

To whom it may concern

Dear Sri/Madam

I am writing to this inquiry to express my opposition to the planned abolition of compulsory student union fees. I believe that the introduction of voluntary student unionism (VSU) will reduce the quality of our universities and produce graduates with less experience and all round skills. It will make our universities less competitive on a world scale. Student unions allow students to build social networks and gain experience beyond the subject area being studied which leads to better qualified and more employable graduates, especially today, when most young people will have several different careers throughout their lifetimes.

I will exemplify what I have just said through explaining my situation and showing how student unions have helped me. My story is not unique and I believe thousands of other students across the country will have benefited in similar ways. I study science, but I do not expect that, after I graduate I will work as a scientist my entire life (even if I wanted to do so, it is a very competitive field). However, I am also interested in politics and the performing arts, both areas which my involvement in union sponsored clubs has given me experience in. When I graduate I will have a single qualification (a science degree) that was funded mostly by the Australian tax payers. However, I will also have experience in the fields of politics and the performing arts, funded by myself and my fellow students through our union fees that will give me greater opportunities for employment than I would have otherwise. I will have gotten more out of my time at university than simply a degree and the additional experience shall be at no extra cost to the tax payer, only to those who choose to attend university.

The social networks I have built through union sponsored clubs have also been invaluable. When I first started university I was very unhappy with it and seriously considered dropping out in my first year. However in second year I became involved in several union sponsored clubs through which I met several people who have since become very good friends and as a result I now enjoy university and look forward to attending every day, both to learn and to spend time with my friends. Once again, I am not alone in this situation. I am sure that nationwide thousands of students have remained in university due to the social networks they have built through clubs when they would have otherwise dropped out. Introducing VSU will mean that many clubs will no longer be able to exist as high membership fees will be required for them to run which will discourage most potential members; hence such social networks will not be able to be developed. This is likely to increase the drop out rate in universities, at the expense of the tax payers who will have paid the bulk of the cost for an unfinished degree.

The topics I have discussed above are only a very small part of the many benefits student unions provide. I am lucky in that I do not rely on the union to make it possible to attend university as some students do; it simply makes the experience for me much more worthwhile. Many students with young children would be unable to attend university at all if not for the union subsidised child care and many students may have done far worse things than dropping out of university had it not been for the counselling services many student unions provide. These are services that provide

essential aid to the disadvantaged and could not feasibly operate on a user pays system.

In conclusion I strongly urge this inquiry to do all in it's power to prevent the introduction of VSU. Thank you for your time and for listening to what I have said.  
Yours Faithfully

Robert McDougall