



UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY UNION

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Mr John Carter
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace
Relations
Parliament House

Dear Mr Carter

Inquiry into the Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities and Other Measures) Bill 2009

I write on behalf of the University of Sydney Union (USU) as a submission to the Committee's inquiry.

Our representative body ACUMA (Australasian Campus Union Managers' Association) will also be making a submission to the Senate inquiry.

The USU proposes the following positions in relation to the Senate's inquiry:

- The Senate inquiry should note that a compulsory fee capped at \$250 per student per annum is not a sustainable long-term solution and on average is less than 50% of the average Go8 student fee in 2006.
- The Senate inquiry should consider that, prior to the introduction of Voluntary Student Unionism in 2006; Universities had the responsibility of setting student amenity fees.
- The Senate inquiry should consider the issue of not capping the fee and allowing Universities to differentiate their offer to students as a value proposition. This can also be done in conjunction with the recommendations from the Bradley Review on student support such as Recommendation 6.
- The Senate inquiry should note that prior to 2006 a percentage of the student amenity fee was directed to capital, property and infrastructure works alleviating the taxpayer and the University of this cost. The funding of the sector by a compulsory fee should include a component for capital.

In 1990 the University of Sydney transferred the responsibility for all building maintenance to the University Union, 30,000 m² of buildings on Campus. Since 1990 the University of Sydney Union has spent \$26 M of funds on new and refurbished buildings on Campus, including \$13 M for the redevelopment of Manning House. No public or University funds were used in the development of these sorts of facilities over the last 18 years.

ACUMA has also tabled evidence to the Government recently that shows hardly any capital funds have been forthcoming from the Government to help the current problem surrounding amenity buildings at Australian Universities. ACUMA's research also concluded that capital investment in the sector stopped upon the introduction of Voluntary Student Unionism. At Sydney University this problem is compounded by the fact that 66 % of the common spaces provide for students are in heritage listed buildings.



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In 2008 USU entered into an Occupation Licence with the University for 30,000m² gross floor area of space, but the capital investment problem remains.

- The Senate inquiry should note that USU has increased its strong governance protocols over the last 3 years, including the appointment of two executive directors, external experts of the USU Finance Committee and a number of senior staff and Board members are qualified as Company Directors.
- Since the introduction of VSU, USU has developed a new operating model for all services on Campus and has had to cut services to match our immediate financial position. This has been successful partly because the University was very supportive (in 2008 USU received \$4 M in funding from the University).
- The main reason USU has survived since 2006 has been the dedication of Directors and staff in delivering a set of programs at about half the cost pre 2006. For example, in 2008, USU won the Australian Marketing Institute Award for the marketing program of the year for our membership program. USU is rated #1 in the world in debating and we have made many changes to our operating model. We would like the Government to ensure that Universities refrain from micromanagement of these funds to avoid a culture of bureaucracy which would inadvertently affect students as the key benefactors of this fee.

Yours sincerely

Ruchir Punjabi
President
University of Sydney Union