provided a forum for regional and rural university students to comment upon the early and anticipated impacts of VSU.

VSU was introduced by the former Howard Government in 2005 through the *Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-Front Student Union Fees) Act 2005*. In the House and Senate second reading speeches four principal themes emerged to justify the proposed legislation:

First, that 'Freedom of association is a basic right that should be available to each and every

⁵ Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education* (Final Report, 2008).

⁶ NAAUC is the peak Australian body for university students living on campus, ANUSA is the representative body for ANU's undergraduate students while NUS is Australia's peak student representative body.

Australian’;⁷ second, that students, particularly mature aged and external students, should not be compelled to pay for non-academic services and amenities which they may not use;⁸ third, that students should not be compelled to financially support causes (political or otherwise) to which they do not subscribe;⁹ and, lastly, that the former USU fees were ‘a significant sum’.¹⁰ This submission is structured to address these four main concerns in light of the proposed bill.

While it is not the intention of this submission to reopen the ideological issues which underpin VSU and USU the first part of this submission includes a brief review of the impacts of VSU as witnessed by the author.

Part 1 – The Effects of VSU on Student Life

After a year of anxious waiting and contingency planning by university clubs and student organisations, the *Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-Front Student Union Fees) Act 2005* passed the Senate. Despite a National Party Senator crossing the floor, the Government, with the support of Family First Senator Fielding, passed the legislation over the objections of the opposition and minor parties. In 2006, during the author’s term as President of a residential hall, many clubs and student amenities raised fees significantly in order to adjust their budgets for VSU. Notable examples were the reduction (by 60%) of the funding available to student clubs and for supporting creative ventures, the near trebling of fees for the use of ANU owned sports grounds – even where the hirer was an ANU owned hall of residence, and the catastrophic reduction in funds to the National Union of Students budget. Fortunately, the Australian National University had, previous to the introduction of the VSU legislation, taken over the management of

⁷ Senator Patterson, Senate Debates, 7 December 2005, 124; Dr Nelson, House of Representatives Debates, 16 March 2005, 3.

⁸ Senator Patterson, Senate Debates, 7 December 2005, 125; Dr Nelson, House of Representatives Debates, 16 March 2005, 3.

⁹ Dr Nelson, House of Representatives Debates, 16 March 2005, 4-5.

¹⁰ Dr Nelson, House of Representatives Debates, 16 March 2005, 4.

the campus childcare, medical centre (which bulk-billed for students) and mental health and counselling services. As such, these services were not significantly impacted by VSU. Nonetheless, the cost borne by the University in providing these services is considerable. Universities Australia commented that the cost of providing these student services and amenities totalled \$173 million in 2004.¹¹

Since VSU has come into effect the ANU has provided several hundred thousand dollars per year to fund student services and amenities, as well as the student representative bodies – ANUSA and PARSA for undergraduates and postgraduates respectively. While this arrangement has worked well thus far, it results in an uncertain financial existence for student clubs and societies as well as compromising their independence, undermining their roles as student advocacy bodies. It is worthwhile noting that ANU’s experience under VSU is as exceptional as it is positive. Many campuses have seen their student associations and guilds fold, or be subsumed into pre-existing University dominated committees. Of particular concern is the disproportionate effect upon regional and rural campuses. For example, the University of New England’s (UNE) independent student representative body folded in 2005 in order to form a more financially viable single entity controlled by the University.¹² One of the central rationales for the introduction of VSU was to enable students to purchase goods and services and access facilities off-campus without still having to pay for like services provided on campus. This may work in Australia’s capital cities but, as UNE’s submission outlines, in the country services are limited and competition, if it exists at all, is often located far from campus. Even in the cities, bulk-billing medical practices, free mental-health clinics and inexpensive childcare are extremely rare.

¹¹ Universities Australia, Comments upon *The Impact of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) on Services, Amenities and Representation for Australian University Students – Discussion Paper* (2008), 1.

¹² The University of New England, Comments upon *The Impact of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) on Services, Amenities and Representation for Australian University Students – Discussion Paper* (2008), 4.

Recommendation: Notwithstanding the result of the present committee inquiry, VSU should be moderated to allow for a compulsory services and amenities fee, noting the disproportionate effects of VSU upon regional universities.

Part 2 – Freedom of Association:

This section deals with the ideological foundation for VSU, cost factors are dealt with in subsequent parts.

From the House and Senate debates the primary justification put forward in support of the VSU legislation was to allow people to refuse to join a student union or, more arguably, to prevent universities mandating paid membership of a student guild or association as a requirement of enrolment.¹³ That the payment of a General Services Fee (GSF) pre-VSU equated to paid membership of a student union is debatable. In the case of ANU the GSF was allocated by the University to ANUSA, PARSA and the Sport and Recreation Association. ANU's 'Union' (which, contrary to its name, is a business organisation partially run by students, which oversees the provision of food and other retail outlets on campus) also received some funding from this general pool of money. Membership of a students' union flowed from the GSF paid, but the University administration acted as an intermediary. Moreover, even after the introduction of VSU all undergraduate students of ANU were members of the Student's Association unless they elect to withdraw. This membership comes at no financial cost and was to avoid dividing students into haves and have-nots, where if you could not afford membership you were excluded.

Nevertheless the right for an individual to join a union, or not, is one enshrined, not only in

¹³ Senator Patterson, Senate Debates, 7 December 2005, 124; Dr Nelson, House of Representatives Debates, 16 March 2005, 3; *Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-Front Student Union Fees) Bill 2005*, Explanatory memorandum.

Australian Law,¹⁴ but also under international human rights conventions.¹⁵ Students should have a right to refuse to be part of their student association but it does not follow that *any* fee which flows to a student run agency is political or imposes a set ideology on the payee. Some fees simple provide student services.

The difficulty has always been in the distinction between a valid student *service* such as a university newspaper, free legal and welfare advice, emergency loans and, to some extent, advocacy in academic matters, as opposed to *political* activities such as rallies, membership of the National Union of Students and the funding of political parties and groups on campus. VSU, in its present form, makes no distinction and so prohibits the collection of a general fee for many services which are non-political and which should rightly be seen as facilities and amenities offered to students as part of the university. That they are ‘non-academic’ does not automatically mean that charging a general fee breaches a right to free association.

Proposed section 19-37 (4) attempts to draw such a distinction, allowing for the collection of a services and amenities fee where such a fee is defined as:

student services and amenities fee is an amount:

- (a) that a higher education provider **requires a person enrolled**, or seeking to enrol, with the provider to pay for a period starting on or after 1 July 2009 **to support the provision to students of amenities and services not of an academic nature**,¹⁶ regardless of whether the person chooses to use any of those amenities and services; and
- (b) that is determined by the provider in accordance with the Student Services and Amenities Fee Guidelines; and
- (c) that is not more than the amount worked out for that period for the person in accordance with those guidelines;
- (d) and

The phrase ‘amenities and services not of an academic nature’ while very general is later confined to exclude certain types of activities, those including:

19-38 Higher education providers’ expenditure of student services and amenities fees

(1) A higher education provider must not spend an amount paid to the provider as a *student services and amenities fee to support:

¹⁴ See, for example, Part 16 *Workplace Relations Act 1996* (Cth).

¹⁵ For example, Art. 8, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* [1976] ATS 5 (opened for signature 16 December 1966) (entered into force in Australia 10 March 1976); Art. 22, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* [1980] ATS 23 (opened for signature 16 December 1966) (entered into force in Australia 13 November 1980); *International Labour Organisation Convention (No. 87) concerning Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise* [1974] ATS 3 (opened for signature 9 July 1948) (entered into force in Australia 28 February 1974).

¹⁶ Emphasis added.

- (a) a political party; or
- (b) the election of a person as a member of:
 - (i) the legislature of the Commonwealth, a State or a Territory; or
 - ii) a local government body.

This matter is explored further below as it relates to a compulsion to support causes which a student may not believe in or wish to support. Nonetheless, by prohibiting any funds raised from the SSAF to be directed towards political-activities, rather than campus services and amenities, the legislation displays an intention to respect the rights of individual students to free association. Moreover, and perhaps more fundamentally, the current section 19-37 in the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (the ‘Act’) is maintained. That section reads:

- (1) A higher education provider must not:
 - (a) require a person to be or to become a member of an organisation of students, or of students and other persons; or
 - (b)

The proposed bill does not seek to alter this fundamental guarantee of the rights of students to withdraw from, or refuse to join, a student organisation. It seeks to draw a distinction between non-academic services and amenities which are non-political and those which are better off being funded by students who are committed and dedicated to the material cause.

Conclusion: That proposed section 19-38 represents an appropriate balance between an individual’s right to freedom of association and the ability of a university to levy a fee which can be directed towards funding of services and amenities. However, this may change when the *Services and Amenities Fee Guidelines* and *Student Services, Amenities, Representation and Advocacy Guidelines* are tabled.

Part 3 – Services Provided but not Wanted

It is all very well for student organisations to provide services such as childcare, legal and welfare advice and a student newspaper; or for universities to maintain lush sports ovals and well furnished study spaces on campus but what of the students who do not want to access these services and amenities. Mature age students, or those studying externally to the main campus, will often not spend significant periods of time on university grounds and, consequently, will be unable (or less able) to access those services and amenities which they may still have to pay for.

In his second reading speech to the House then Minister for Education, Science and Training the Hon. Brendan Nelson quoted:¹⁷

I will read into *Hansard* an excerpt from a letter sent to the member for Cook by a constituent.

...

I also write as a concerned parent of a daughter who is doing her nursing degree at Uni of Western Sydney. As a single parent pensioner with 2 children and a mortgage left to her by an adulterous husband she is finding the going very tough. However, always wanting to be a nurse from way back she took the opportunity. When enrolling this year she was asked for \$300 Student Union fees. When she objected due to lack of money she was told she wouldn't get her exam results or be able to do her clinical training. Reluctantly she paid although the benefits seemed very minimal ...

The Minister asked the house ‘why is a single mother who is training to be a nurse paying for the canoeing club or the mountaineers?’¹⁸ This example subsequently became a preferred rationale for the proposed legislation.

This submission does not intend to, nor would it succeed in, reconciling the differences between liberal-democrats and social-democrats. Suffice to say that the counter arguments to this example: that all Australian’s pay tax without expecting to see the whole benefits from their money; or that landlords may pay rates in two jurisdictions but only live in one; or that governments collect fees from driver’s licences which fund roads across the State, not only where the driver lives, are well worn and disputed.

¹⁷ Dr Brendan Nelson, House of Representatives Debates, 16 March 2005, 4.

¹⁸ Dr Brendan Nelson, House of Representatives Debates, 16 March 2005, 4.

If an example was needed of the ideological differences behind USU and VSU one need only turn to the current provision in the Act which reads:

19-37

....

(2) A higher education provider must not require a person enrolled with, or seeking to enrol with, the provider to pay to the provider or any other entity an amount for the provision to students of an amenity, facility or service that is not of an academic nature, **unless the person has chosen to use the amenity, facility or service.** [my emphasis].

and then compare with the proposed amendments:

19-38

...

(5) A *student services and amenities fee* is an amount:

(a) that a higher education provider requires a person enrolled, or seeking to enrol, with the provider to pay for a period starting on or after 1 July 2009 to support the provision to students of amenities and services not of an academic nature, **regardless of whether the person chooses to use any of those amenities and services**... [my emphasis].

It is hoped, however, that the proposed legislation has achieved a tolerable compromise by:

- a) restricting the maximum amount that a HEP can levy as a SSAF to \$250 per year;¹⁹ and
- b) providing that the levying of a SSAF is optional.²⁰

Moreover, from a plain reading of the bill – and in the absence of the proposed *Guidelines* – it may be possible for HEPs to levy two levels of SSAF, one for external students and one for campus based students. Prior to VSU the University of New England had such an arrangement and as universities diversify in the coming years, it may be a strategy worth pursuing.²¹

One justification for forcing university clubs and societies onto a user-pays system was that, if the club provided a desired service, students would pay for it and there would be no problem. However, this belief rests upon the assumption that a student's discretionary income could afford the increase

¹⁹ Proposed subsection 19-37 (5)(e)(ii). If the bill is passed before 1 July 2009 the maximum which can be charged for the remainder of the 2009 calendar year is \$125: 19-37 (5)(e)(i).

²⁰ Proposed subsection 19-37 (6) reads in part: '*If* a higher education provider determines...' It would be naïve to imagine, however, that any university would not impose a fee.

²¹ The University of New England, Comments upon *The Impact of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) on Services, Amenities and Representation for Australian University Students – Discussion Paper* (2008), 3.

cost. Rather than becoming less expensive under VSU, it has been the author's experience that these facilities have been priced out of the range of many students, a consequent of the low income of most students. As the Bradley Review explored and as the NUS has argued for several years, the present level of Youth Allowance is less than sufficient for many students to live off. While this may be used as a reason to do away with SSAFs altogether, the proposed legislation provides that students (and prospective students) must be made aware of any SSAF – which allows sufficient time to save and plan expenditure – and the new SA-HELP scheme protects those who may otherwise be financially barred from attending university. Ultimately, university is expensive: textbooks, lab supplies, food and drink and yes, social activities. Many of these costs can not be deferred, unlike the proposed SSAF.

One foreseeable problem with the proposed legislation is that it does not seek to replace the present sub-section 19-37(2) but only change the application of subsection (2) so that it no longer applies to a SSAF. The effect of these conflicting provisions is unknown but, at best, it will lead to confusion and ambiguity and at worse it may stifle the funding of valid services and amenities as universities adopt a risk-minimization approach. As discussed above USU and VSU represent two conflicting theories of government and the bill as present seems as keen as the author is to stay above the fray.

Recommendation: That consideration be given to repealing the present subsection 19-37(2) or clarifying its application if the bill is passed.

Part 4 – Money Spent on Causes Supported by the Few

It is unlikely that a Higher Education Provider (HEP) will fund all services and amenities directly and they may transfer funds to student run organisations. Those third parties are subsequently enjoined from directing money into any of the activities listed in proposed section 19-38 (1)(a)-(b) which reads:

19-38 Higher education providers' expenditure of student services and amenities fees

(1) A higher education provider must not spend an amount paid to the provider as a *student services and amenities fee to support:

- (a) a political party; or
- (b) the election of a person as a member of:
 - (i) the legislature of the Commonwealth, a State or a Territory; or
 - ii) a local government body.

The prohibition extending to third parties is contained in proposed 19 – 38 (2):

...

(2) If a higher education provider **pays a person or organisation** an amount paid to the provider as a *student services and amenities fee, the provider must make the payment on the condition that none of the payment is to be spent by the person or organisation to support:

- (a) a political party; or
- (b) the election of a person as a member of:
 - (i) the legislature of the Commonwealth, a State or a Territory; or
 - ii) a local government body. [my emphasis]

It would appear that membership of NUS would not constitute prohibited expenditure under the proposed section. However, the ways an HEP can spend direct funds collected as part of a services and amenities fee could be limited by Legislative Instrument with proposed 19 – 38(3) requiring that:

(3) A higher education provider must not spend, for purposes other than those specified by the Student Services and Amenities Fee Guidelines, an amount paid to the provider as a *student services and amenities fee.

The requirement to conform to subsection 19-38(3) does not, on the face of the legislation, appear to apply to bodies to which an HEP directs its funds.

It is difficult to provide a conclusive opinion as to whether the legislation offers adequate protection to those who do not wish to see their money diverted into political or otherwise inappropriate matters without first seeing the *Student Services and Amenities Fee Guidelines*. Moreover, the author expresses some concern as to the general power to amend these guidelines (section 238-10 of the Act). While Legislative Instruments can be disallowed by either chamber of Parliament pursuant to the *Legislative Instruments Act 2003* there is the potential for abuse if matters such as women's health and family planning clinics, sexual disease clinics, the provision of condoms, student newspapers or other controversial issues cause a future Minister to amend the Guidelines. Nonetheless, legislative instruments are both useful and necessary to the operation of government and provide for flexibility and the existing Act contains a range of matters dealt with via such guidelines. Yet it would be a poor result if the passage of this bill allowed future Ministers to ban the funding of non-political but politically charged services.

Recommendation: That the Senate ensure that future guidelines made under proposed section 238-10(10A), (10B) are scrutinised to ensure that they do not infringe any freedoms of communication or stifle legitimate debate and dissent.

Part 5 – Service at what Price?

The high cost of some university's GSFs made arguing against VSU a difficult matter for some groups. When introducing the legislation into the House the Minister was quick to point out:

Ironically, it is those that regularly and vigorously oppose changes to the Higher Education Contribution Scheme who argue so passionately for the right to compulsorily require up-front fees from their fellow students for services they may not need nor want.²²

In part this is fair criticism. At Sydney University the GSF was over \$500 for the year, a significant

²² Dr Brendan Nelson, House of Representatives Debates, 16 March 2005, 4.

sum of money. ANU's fee annual fee was \$240, which was considered by many to be a reasonable amount.²³ As discussed above, UNE operated a two-tier system with internal students paying \$185 per annum and external students \$80.²⁴ Pricing of a SSAF should be at the discretion of each institution after it examines its needs and considers the services which it *must* provide, rather than those that it could provide. It is suggested that the proposed *maximum* of \$250 is an appropriate cap which may address the issue raised by the Coalition that students are being slugged with excessive fees. While it may not restore funding to all clubs, societies and amenities to their pre-VSU level it will significantly lessen the burden upon universities to fund these operations out of already stretched budgets. Nonetheless, as discussed above, student income levels (for those fortunate enough to qualify for Youth Allowance) are generally very low and any additional financial burdens should be minimised or managed. More critically, any barriers (perceived or actual) to students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds must be avoided.

While the author confesses to being one of those who as the Minister put it 'regularly and vigorously oppose changes to the Higher Education Contribution Scheme' the scheme has merit in that the cost of a degree is deferred until the student's income exceeds a certain threshold. Further, while opinions are divided on the matter, literature reviews suggest that HECS is not as great a barrier to tertiary education as overall family income and employment levels.²⁵

Considering the above, the proposed SA-HELP scheme appears to alleviate the initial concern that reintroduced GSFs will present a barrier to students from lower socio-economic groups. If a student's learning entitlement remains at seven years fulltime then the maximum SA-HELP debt they will accumulate will be a little over \$1750, adjusted in line with the SSAF indexation. Universities would have discretion over whether part-time students pay a pro-rata rate, although this is a matter which could also be addressed through the guidelines.

²³ ANUSA, *Submission to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee inquiry into Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005* (2008) 9.

²⁴ The University of New England, *Comments upon The Impact of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) on Services, Amenities and Representation for Australian University Students – Discussion Paper* (2008), 3.

²⁵ See for example: Bruce, Chapman, Mark Rodrigues and Chris Ryan, *HECS for TAFE: The case for extending income contingent loans to the vocational education and training sector* (Treasury Working Paper 2007-2) http://www.treasury.gov.au/documents/1252/HTML/docshell.asp?URL=TWP_02_2007.asp#P282_65684 accessed 20 February 2009; but cf: Amy Lawson, 'HECS a barrier for poor students' (*The Age*) <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/07/17/1089694609749.html> accessed 20 February 2009.

Part 6 - Final Remarks

Additional matters which are also worth considering but for which there was insufficient time to examine in detail include:

- a) The extent to which student clubs and organisations have substituted sponsorship from the hospitality industry since the introduction of VSU (and the extent to which the two are related). Increased reliance of bars and night clubs for sponsorship may lead to an increase in the instance of alcohol abuse and, nevertheless, appear to be in conflict with the government's aim to reduce binge drinking; and
- b) The use of SSAFs at overseas universities. This matter would have been addressed indirectly during discussions on the introduction and review of VSU; and
- c) Whether the introduction of a SSAF will see independent student advocacy bodies re-established at those universities where they have folded.

Student life is more than academic study. A dynamic and vibrant university community is at the heart of the tertiary education environment. Although new and more convenient ways of delivering educational content are being developed and rolled out; even though more content is being placed online; and with students working outside of university more than ever, there will still be demand for the bricks(or sandstone)-and-mortar campus experience. This experience can only be provided if the services and amenities which are required by students – not all of them, not all of the time – are in place and well funded. A student services and amenities fee is an appropriate way to raise such funds. The SA-HELP scheme should ensure that the equity, diversity and the rewarding of merit, upon which Australia's universities pride themselves, continues into the future.

The author once again thanks the Chair and other Committee members for devoting their time to this important bill and commends the proposed bill to the Committee.

Sincere Regards,
Timothy Vines