

20/02/2009

Committee Secretary  
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee,

As the President of the Adelaide University Postgraduate Students' Association (AUPGSA), I would very much like to take this opportunity to inform you how deeply our student body has been affected by VSU.

At the University of Adelaide (a GO8 "sandstone" university) the postgraduate contingent of our student numbers hover around one third (roughly 5,000 out of 15,000 enrolled students). Before VSU our association had annual funding of about \$140,000, two staff (one research / advocacy full-time, and one admin part-time): a suite of offices including a student meeting room for the use of all postgraduates, and a kitchen with a Halal only microwave for use by Muslim students.

We have lost our suite of offices, and now cramped in a storage room within a storage room, where meeting with our members has become very difficult indeed. Our overall funding has been reduced by close to 90% (from \$140,000 to \$16,000). Our organisation is under constant threat from merger and starvation of funds from other student organisations, and from the University. Our organisation is under very stringent controls as to how we may use our funds.

Because of VSU we have lost all our staff, and because of this our executive committee work entirely as volunteers. This has impacted greatly on research and coursework outcomes of all of our committee members because they are over-committed having to study, run the AUPGSA and still work to support themselves because the honorarium has been cancelled by the university 'in the spirit of VSU'. The alternative would have been to close the association down but as our student body needs us ever more greatly for our independent and confidential advocacy services and our coordination of cultural events on campus. We cannot find it in our hearts to take this last drastic step so we struggle on for the sake of postgraduates having somewhere to turn to, and at least some sort of voice.

Our organisation continues to exist thanks only to a small but loyal group of volunteers. We ask that the legislation be implemented to allow postgraduates a fair share of direct funding from any student fee structure. Our aim is only to serve the interests of our members unfettered by the conflicts, and the conflicts of interest, found elsewhere.

Postgraduates at The University of Adelaide now struggle to have voice, let alone the kind of dedicated services and support enjoyed pre-VSU, and of the kind that postgrads at some other institutions still enjoy. I urge the committee to ensure that secure direct funding for independent student associations (and postgraduate associations in particular) is restored as a result of this Bill, and that it does not serve only to perpetuate the status quo.

Sincerely,

Felicity Rai, President

Adelaide University Postgraduate Students Association