

To whom it may concern,

My name is Brentyn Stafford. I am a student at Swinburne University of Technology in my third year of study, and my first at degree level. I believe the presence of the student unions in their current misguided form is detrimental to the health of tertiary education, and as such, I write to you expressing my total and undying support for Voluntary Student Unionism.

Every school day, I hop on a train, come to my lectures and tutorials, and leave. I have never used a service provided by the union that I couldn't access elsewhere. I do not participate in clubs, I do not make use of the sports centre, and I don't support the union in any political issue. Hence, I do not see why I should have to pay to support such services.

The unions try to justify this by juxtaposing fees as similar to council rates: one pays a fee to access such necessities as roads, police, and water. However, such an outlook is flawed: no service offered by the unions is exclusively offered, nor crucial to students. The social clubs, activities, on-campus concerts and such offer nothing in terms of academic merit, and only serve to distract students from their studies. Other services can easily be found elsewhere: childcare, legal advice, employment assistance and food.

However, the services that council rates provide are essential to the wellbeing of the community. We all use clean water and roads and/or public transport every day. We may never need the services of the police directly, but they always serve to keep a safe and happy community.

Another important point to bring up is freedom of association. It is a basic human right that a person cannot be forced into joining an organisation. The unions (frustratingly) counter by insisting that students do have the right to opt out of membership. However, this is just not true. In the three times that I have enrolled at Swinburne, I was never once given this option. The choice simply does not exist if students are not made aware of it. Besides, under the current system, if you opt out then your fees are not refunded, they are directed elsewhere. There is little point of opting out if you have to pay the fees anyway.

The unions also raise issue with what it deems a "user-pays" system, which would mean that a person would pay for the service he/she uses on an as-needed basis, rather than being funded by the unions. What could possibly be wrong with that? Heaven forbid a person actually pays for a service he/she makes use of. If it were up to the leftist political movement, they would never pay for a thing in their lives.

Furthermore, it enrages me to no end that the unions make use of my money for advancing their political agendas. Last year, it was found that the National Union of Students wasted \$250,000 of student fees on political campaigning. Money is regularly diverted from causes worth funding to organising protests and printing of extremely leftist posters, flyers and other propaganda. I should not have to support such causes, particularly when not only am I a proud Liberal voter, but also when the unions should stay out of political issues no matter what side they support.

On the subject of politics, the unions have pounced on this legislation and painted it as another attempt by the “evil” Liberal government to “silence” students. Which is complete and utter nonsense. Apart from the fact that students do not need an organisation to be able to write letters like this one, protest and speak out against the government, this viewpoint is nothing short of hypocritical. The unions are so militantly left-biased, they hardly ever, if at all, let the right-leaning students get a word in edgewise. I have never once read any material supporting right-wing causes, Christianity or an anti-union movement in my university’s student magazine, the *Tabula Rasa*.

The unions also propound to have fought against HECS increases over time. We got a 25% increase, a fantastic job they did! What is it they’re doing with our money again? (Not that it matters to me; due to my articulation from a TAFE program to a degree last year, I am immune from the increases.) This is where the unions’ true colour show. They fight to have HECS fees lowered, but whenever their own funding is placed in jeopardy, they start whining. They don’t care about students at all, they only care about furthering their own existence.

Besides all this is the fact that support for VSU is definitely a minority – no doubt due to the unions’ clever mind conditioning. Estimates have placed such support at around 5% of the Australian student population. We can be sure, then, that the other 95% want the unions and their services to stay. Hence, the unions are losing 5% of their funding, assuming none of those 5% decide to pay anyway. Which is, quite frankly, insignificant. VSU will not magically wipe away unions. And if they did in fact start losing more money, perhaps they would think a little harder about how they spend it.

Finally, it is exasperating that nobody realises the beauty of VSU. It is just that: voluntary. The anti-VSU students simply don’t understand that this legislation is not abolishing student fees, but simply making them non-compulsory. If they want to waste their money on union membership, then they can go right ahead.

I urge the Senate in the strongest possible terms to disregard the ravings of the leftist political parties, the greedy, militant unions and their brainwashed followings of students, and vote in favour of VSU.

Faithfully,

Brentyn Stafford