

SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE SCRUTINY OF NEW TAXES

Inquiry into compulsory student fees

Submission from Matthew Incerti

I support the proposed amendment to the Higher Education Support Act 2003, recently reintroduced to the House of Representatives, to allow universities to charge their students a Student Services Fee. Any such Fee should be charged via an income-contingent loan, removing up-front costs for enrolled students. There is a distinction between charging a Students Services Fee in order to maintain and grow student services, and the mandating of compulsory student unionism via such a Fee. The restrictions on the ability of higher education providers to require students to pay fees for services and amenities that are not of an academic nature, since January 2006, has had a detrimental effect on the provision of child care; legal, employment, health, advocacy, counselling and welfare services; meeting room availability; stationery and second-hand book services; and accommodation assistance for students.

I would also draw the Committee's attention to two particular effects of the Howard Government's Bill:

Clubs that support culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse students have suffered. This area of funding is acutely important in the current education environment where foreign student enrolment levels are falling in many areas.

Students enrolled in regional higher education providers, where service provision outside Universities and TAFEs is less developed than in urban areas, have been especially hard hit.

A recommendation for future reform is to investigate the possibility of expanding the role Local Government has in cooperatively funding student services at higher education providers. I would like to draw the Committee's attention to James Smith Page's 2005 article on constituting student representative bodies as local government entities as a potential avenue for future parliamentary deliberation.

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Reference Page, James S. (2005). 'A Creative Solution to the Dilemma of Voluntary Versus Compulsory Student Union Fees'. *AQ: Journal of Contemporary Analysis*. 77(4): 19-21, 40.