

Committee Secretary
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

15/6/05

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to this Senate Committee to voice my concerns with the introduction of the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005.

Firstly I would like to comment upon what I see as an outdated agenda from one political perspective, and that I can not understand why this has been introduced into a sector which is overwhelmingly against such legislation. I find this quite alarming as the 'powers that be' are not listening to their constituents nor bodies affiliated with University service providers.

This legislation goes a lot deeper into the community than seen at face value and I applaud the senate in sending this to the legislation committee.

I am currently a member of the QUT Student Guild in Brisbane yet find myself in the unique position of having attended not only this metropolitan institution but also the regional university of James Cook in Townsville. This has given me a sample of how student organisations run services in different surroundings and an insight into two student run entities with completely different demographics. One common theme I have found with these two student bodies is that they provide essential services which add to my university experience, provide me with networks whether they be social or purely academic and also give professional advice in times of need. When I finally finish my degree this year I will look back upon my experience and thank these student organisations for their support and be safe in the knowledge my fees were well spent.

I first enrolled at James Cook University in 2000 and initially found the transition from high school hard. I had just moved out of my parents' house and found myself working over 20 hours a week at Coles to make ends meet. I then took advantage of the Student Associations Centrelink service and declared myself as independent which then gave me the freedom to study more and get more involved with what the Student Association had to offer. JCU has a truly enriching campus culture and this is solely due to the Student Association and what it provides its members. The campus club on Thursday nights are always packed and the refectory is not only a cheap place to dine but also a major meeting place for students and if these were to close under VSU the heart of this regional university would be effectively torn out.

One memory I distinctly remember back in 2001 was the buzz created at this university from hosting the Northern University Games. Sport is an integral part of this University and has many different teams competing in the local leagues including Soccer, AFL and Rugby League to name just a few. This legislation will effectively stop sporting opportunities for students especially those who come from overseas and stay at the residential colleges. JCU has a large international contingent and I would hate to see the overall university 'package' devalued and income inevitably lost by the university for students deciding to travel elsewhere for exchange.

In 2002 I left for the City and transferred my studies to QUT. With the inevitable moving hassles and the absence of a job it was again the student organisation I turned to for assistance. The QUT welfare department is a true asset to students and worth its weight in gold. They helped me find a share house and job through their online services and gave me advice in regards to attaining subject credit points and financial assistance to help with the transition. Three years later on I have become a very active member in the university community, attending three University Games (2 as a player, 1 as a manager), involvement in clubs and societies, recreation courses and campus activities. I am also a member of the gym as it offers the most competitive rates for students in the CBD.

I am safe in the knowledge that if I ever have a problem whether it be academic or personal, I have the relevant support structures and representation needed from the Guild at all times.

I am eternally grateful to the Guild for providing me with the opportunities to build new networks and friendships and I know that if they were not there university could have been a very lonely experience. I am but one student in a university of 40,000 and I am sure many others feel the same or have had the same troubles I have had, if not worse. I am in the firm belief that the services student organisations provide are often the difference between a student completing their degree and dropping out, and if they cease to exist students will no longer have a safety net to fall back on if they experience difficulties. University is more than going to lectures and doing exams. The demise of all social, sporting and recreational activities on campus will destroy the university experience for all students not only here at QUT but nationwide.

To sum up I find it difficult for this bill to be introduced when the government will not listen to student concerns, university concerns nor anyone directly related to the tertiary sector. They have not even taken the time to visit these campuses that are at risk to see the importance student organisations play in university life. Why are student organisations being labelled without any substantial evidence?

I am concerned that many professional staff will lose their jobs, that student representation will be lost, that student welfare will be compromised and sporting/activity opportunities will diminish.

I hope that this legislation committee really takes into account the huge impact this could have on campuses nationwide and look past this ideologically driven bill. There are essential services that need to be maintained and this 'scorched earth' view is unacceptable. I implore you to take on these sentiments and look to a different alternative.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my concerns.

Yours sincerely,

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Member of QUT Student Guild