

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
Legislation Committee

Inquiry into the Higher Education Legislation Amendment (2005 Measures No.4) Bill 2005

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The Students' Association of the University of Adelaide

The Students' Association of Adelaide University (SAUA) is the peak representative body for all students enrolled at the University of Adelaide. The University of Adelaide is comprised of four campuses – North Terrace, Roseworthy, Waite and Thebarton Campus and have over 16 000 enrolled students. The SAUA is an affiliate of the Adelaide University Union, as legislated in Section 21 of the University of Adelaide Act 1971.

The SAUA welcomes this opportunity to comment on the *Higher Education Legislation Amendment (2005 Measures No. 4) Bill 2005* on behalf of our members, the students of Adelaide University.

The SAUA Mission Statement is as follows:

- The Student's Association of the University of Adelaide's (SAUA) primary objective is to provide accountable, strong, relevant, and transparent representation to its membership. The SAUA is the peak student representative body on campus, and is the primary advocate for students, to the University, Government and the wider community.
- The Student's Association recognises its opportunity, and obligation to highlight issues affecting students in the education sector, and people in the broader community. The SAUA will uphold the principles of **equity and accessibility** in the Education sector.
- The SAUA will lobby all relevant bodies and do all possible to ensure that students, young people, and people within the higher education sector are represented, and their views, convictions, and opinions are supported.

This statement directs the SAUA's day-to-day operations and as such this mission statement will provide the direction and foundation for the SAUA's submission.

Introduction

The Students' Association of the University of Adelaide opposes the funding by the state government to assist in the establishment in Adelaide of a branch of the American university Carnegie Mellon.

The SAUA believes the provision of funds to launch of the H. John Heinz III School of Public Policy and Management in Victoria Square in 2006 is short sighted and display a lack of support for the three existing public universities in South Australia, and are not in the spirit of Australian public education.

A Forth University?

South Australia has three public universities currently educating domestic and international students. Since the election of the Howard Government, Australia's universities and their students have faced constant and severe attacks. The education policies of the current Federal Government have placed Australia's higher education system in an extremely tenuous position. Currently, Australia ranks as one of the highest fee charging countries for higher education, along with America, Japan, Chile, Korea and New Zealand.¹

Since 1996, real value of university operating funds allocated by the Federal Government has decreased. By 2001 the Commonwealth was allocating almost \$2000 less per student than when they first took office. The National Union of Students translates these funding cuts into very real terms and estimates that they result in universities losing:

- * 20 hours of tutorial each year per student
- * 10 hours of lectures each year per student
- * a professor/student ration of 1:100

Australian families are now paying \$900 million more for higher education than they did eight years ago. Differential HECS, the introduction of up-front fees, funding cuts that have forced the student teacher ratio to increase to dangerously high levels, privatisation of public learning, the deregulation of HECS and continual and unjustifiable all round cuts to higher education have made the current government the biggest threat faced by tertiary students in a long time.

In addition to this Australian students have seen the virtual demise of any realistic and adequate income support from the Coalition Government. The introduction of the Common Youth Allowance, and its consequent alternations and restrictions and the virtual decimation of Austudy are both indicative of the attitude towards students and their wellbeing held by this government.

Public Education in Australia is in dire need of funding and financial support. South Australian students are angry at the State Government's intention to invest \$20 million to help establish a forth university in South Australia. The targeting of international students will also have a significant impact on South Australian universities. International students make up 15% of the student body at Adelaide University and inject cultural diversity, vibrancy, as well as much-needed funds into our universities. The Students' Association believes that these funds would be better used in supporting campus services and students organisations.

The SAUA is at a loss to understand why the State Government is intent on establishing a privately operated fourth university in South Australia. The Students' Association believes it is the responsibility of the State Government

¹ Hastings, Graham & Standfield, Rachael, *NUS Briefing Paper on Higher Education Reform*, National Union of Students, 2003, pp.12

to contribute to and ensure the financial survival of the established public, accessible universities. Surely outstanding public universities carrying the state's name would best serve the reputation of South Australia, rather than one overfunded private American campus.

Public Funds and Private Universities

The South Australian state government will provide a financial commitment of up to \$20 million over the next four years to establish and support the new campus. The SAUA objects to public funds being spent in this manner.

The SAUA believes \$20 million dollars would be better spent improving the quality of teaching, learning and facilities of South Australia's public education institutions.

The Students' Association is disappointed at both state and federal government's prioritising profit over the education of so many South Australians. Carnegie Mellon has announced that its initial offering will be a Master of Science in Information Technology and a Master of Science in Public Policy and Management. The Commonwealth government has budgeted expenditure under FEE-HELP that assumes total enrolments in both courses to be 20 in 2006, 38 in 2007, 58 in 2008 and 77 in 2009.²

The Students' Association is also concerned about the lack of consideration the State Government has shown in regard to the impact on in particular VSU. The threat of VSU should see the South Australian Government do everything in their power to ensure our universities remain an attractive option for students.

VSU will limit the services, the activities and the support student organisations can offer international students, who contribute significantly to making Australian Universities one of the countries top export industries. With a declining quality of education due to lack of funding and few services because of VSU, international students will stop choosing to study in local universities and opt for this American campus.

Victorian Education Minister, Lynne Kosky has commented in the past on the use of public money to support private education institutions. The Minister comments,

"The fundamental premise of universities is that they can develop academic knowledge without fear or favour, and private universities by their very nature can't allow for that environment."³

² Ms Jenny MACKLIN (Jagajaga), Hansard, House of Representatives, October 12 2005

³ Shane Green and David Rood, 'State set to get US private uni', *The Age* June 16, 2005
<http://www.theage.com.au/news/National/State-set-to-get-US-private-uni/2005/06/15/1118645872292.html>

The SAUA is concerned about exactly what favour the State Government expects from its investment, and what the consequences will be for going down the private university line.

ACCESS TO FEE-HELP

In an article in *The Age* on the 28th March, Simon Marginson called FEE-HELP “*the most important university policy since the abolition of fees in 1974*”⁴. He argued that FEE-HELP makes the full fee student market in Australia viable and potentially would see the combination of HECS-HELP and FEE-HELP will see students face a unified full fee student market.

The FEE-HELP system will be available for domestic students studying in Carnegie Mellon programs. The Students’ Association believes FEE-HELP is an education policy fraught with serious consequences for students. While the Government may claim that the FEE-HELP system makes it easier for lower socio-economic students to access full fee paying places, they have again failed to consider the consequences for those students. Lifelong and generational debt does not seem to concern the Federal Government who has produced bandaid solution after bandaid solution when trying to reform higher education.

Fees are anticipated to be in the order of \$US32, 000 or \$A42, 600 a year. Of course, these fees are very significant. By way of comparison a Master of Public Policy at the University of Sydney is \$10,800 for local students. At the University of Melbourne, fees for a Master of Public Policy and Management are just under \$32,000.⁵

The Students’ Association voices similar concerns as detailed above about the use of public funds to further private overseas education profit based initiatives.

CONCLUSION

The SAUA believes the State Government’s financial commitment to Carnegie Mellon is symptomatic of a growing blur between private and public in Australia’s education sector. If higher education options become more streamlined into specialised private institutions, the idea of university as a place to develop original thought and social criticism will disappear.

The recent collapse of Melbourne Private, the private university that shamelessly traded on the Melbourne name could perhaps be seen as a victory – a triumph of the public system, a change in the recognised

⁴ Marginson, Simon, ‘A Revolution to What End?’, *The Age*, March 28th 2005

⁵ Ms Jenny MACKLIN (Jagajaga), Hansard, House of Representatives, October 12 2005

educational direction of Australia. However, a more likely reason is this – perhaps that exclusivity offered by the private system is starting to crumble because the public system is indeed growing ever more private.

As each year passes, with each Federal Budget, and Federal Surplus our public system is being assimilated into the private sector, and the differences between them are being eroded. With these differences disappearing at a devastating rate, the public, and perhaps more alarmingly, students will cease to recall why a public system is worth having and worth fighting to save.