

Re: Inquiry into proposed student fees

Thankyou for this opportunity to make a submission to the committee's inquiry into proposed student fees.

I was a student at the University of Melbourne at the time that Voluntary Student Unionism was introduced, and I was very grateful for the reform.

Prior to VSU, the most obvious use of student funds was in free beer handed out at barbecues sponsored by the student union. I struggle to see how free beer is a vital student service that every student must pay for. Typically it was the same few hundred students who would turn out to get their hands on a can of VB. I have nothing against students forming a club which provides them with free alcohol, but it makes no sense for every student to be slugged with a compulsory fee to pay for this frivolity. Students who use these services should pay for it themselves by voluntarily joining the relevant student union or club. I note that one of the allowed uses for the proposed new student tax is "providing food or drink to students on a campus of the higher education provider" - it seems that this does not proscribe alcohol.

With regard to other advisory services which the student unionists claim are essential- the fact is that most students do not use these services.

In my experience it was mainly the well-off students who either lived at a residential college on campus, or nearby in trendy inner city suburbs who had the luxury of spending long periods of time on campus, outside of class hours, to take advantage of these freebie services. The students I knew who were less well-off were actually out working part time to support themselves, rather than spending time on extracurricular activities on campus. A few of my friends whose families were struggling financially found it very difficult to afford the compulsory student fees.

Some who promote compulsory fees have suggested they should simply be added to a student's HECS-HELP / FEE-HELP debt so that there is no up-front cost. I find this amusing considering that many of those advocating compulsory student fees also talk about high university fees being unfair on students. This is gross hypocrisy. If people who argue against higher university fees want to add compulsory student fees to students' bills, they are talking nonsense.

It is clear that compulsory student fees are inequitable, increase inequality among the student body, and benefit the privileged rather than those in need. In addition, these fees have the effect of a tax on tertiary education that may discourage some people from undertaking further studies.

I urge the committee and the Parliament to consider these issues and to oppose any attempt to charge students compulsory fees in addition to tuition costs.

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Parsons