

I am making this submission against the return of compulsory student fees and I am hopeful that you will give this submission, and others who write submissions expressing their concern, some consideration before making your decision.

I agree that student associations can have an important role to play in universities and I certainly do not advocate otherwise. I think for those who want to be part of the student association/Guild whilst at university, it can be a very valuable experience and opportunity, as well as helpful when the need to access services arises, however what I am unhappy with is the possibility that these fees are being made compulsory for those who do not wish to participate or access these services.

As an internal student in 2003, the only access to student services was the free diary I received in my first week (which I never used). I did not access child care, health, sport, legal or counselling services, nor did I wish to take part in any of the functions put on as they were usually promoted as an excuse to go and get drunk, or just weren't what I was interested in. The student associations further claim that they subsidise the food and drink in cafeterias, but yet this was certainly not my experience at all. In fact, the food and drink was actually more expensive than anywhere else.

As a full time student, I simply did not have the money to pay for a service I simply did not use, nor need however under the previous legislation, I had no option but to pay the fees to be able to access my student results. I consider this unfair and tantamount to blackmail.

As an external student since 2005, I have even less access or need to access any services offered by the student association. My university is approximately 500km from my home, and there are other external students who live further away than I. It is therefore highly unlikely that I (or those like me) would be accessing most (if any) of these services offered. I do not consider that I should have to spend the money that I work hard for, on services that I do not wish to, or cannot access.

I also note that joining a student association is not mandatory in other developed countries such as Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands and New Zealand and am left wondering why in a country such as ours, where we proudly promote freedom as being one of the key attributes of our system, we are even considering making student association fees compulsory again.

Many student organisations have expressed concern about their ability to provide social, academic and political services under Voluntary Student Unionism and point to significant decreases in revenue. As you would no doubt be aware, the most basic concept of a free market is that a product or good is only worth what the consumer is willing to pay for it. Therefore, if consumers, ie students, feel that the student union is worth paying for, they would and should join it. This should not require government intervention. If anything, perhaps the government should not be looking to compulsory student fees as a way of receiving more funding, but instead the student associations should be asking themselves how they can make their services more attractive and relevant to students in order to attract paying members.

In this vein, I note that the fees could be anywhere up to \$250 a year. By comparison, a workers' union fees are generally around \$450 a year. It seems to be disproportionate when you consider that a workers' union fee is paid by a full time worker whereas a student association fee is paid by an often low paid part time or casual worker, most of whom would not be earning even half of what a full time worker would be.

That being the case, in order to facilitate a greater ability for struggling students to pay student fees should they wish to, I fully support the proposal of students being given the option of taking a HEC-style-income-contingent loan to cover the fees if they chose not to pay directly, as well as the proposal of giving students a greater say in where and how the fees are spent (provided that the student associations are held fully accountable and can demonstrate they have followed the wishes of their members in this regard). This is still on the basis that student fees remain voluntary.

I also note that students already pay substantial fees when it comes to their attendance at university – ranging from \$800 a subject (at best, for a full time load, this equates to \$3200 a semester) to \$1500 a subject (or more!). I'm left wondering where these fees are going when there are so many students at university.

Instead of looking to compulsory student fees as a solution to falling revenue and student participation, lets talk to students who do not pay student fees and lets look at the reasons they do not pay the fees. Let the student associations act on this feedback from these students to make it more relevant and attractive to

them. On a cursory look at several student guild websites this week, it was almost impossible for me to find out how much student association fees are these days, and in some, difficult to even find out where and how to join. Let's make it easier for students to access this kind of information. Perhaps then, there will be an increased participation in membership.

Although I don't necessarily agree with the contention that such services as sporting facilities and student functions are essential to student life, even if this were the case, I urge you to consider the relevance of and access to these services to external students such as myself and, at the very least, exclude external students from these compulsory fees.

In closing, on behalf of other students like me, I strongly urge you to consider voting against compulsory student fees. Thank you for taking the time to consider my submission.