

Submission: That Clubs and Societies should receive funding from the proposed student services fee.

The University of Melbourne Student Union (“UMSU”) Clubs and Societies Department (“Clubs”) is a vital student service that currently depends on funding from student union memberships and ever-decreasing transitional University funding. The proposed student services and amenities fee is, we understand, intended to fund student services and it is likely then that it would replace any union membership fees or University transitional funding. Clubs’ only chance for funding then, would be from the services fee. Simply put, without funding from the services fee, Clubs will surely cease to exist.

We understand that Clubs is currently excluded from accessing the proposed fee as student clubs and societies are not included on the Government’s list of “allowable activities” and more damningly, give funding to political clubs on campus. This deliberate exclusion is in our opinion ill-advised and we would submit that the Government reconsider its position.

The UMSU Clubs and Societies Department is responsible for providing funding to 110 affiliated clubs on campus. It is the third-most used Union service at the University of Melbourne, with 75% of surveyed students having accessed Clubs and Societies.¹ The clubs cover a wide variety of interests, cultural groups, religious groups and academic groups, a list of which are attached. What the list of affiliated clubs demonstrates is not only do we reach a diversity of students but political clubs make up only a small fraction of the funded clubs, specifically, five of 110.

We do not deny that political clubs have been and are very much involved in student, state and federal election campaigns. The Clubs Department, however, does not fund such activities. Political clubs can not and do not receive grants from our Department for election activities, such as student elections and campaigns. Department funds do not go directly to the campaigns of any candidate in any election, with a caveat that some limited funding is available for printing. Funding for printing, however, is available to all affiliated clubs and we do not consider it to be a political tool. Furthermore, funding for political clubs represents a very small amount of total grant spending. In 2008, our five affiliated political clubs were only paid \$1,261.60 in grants out of a total grants pool of \$60,495 (less than 2.10%).²

We can understand the concerns the previous Government had with compulsory fees being put some way toward political campaigns, especially if they were used in state or federal elections. Realistically, very little money from UMSU in fact reaches political clubs and its uses are limited. That said, we believe Clubs is a way for students to make friends and to find their passions on campus. For many, this passion may well be politics and we are proud to fund these clubs and get students involved.

¹ MU Student Union Ltd, 2007 Member Satisfaction Survey, p4. Available on request.

² UMSU Clubs and Societies, Grant Spending 2008. Available on request.

To deny Clubs funding on the grounds of its political associations is to deny funding to so many non-political students and seriously underestimates the Clubs Department at UMSU. The Clubs Department is run as apolitically as possible, affiliating any club that complies with Clubs Regulations and the UMSU Constitution without regard to our personal opinions on the aims or ideals of the club in question. The Clubs Administrator is an independent paid staff member and while Office Bearers are elected, they are currently from an independent ticket. Even if the political leanings of the OBs were to change in the future, any spending decisions have to be compliant with the Regulations and the UMSU Constitution. Further, they must be agreed to by the Clubs Committee. The Clubs Committee is comprised of 7 voting representatives, elected from the Executives of all the affiliated clubs on campus, leading to a variety of students being represented in the decision-making process. Simply, Clubs has an effective system of checks and balances that reduces the chances of any funding from Clubs being used for a specific political or ideological purpose.

But surely the most important argument for funding Clubs and Societies is its unsurpassed contribution to the “university experience”. As cliché as it sounds, Clubs are one of the most visible examples of non-academic student involvement at university. Clubs and societies are great for social networking and create a lively culture on campus. Many students, including the author, make their first friends at university through the various clubs they join in O-Week. Many make friends at orientation camps run by the clubs. Other students just enjoy the company (and food) a free barbecue can provide. All of these activities are funded by the Clubs and Societies Department. International and rural students, who often arrive at the University without the advantage of groups of friends from high school, can especially benefit from the activities funded by Clubs. Students are now in larger, more impersonal degrees and, without funding for Clubs, may never get the chance to meet and connect with like-minded people.

Clubs activity enlivens a university. Most days of the week at Melbourne will see a club meeting, a movie or DVD viewing, a barbecue on Parkville’s South Lawn or multiples of the above. The evenings will often see club-run trivia, juggling or a Ball for club members. Without funding for Clubs, the social events that students depend on for company, for support and to break the monotony of study, will disappear from campus. The University of Melbourne especially has to counteract the image of a ‘degree factory’ but if funds are not diverted to Clubs and Societies, surely an impersonal degree is all the University will be able to offer.

Clubs is also one of the most visible ways of promoting diversity on campus. As the list of affiliated clubs shows, we have many religious and cultural clubs. In this way we provide funding for ethnic and religious minority clubs who would otherwise struggle to find outside sponsorship. For a University that prides itself on its diverse make-up, we cannot afford to lose these clubs and the contribution they make. There is often no equivalent group in the area for these religious and cultural minorities and our clubs that provide support and

company for them should be funded. The impact on students if funding was no longer available, especially those belonging to the minorities, cannot be justified simply because Clubs also funds political activity.

Involvement in clubs, aside from being an excellent social tool, is good preparation for life after university. Club Executives get exposed to leadership and management, with many students later putting their experience on their résumés. The oversight provided by Clubs ensures that Executives remain accountable, especially in respect of their financial records and elections. While university does of course offer other chances for leadership, Clubs inspires people who would not take up these other chances. We often find that is the chance to be President of a club that speaks to their passions that convinces students to put their hand up.

UMSU has struggled since the introduction of VSU, although of course not as much as some rural campuses, whose student services have been decimated. At Clubs, we wholeheartedly support the move to introduce the services fee in order to bring back some student life to universities. However, if clubs and societies are not to be funded by a services fee then the fee will surely fail in its aims. Clubs does fund political societies but we contend that they, as well as our other 105 affiliated clubs, contribute irreplaceably to the culture and social life on campus. Clubs provides an opportunity for minorities to feel accepted, a place for students to meet and connect with new friends, a place for students to find their passions and a chance to lead their peers. Clubs and societies must be funded by the services fee or else we risk the end of student life on campus.

Katherine Klaus, UMSU Clubs and Societies Office Bearer 2009

Appendix 1: List of Affiliated Clubs

Academic Clubs

Club
Actuarial Students Society
Architecture, Property, Planning, Landscape, Environments
Arts Students Society
Biomedical Engineering Student Society
Biomedicine Student Society
Chemical Engineering Students Society
Computer Students Association
Department of Forests and Ecosystem Science Student Club
Earth Sciences Students Society
Engineering Students' Club
Environmental Engineering Students Society
Environments Students Society (Envi.)
Geomatics Society
German Club
Information Systems Student Society
Japanese Club
Land and Food Resources Students Association
Mathematics & Statistics Society
Mechanical Engineering Students Society
Music Students Society
Nursing and Social Work Society
Physics Students Society
Physiotherapy Students' Society
Russian Club
Science Students Society
Veterinary Students Society of Victoria (Parkville)

Non-Academic (General Interest) Clubs

Club
1701 Star Trek Club
85 Broads

Club
Adventist Students on Campus
African Club
African Drumming Club
ALP Club
Amnesty International
Arabic Culture Club
Association of Trade & Management
Australasian Association
Baha'i Society
Book Club
BreakFirst
Buddhist Studies Society
Cage Free Campus Society
Cantonese Christian Fellowship
Catholic Overseas Students Down Under
Chess Club
Chinese Culture Society
Chinese Debating Group
Chinese Music Group
Chinese Publishers' Group
Chocolate Lovers Society
Choral Society
Christian Union
Consistently Amazing Kitchen Endeavours
Cosmic Hitchhikers Appreciation Society
Cross-Cultural Dialogue Society
Debating Society
Engineering Music Society
FAS2 Fantasy & Science Fiction Appreciation Society
Filipino Students Association
Film Society
Food Interest Group

Club
Footbag (Hacky Sack) Club
Fotoholics – Photography Club
French Club
Friends of Unnatural Llamas (F.O.U.L.)
Greens On Campus
Hong Kong Students Association
Indian Club
Indonesian Students Association
Infinite Images Gaming Club
International Commerce Students Society
International Engineering Students Society
Islamic Society
Italian Social Club
Jewish Students Society
Juggling Club
Korean Students Society
Labor Club
Latin American Student Association
Liberal Club
M.T.O Sufi Association
Magician's Society
Malaysians of Melbourne University
Mauritian Student Society
Melbourne-Tsinghua Student Friendship Society
Men's Union
More Beer!
Overseas Christian Fellowship (O.C.F)
P.I.R.A.T.E.S. (People Interested Really At The Ear Sounds)
Pakistani Society
Political Interest Society
Pool Club
Scandinavian Club

Club
Secular Society
Singapore Students Society
Socialist Alternative
Society for Creative Anachronism
Society for Electronic Entertainment
Sri Lankan Students Association
Student Exchange Society
Student Life (Disciplemakers)
Students Arise – Learning To Serve
Students Playing Go
Taiwanese Students Association
Thai Student Association
Turkish Students on Campus
UNICEF Club
Universe (Campus Ministry)
Urban Yoga
Vietnamese Students Association
Weekly Watchers of Wonderful Anime