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Office of the Vice-Chancellor

Wednesday, 3 November 2010

The Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

Re: Inquiry into Higher Education Amendment (Student Services and Amenities) Bill 2010

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important Bill, which Southern Cross University (SCU) strongly supports.

As a regional University, with campuses in Lismore and Coffs Harbour, as well as a newly established campus in the Tweed Gold Coast region, SCU is critically aware of the impact of voluntary student unionism and the detriment this has had on the broader student experience. In order to provide a continuation of some services in the post-VSU environment, the University has been financially supporting the four student representative bodies and had established the Office of Sport and Cultural Activities (OSCA) to provide a range of sporting, cultural and recreational activities across the campuses.

The reintroduction of a student services and amenities fee would provide SCU, in consultation with our students, with the opportunity to enhance a range of student services in a more sustainable manner. However, it is important that there is a reasonable time-frame by which universities are expected to meet the requirements of the related Guidelines (Student Services, Amenities, Representation and Advocacy Guidelines, and Student Services and Amenities Fees Guidelines). This is particularly important for smaller regional campuses or for delivering services to students studying externally, where more flexible ways of delivering the required services will need to be negotiated.

In addition, the commencement of the Bill will need to factor in the time needed for universities to set up appropriate internal financial, enrolment and information processes. For this reason, I suggest that mid-2011 provides a realistic timeframe to introduce the fee. Universities will have additional costs in updating their enrolment and information processes to meet the new requirements of the Bill.

While I agree that the fee should not be used for ongoing compliance activities, I do consider that the fee could contribute to the necessary up-front development costs.

Professor Peter L Lee Vice-Chancellor

Implementing the new arrangements will require administrative and IT changes, which in turn has resource implications. Part of the collected fees could be used to assist with these costs and be specifically acquitted to the Commonwealth to ensure the fees were being used for this sole purpose.

Yours sincerely

Peter Lee