

Student organisations in Australia represent university students - similar to the way student councils represent secondary school students.

Student organisations run refectories, ensure that students are getting a "fair go" and ensure students get their money's worth for their education - similar to Parents and Citizens Associations in secondary schools.

Student organisations provide welfare support such as help dealing with Centrelink, providing food vouchers for the most disadvantaged students, running accommodation and employment services for students which are all vital during their first years of living away from home.

Student organisations run sporting events, tours, scholarships, clubs and awards at university.

Student organisations support the most harassed, bullied and oppressed students such as queer, indigenous, international, female students and students with disabilities.

An organisation that can manage to provide such a wide variety of important services like the ones above should be applauded, not shut down. None of the things mentioned above are funded by a user pays system in the wider community, even sport has to be supported by Local, State and Federal Governments. This is because these are not the type of services that are able to be run by a user pays system.

I am currently a student at the Queensland University of Technology. Below is an outline of how paying the compulsory student fees has more than paid off during my time at university, even when I didn't know it.

In 2001 I moved to Brisbane from Rockhampton to attend the University of Queensland. I was selected to compete for the University of Queensland tennis team at the University Games and was able to train and compete for UQ at the Northern and Australian University Games during my first year and again in my second year at UQ. I also attended college at UQ and our college student association was sponsored by the UQ Union which provided us with insurance, funding, free hire of equipment for events and cheap photocopying to advertise events around our college and the other colleges at UQ. Through college and university games I was able to make friends, continue with sport and get my first opportunity to manage sporting teams and help organise events. During my first two years at university, I did not realise that my student fee funded all this activity and resented paying it. If it was not collected automatically by the university, I would almost certainly not have paid it, not realising what the consequences of this decision would be.

I have changed degrees and am now at the Queensland University of Technology. Last year I ran for and was elected as Sport and Recreation Director of the QUT Student Guild. I work at the QUT Student Guild to improve our sport portfolio, help our clubs and societies grow and organise activities and events that students want on campus such as O-Week market days. I did not run for elections to further myself politically, I ran to help improve the QUT Student Guild, although I now have a very strong political opinion which has developed since I heard about the VSU legislation. I also sit on two university committees – QUT Disciplinary Panel and QUT Academic Board to represent students in these meetings.

I know much more about student organisations now than I did during my first two years at university and looking back on the times that I resented paying my student fees, I am now extremely glad that student fees are collected universally so that I was able to compete in University Games and receive all the opportunities I have during my time at university.

I urge the Senate Committee to remember that membership of student organisations is not compulsory. At QUT, students can choose to give their student fee to the university who spends their fee on facilities management amongst other things. If a student does decide to become a member of the QUT Student Guild and the student is not happy with the way the QUT Student Guild functions during the year, they are able to vote to change the way it is governed, or run for election themselves.

This is how a democracy works and at the moment, at the QUT Student Guild and at other student organisations around Australia, it works very well.