

November 2010

University of Tasmania submission to the Senate Select Committee on Scrutiny of New Taxes' Inquiry into Compulsory Student Fees

University of Tasmania – pre-VSU

Prior to the introduction of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU), the University of Tasmania (UTAS) collected a "services and amenities fee" (S&A fee) from most enrolled students (some exemptions applied for off-shore, distance, rural, remote, isolated and other campus specific student groupings). This revenue was distributed to two student organisations according to region of enrolment. In 2005, the final year in which S&A fees were collected and disbursed in this manner, the gross S&A fees billed was approximately \$2.4m (of which approximately \$400,000 remained outstanding) and these funds flowed through to the student organisations.

In the pre-VSU environment UTAS operated its own Student Services without retaining S&A fee revenue for that purpose. UTAS retained 2.25% of the S&A fee revenue for administrative costs associated with billing and collection. Table 1 provides an outline of the type of services delivered by UTAS and the student organisations in the pre and post-VSU environment.

University of Tasmania – response to VSU

UTAS has remained committed to the provision of accessible affordable student focussed services on campus. In response to the passing of voluntary student unionism legislation, the UTAS Council established a Student Services Fund with enough capital (\$3.5m commitment from UTAS and \$1m from the student organisations) to generate income to purchase some student services into the future within a purchaser/provider framework utilising a service level agreement. Diagram 1 illustrates the detail and complexity of the Student Services Fund model.

The establishment of the fund by University legislation in 2007 was contingent upon the amalgamation of the two student organisations into a single state-wide student organisation with a single student representative council. While considerable effort and progress was made toward amalgamation in 2007, it was not achieved and UTAS committed approximately \$1m to support an interim service level agreement and various in-kind support including rent holidays.

Within the 2007-2010 service level agreement (SLA) framework, UTAS has provided over \$700,000 pa to the two student organisations to deliver specific services. These services were intended to be different from (but to complement) those delivered by UTAS, and in areas that it would be most appropriate for student organisations to be responsible. The services purchased from the student organisations are under four broad areas and include:

Representation - funding to support effective student representation including a democratically elected Student Representative Council (SRC); ensuring a peak voice for students; the participation of student representatives on University committees, establishment of a Student Representative Network and major student consultation activities.

Student Advocacy and Referral - funding to support a professional advocacy service to assist students with formal action taken under student complaints and discipline legislation as well as broader student issues, resourcing for three student contact centres (at Hobart, Launceston and Cradle Coast), information and publications such as student magazine, diary, survival guide and web based information.

Orientation - funding for delivery of activities and events in 'O' Week, support and events for Uni Info Days, and for enrolment and re-enrolment days.

Student Experience (Retention) - funding to assist in developing a unique student experience on campus that extends beyond classroom learning, through: coordination of a program of cultural events on campus; supporting the establishment, development and on-going effectiveness of clubs and societies; coordinating the University Games, health and well-being programs including safety-net grants, health forums; and targeted activities for Graduate Research Candidates such as the annual postgraduate research conference, generic skills workshops and on-line resources.

In addition the first year of the SLA provided funding to facilitate the organisations to integrate into a single state-wide organisation; establish a single state-wide student representative council; and to develop a financially sustainable membership model for clubs and societies.

Costs and sustainability of the UTAS Model

Diagram 1 outlines the model and funding streams into the Student Services Fund. As effective as the model is in generating an income stream for the purchase of student services, the income generated in the four years of operation suffered due to the global financial crisis and was effectively underwritten by UTAS in 2008. The model also relied on subsidisation of \$400,000 per year for three years (2007 – 09) from UTAS' operating budget and in-kind support including rent holidays for the student organisations. This funding would otherwise be invested in UTAS teaching and learning.

As can be seen from table 1, the UTAS model is one aspect of a service network that utilises a range of delivery models for student services. These can be broadly categorised as follows:

- UTAS delivered services include essential student support involving legislative requirement or compliance (Counselling and Disability Services);
- Services purchased from the student organisations under a service level agreement (complementary services best delivered by a student organisation for students);
- Services delivered through a University Business Enterprise on a user pays basis (child care, Sport and Recreation and Student Accommodation);
- Food and commercial services delivered by the student organisations;

- Professional services delivered on campus by commercial or community operators (medical service, hairdressers, bookshop and more recently child care).

The UTAS model has met with some success which is in part due to this broader service network which involves a range of different provider models. The involvement of different providers has to some extent insulated students from the type of impact that has been felt at other institutions where the entire continuum of services was provided by the student organisations and funded from student services and amenities fees.

Where are the gaps?

The UTAS model provides funding under an SLA for a specific and limited range of student services. As a relatively small institution, UTAS is not able to fully fund the gap resulting from the abolition of S&A Fees and therefore is unable to adequately fund a full range of student cultural activities.

The key area of service provision affected by VSU is limiting support for UTAS Clubs and Societies. While under the current arrangements UTAS provides a subsidy for UTAS based sporting and non-sporting venue hire, public liability insurance and asset insurance it has not been able to provide funding at pre-VSU levels. For example, prior to VSU clubs and societies received operating grants in addition to having ground and venue hire paid on their behalf; students received 50% funding to attend the University Games; and various members of societies received funding to travel to national conferences. UTAS has a significant presence in the community and the impact of the reduction in funding to clubs and societies has been felt in the broader community.

The costs of VSU have also been borne by the now single student organisation, predominantly by its commercial activities. Since the introduction of VSU, seven full-time positions have been absorbed through natural attrition and consolidation of the duties of vacant positions, and a further 10 full time casual positions were abolished following amalgamation of the two organisations on 31 March 2008.

Funding into the future

Despite UTAS' considerable efforts and funding commitment, there remains a shortfall of around \$1.5m to effectively support student culture.

It should also be noted that, for the last three years, the Vice-Chancellor, seeing the impact that the post-VSU environment was having on the student organisation, decided to provide an annual untied grant (currently \$150,000) to assist student clubs and societies to become more self-sufficient (the 'VC's Grant'). This is in addition to the monies paid under the SLA.

UTAS supports the Bill to impose a new fee.

Diagram 1

University

Student Body

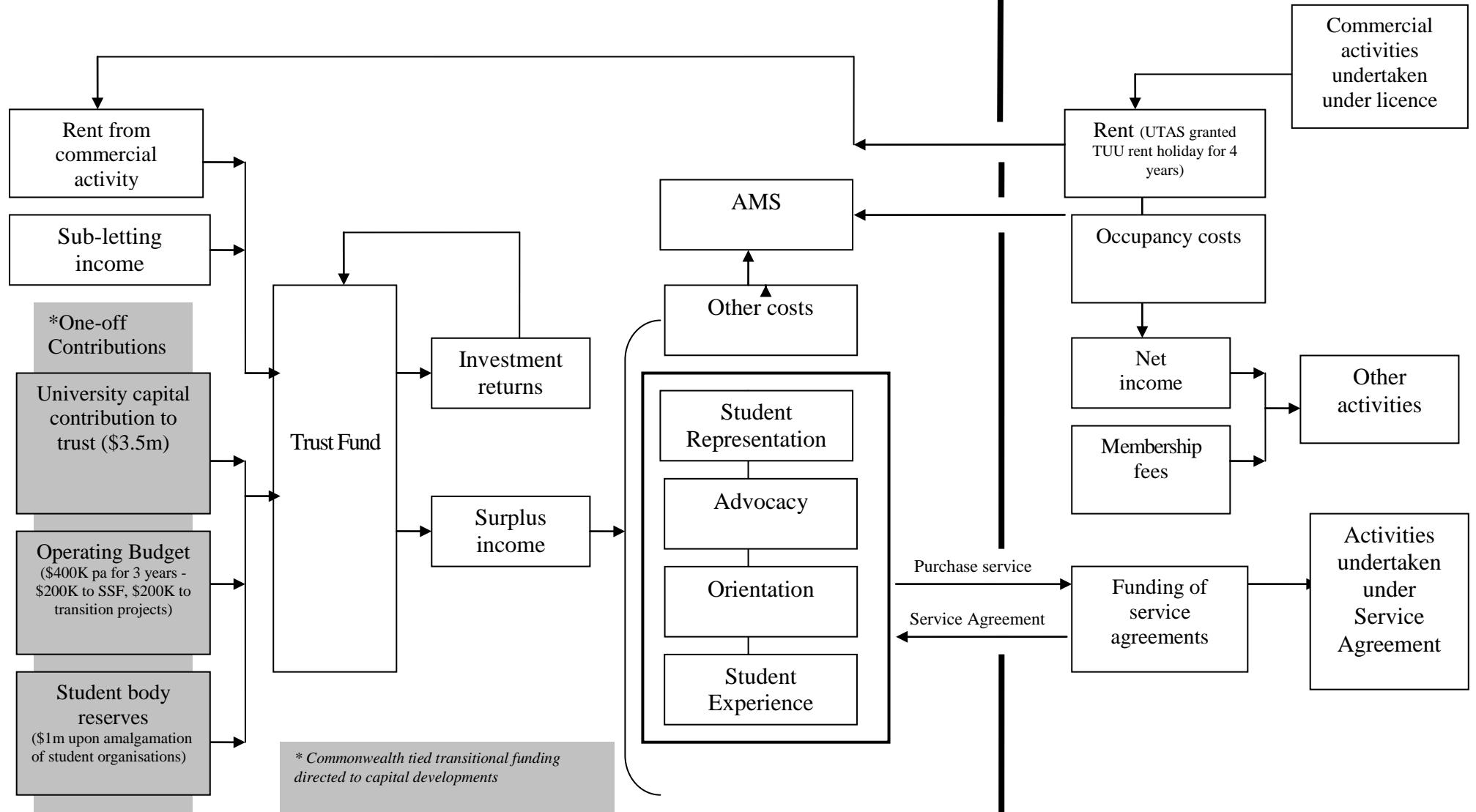


Table 1

Service Type	Pre-VSU	Post-VSU
Representation - SRC, including Postgraduate Association	Student Organisations	SLA
Advocacy	Student Organisations	SLA
Student Contact Centres	Combination UTAS and Student Organisations	SLA
Orientation	Combination UTAS and Student Organisations	Combination UTAS and SLA
Student Experience - Clubs and Societies	Student Organisations	SLA transitional funding and user pays principles
Student Experience - sporting facilities	UTAS UBE	UTAS UBE
Student Experience - cultural events	Combination UTAS and Student Organisations	SLA
Student Experience - health promotion forums	ad hoc	SLA
Student Experience - student newsletters and magazines	Student Organisations	SLA
Student Experience - Emergency grants	Combination UTAS and Student Organisations	SLA and additional UTAS funds
Student Experience - Postgraduate Association Events	Student Organisations	SLA
Student Counselling	UTAS	UTAS
Disability Services	UTAS	UTAS
Careers Service	UTAS	UTAS
Student Employment Services	UTAS	UTAS
Student Transition Support Services	UTAS	UTAS
CALD support	UTAS	UTAS
Student Accommodation	Combination UTAS and Student Organisations	Combination UTAS and Student Organisations
Food Outlets	Student Organisations	Student Organisations
Stationery, newsagent and general store	Student Organisations	Student Organisations
Australia Post Agency	Student Organisations	Student Organisations
Banking	Commonwealth Bank	Commonwealth Bank
Book Shop	Private Enterprise	Private Enterprise
Doctors Surgery	Private Practice	Private Practice
Child Care Services	UTAS UBE	Community Provider