



QUT STUDENT GUILD

Submission

Student Services & Amenities Bill

4 November 2010

PREFACE

Prior to VSU, the QUT Student Guild received approximately \$5.6 million in income per year from student fees. We now rely upon university funding of approximately \$300 000 a year. We have had to shut-down services, transfer existing services over to external providers or the university and cut funding to core support programs.

For example, the Guild no longer runs:

- Kelvin Grove Secondhand Books Closed
- Kelvin Grove Gym Private operator
- Gardens Point Gym Private operator
- Gardens Point Pool Private operator
- 2x Gardens Point Childcare Centres Closed
- Kelvin Grove Childcare Centre Transferred to C&K
- Carseldine Childcare Centre Transferred to C&K
- Teppanyaki Time Private operator
- Subway Private operator
- Orientation Publication University acquired
- Orientation Week University acquired
- International Student Services University acquired
- Campus Shuttle Bus University acquired
- Student Accident Insurance University acquired
- Employment Assistance Program University acquired
- Subsidised Photocopying Closed
- Union Shopper Closed
- 2x Information Centres Closed
- Recreation, Trips and Courses Closed
- Parents' Room Closed
- Post Graduate Student Association Closed

And we have had to cut funding to several areas including:

- Advocacy Staff 3 FT Staff to 1 PT Staff
- Welfare Staff..... 3 FT Staff to 1 PT Staff
- LGBTI Staff..... Reduced hours
- Women’s Staff Reduced hours
- International Students’ Staff 2 FT Staff to none
- Sports Staff..... 3 FT Staff to 1 FT Staff
- Textbook Bursaries \$50 000 to \$15 000
- Legal Aid..... \$24 000 to \$6 000
- Food Vouchers \$11 000 to \$5 000
- Sports Scholarships..... \$27 000 to \$19 000
- Clubs and Societies \$104 000 to \$32 000
- Sports..... \$225 000 to \$82 000
- Student Magazine..... \$65 000 to \$20 000

Private operators are now the preferred method of service delivery at QUT in the areas of food and drink provision and sporting and recreational facilities. Students have had to pay the cost of this with increased prices and decreased quality.

Students have also lost their independent voice due to the Guild’s dependence upon QUT for funding, and subsequently, survival. We cannot print articles criticising the university in our student media, we cannot run campaigns on vital issues due to fear of having our funding reduced, and we cannot truly advocate for students. We are dependent upon QUT in every sense of the word and this has compromised our organisation’s ability to fulfil its core aims.

THE BILL

The QUT Student Guild is against the Student Services and Amenities Fee Bill for the following reasons.

1. The bill states “the Student Services, Amenities, Representation and Advocacy Guidelines cannot require a provider to fund an organisation of students, or of students and other persons”. This will give Universities the opportunity to acquire services that are currently provided by Student Unions and fund them using the SS Fee. Given the history of service acquisition since VSU, this will undoubtedly occur.
2. The bill insists the SS Fee be collected and distributed by Universities. This will increase Student Unions’ dependence upon Universities for funding and consequently compromise the autonomy of our organisation even further. We cannot effectively advocate for students when the funding for advocacy is dependent upon the University! Furthermore, there is no requirement upon Universities to transfer any of these funds to Union services, even if they fall within the guidelines.
3. It is a further tax on students who are already struggling to repay \$40 000 HECS/HELP debts and balance work-study commitments. It is an added financial pressure on an already poverty-stricken group within the Australian community. Any increase in the financial costs associated with higher education is also a preventative to access.
4. The Bill requires the setup of a separate loan system – SA-HELP – rather than using the existing HELP assistance scheme. This will increase administrative costs and delay the implementation of any fee. It will also confuse students with two separate loans.
5. The guidelines do not include student representation.
6. The guidelines do not address the specific needs of Indigenous students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The QUT Student Guild urges the Australian Government to respond to the loss of representation, services, amenities and advocacy at higher education institutions around the country since VSU. There is no doubt that the \$170 million lost from student fees has negatively impacted the sector. It has caused the degradation, if not total obliteration, of Student Unions and the political representation and support services they provide.

Consequently, the QUT Student Guild strongly recommends that the Government reintroduce student union fees. This would be a percentage of students' HECS/HELP payments per year, that higher education institutions would be required to transfer to Student Unions. This would prevent an increase in students' financial burden whilst also addressing the effects of VSU on campuses across Australia.

This would address the areas of concern raised by the Bill without further compromising students' representative bodies and independent voice.

CONCLUSION

Student money should be spent by students, for students. In an environment where Universities would rather prioritise for-profit providers in areas such as food provision and sporting amenities, over not-for-profit providers, and VC salaries increase by hundreds of thousands of dollars whilst student support funding comparatively decreases, Student Unions remain principled in their aims of representing, advocating and supporting students. Although the Guild has undergone heavy staffing cuts, service reductions and attacks on our representative capacity, we are still committed to supporting students and fighting for their best interests. If this legislation is passed, it will only serve to undermine this ethos.

For further comment contact:

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