

SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON FAMILY AND HUMAN SERVICES

INQUIRY INTO BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY

1. On 16 March 2005 the Federal Government introduced legislation to the House of Representatives that if passed by the House and subsequently the Senate would have a significant impact on the ability of students to access affordable child care on the Bundoora campus of La Trobe University and indeed on the majority of campuses across Australia. The legislation is entitled the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-Front Student Union Fees) Bill 2005. The Bill precludes University's from charging a compulsory fee to students for the provision of an amenity, facility or service that is not of an academic nature unless that student has chosen to use that amenity, facility or service.

Currently La Trobe University charges all students a compulsory General Service Fee which, in part, is allocated to the support of various child care services on the Bundoora campus. This arrangement will not be permitted if the legislation is passed in its current format. In 2005 the total fee that students will pay is budgeted to amount to \$5.5 million of which child care services will receive nearly \$550,000 or 10% of the fee.

2. This fee will be used to support the three child care services at Bundoora. They are the:

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• La Trobe University Childrens Centre	425,000
• La Trobe University Union Parents and Childrens Child Care Centre	115,000
• La Trobe University Union School Holiday Care Program	<u>10,000</u>
	<u>\$550,000</u>

3. La Trobe University Childrens Centre
 The Childrens Centre is a traditional 128 place, class one child care centre which uses its allocation of \$425,000 from the General Service Fee to reduce child care fees for students and to cover student places during non-semester periods. Approximately 60% of the users of the Childrens Centre are students, with most of these being in receipt of the maximum benefits provided via Centrelink. Without the support of the General Service Fee a significant number of students, mostly women, would not be able to further their tertiary education. It is acknowledged that tertiary education improves employment prospects therefore reducing reliance on Welfare payments. Over the 34 year history of the Children's Centre there have been various major building projects which have been supported in various ways via contributions from the General Service Fee.

4. La Trobe University Union Parents and Childrens Child Care Centre
 The Parents and Childrens Child Care Centre, a 21 place, class one child care centre is managed slightly differently from the Childrens Centre in that it does not charge fees except for a \$50 levy per semester to help cover everyday expenses. Parents pay for their child care by providing one hour of child care duties for every 30 hours of child care. The cost of providing this service is budgeted to amount to \$115,000 in 2005 which is principally used to pay the salary costs of the trained child care workers who

co-ordinate the centre. Currently over 30 students use this centre. This contribution is funded entirely from the General Service Fee. The Parents and Childrens Child Care Centre building was also entirely paid for from the General Service Fee; ie the fee that will not be able to be compulsorily collected under the proposed legislation.

5. La Trobe University Union School Holiday Care Program

The School Holiday Care Program provides vacation care during the three semester holidays for up to 35 children aged between 5 and 12 years. The Union subsidises this service by approximately \$10,000 per annum, in staff time, cleaning services, and occupancy costs. The program occupies space within the Union Building which was built entirely from funds provided by the General Service Fee.

6. If the legislation is passed by the Senate, and the effective date on the Bill is 1 January 2006, the effect will be devastating on the student use of the various child care services on this campus.

It is the University's view that most students would not be able to afford the traditional child care places at the Childrens' Centre, furthermore:

- the Parents and Childrens Child Care Centre would either close or become a commercial child care centre again with little or no student enrolment.
- The School Holiday Care Program would be become significantly more expensive to the extent that most students would not be able to afford it.

7. La Trobe University contends that by pricing child care out of the reach of students, as is most likely with the introduction of the Bill, that the Federal Government will be placing an overwhelming impediment for families when considering upgrading tertiary qualifications, or indeed ever starting them. This will have a deleterious outcome on those families from either entering or re-entering the work force.

Item 2 of the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry states that the "Committee is interested in making it easier for parents who so wish to return to the workforce".

It is imperative in a quickly changing technological world that parents have the opportunity to upgrade their skills as a preparation for re-entering the workforce.

The passage of this Bill we believe will impede that process and La Trobe University contends that as a consequence it should not be enacted.

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and
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