

La Trobe University Student Representative Council – Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services And Amenities, And Other Measures) Bill 2009

Voluntary Student Unionism's (VSU) devastating impacts on university life are well documented and accepted. For a detailed account on the effect at La Trobe University see the La Trobe University Student Representative Council and La Trobe University Guild submissions to the DEEWR review on the 'The Impact of Voluntary Student Unionism on Services, Amenities and Representation for Australian University Students' 2008.

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

The Legislative Instruments

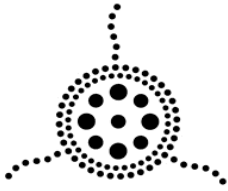
Part 1 – National Protocols

The SRC welcomes the Government's decision to establish a set of minimum standards for student representation and independent academic advocacy at Australian universities and recognises that this is not something that has existed previously at a national level. The SRC particularly welcomes the requirement of universities to *“ensure(s) there are opportunities for the interests of enrolled students to be considered in institutional decision making”*.

However, the SRC believes that quality representation, be it for students or otherwise, can only be achieved through strong coherent voice not through a disjointed, piecemeal approach. To be represented adequately students need independent democratic student organisations.

Further, these protocols are very broad and their interpretation will vary from institution to institution. The SRC is concerned that universities may be free to interpret the meaning of adequate *“opportunities for the interests of enrolled students to be considered in institutional decision making”* as a few student members on staff controlled boards who have no training or contact with each other.

Some universities will continue to regard their relevant student organisation as the legitimate representatives of students but the law will not require this. However, the Bill does seem to allow university administrations that have a hostile relationship to their student organisation to sideline them from the decision making process at any time, regardless of any democratic mandate which the elected representatives may possess. Further, universities without a student organisation will not be required to establish one.



Part 2 – Guidelines

Whilst the Protocols fail in their attempt to ensure adequate representation for students the Guidelines are much more concerning in that they outlaw adequate student representation from being funded by the proposed \$250 student services fee. Universities will not be allowed to direct this money to student organization's work to politically represent students. This means all the government claims to wanting to ensure adequate student representation are hollow.

It is also very concerning that the government has restricted the student services fee from funding adequate representation for student on a national level.

The SRC recommends that the Bill be amended to ensure that:

- a) Student representation can be funded from the fee, including national representation.**
- b) Independent, Democratic Student organizations play a leading role in allocating funds to services for students on University campuses. Where these organizations do not exist, they should be created and supported.**