

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
Legislation Committee

Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005

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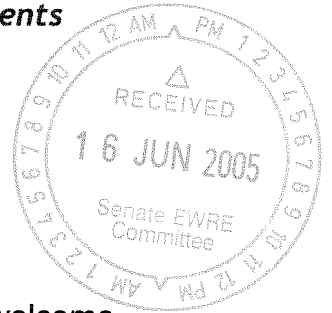
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*Listening, Working &
Delivering for Caulfield
students*



Thursday, 16 June 2005

Dear Senators,

The Australian Government's proposals to abolish amenities fees is a welcome move to many students across the country, and especially students at Monash University's Caulfield Campus.

This submission is broken into three parts:

- An analysis of **the Monash experience**;
- A summary of **six key reasons to support the abolition of high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees**; and
- **Genuine questions from non-political, non-partisan students**, with answers.

The questions and answers from students derive primarily from Monash students (at Caulfield, Clayton, Berwick, Peninsula and Gippsland Campuses) but also a small number of students from Deakin and La Trobe Universities. These questions are from students who contacted me in my role as President of the Monash University Student Union Caulfield. In the case of Monash University students, they were almost entirely in response to an email from Monash University management to all students enrolled at an Australian campus.

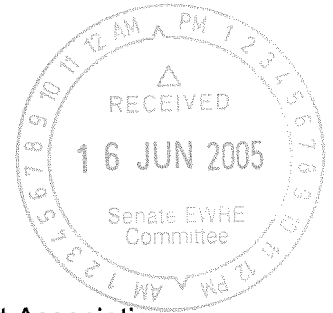
I hope that you find this document useful in your deliberations, and if you have any questions or require any further information, please feel free to contact me anytime on 0408 348 631 or (03) 9903 2567 or by email to president@monsucaulfield.org.au

Yours sincerely,

MICHAEL JOSEM

2004 & 2005 President, MONSU Caulfield

The Monash Experience



History

In 2000 Monash University approached MONSU and the Monash Student Association Clayton, (the student representative organisation on the Clayton Campus of Monash University) and Unicomm (the University controlled commercial and students services provider on the campuses of Monash University other than Caulfield and Peninsula) to establish a new cross campus student and commercial services organisation, to be called Monash Service Organisation (MSO).

MSO was an organisation that had, at the core of its aims, to provide seamless student services to the students of Monash University on all campuses of Monash University, including the newly established Malaysian and South African campuses of Monash University, to guarantee funding for student representation, to ensure student representation continued with the possible future introduction of voluntary membership of student organisations and for student services to become self funding to reduce the amenities and services fee through profits made from profitable business ventures.

After more than a year and a half of consultation and discussion between the stakeholders of the new MSO, the Deed for the Provision of Student Services, the agreement establishing the MSO, was approved by MSA (Clayton) Student Council, MONSU Caulfield Student Council, MONSU Peninsula Student Council and the MONSU Board as well as all of the relevant stakeholders within Monash University and Unicomm.

In this time efforts had already begun in establishing the structure, names and branding of this new organisation which was eventually named Monyx.

Monyx was established as an organisation that is half owned by the students of Monash University through the student representative bodies of the participating campuses, MONSU Caulfield, MSA (Clayton) and MONSU Peninsula, represented through the holding company, Students of Monash (SOM), and Monash University through Monash Commercial (Moncomm). Monyx is governed by six directors, three nominees of SOM (one from each the Caulfield, Clayton and Peninsula campuses of Monash University) and three nominees of Moncomm.

Since the first meeting of the Monyx Board on Monday, 2nd February 2003 the role of Monyx has been to run the commercial and student services component of MONSU and Unicomm.

Key Benefits

This new structure has led to a number of obvious and significant benefits for Monash students, in the form of seamless service across Monash campuses, cost benefits from delivering larger economies of scale, amongst others.

In addition, the establishment of Monyx has also enabled the organisation to increase revenue from sources other than high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees. This is being achieved in the form of food and beverage (unlike many other Universities, on-campus food outlets are run efficiently, at a profit) retail (Monyx is the second-largest post-secondary academic book retailer in the country) and other services. This enables student associations to reduce their reliance on amenities fee funding, and thereby returning profits into on-campus services.

Six Key Reasons to Support the Abolition of High, Compulsory, Up-Front and Unfair Amenities fees

1) Students Support the Idea

Overwhelmingly, students support the abolition of high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees. This is revealed by the National Union of Students' own research – in Western Australia, around 70% of students chose to not pay these unfair fees when first given the choice.¹

2) Students Will Be Better Off

The key difference that most students will notice will be several hundred extra dollars in their pocket. That's a massive step forward, and eliminates the last remaining compulsory fee of the Australian university system for Commonwealth Supported Students.

3) It's Fairer – No Up-Front Fees

Until now, only students who were able to afford the high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fee were able to study at University. This equitable and progressive move forward will allow all Australians, regardless of personal wealth, to study at university without being slugged by up-front fees.

4) Campus Services Will Be Better

Many people have claimed that under VSU, student services will be “under threat.” Student services will only be under threat in the same sense that a baker is “under threat” to bake good bread. If a baker produces bread that his customers want, he'll succeed and prosper. Alternatively, if a produces unwanted bread, he's not going to sell it, and will quickly be in trouble.

The same principle *should* be applied to student unions. If we provide good services to our members, students will happily pay for the service, and we will succeed and prosper. If we provide poor service, we'll be in trouble – and don't deserve to continue. The free market has delivered wonderful advances in every other area of our economy. Student unions are no different.

This is a simple principle: if we deliver services to students that are worth our fees, students will pay. If we don't deliver services that are worth our fees, why are we currently forcing students to pay those fees?

¹ National Union of Students, Student Organisations in Australia, online at <http://www.flinders.edu.au/stuassoc/Downloads/vsu.pdf>, p.22

5) Universities Will Be Forced To Recognise Student Association Services as Core University Services

If a particular service is a core university function (such as Careers & Employment, for example), then it should be funded out of core university revenue. If a particular service is not a core university function, students should not be slugged with high up-front fees to fund it.

One key argument against VSU is that the services provided by student associations are essential to university life, and that they should be part of a University's offering in the competition for students. The proposed bill recognises this, by allowing Universities to fund such services as they want from core university revenue.

Integrating such services with the rest of the University has led to massive service improvements at Monash University.

6) Enabling Students to Make their Own Choices

The bill will allow students to make their own decisions about which services are best for them. If none of us are fit enough to make our own decisions, how can any of us possibly make decisions for others?

This is the core issue of this debate: who is better placed to spend students' money - students, or a university bureaucracy?

Genuine Questions from Australian University Students

Each question was asked to me in my role as President of MONSU Caulfield by an Australian university student. They represent a genuine representation of queries from students, and answers from a student representative.

What would you consider to be benefits or weaknesses of the Victorian model of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU)?

The most obvious feature of the 'Victorian' model of VSU is that it is not VSU. The expenditure requirements of the Tertiary Education Act are entirely useless, as auditors across Victoria have been willing to sign off almost anything as being to the 'direct benefit' of tertiary students. While Victorian VSU was supposed to stop the radical, militant and ugly politics of student unions, it has been entirely ineffective – witness the use of high, compulsory up-front and unfair and amenities fees to purchase an axe to smash the door of the former Melbourne University Vice-Chancellor's door.

The other key weakness of the Victorian model is that people use it to distract from the real debate as little more than a smoke and mirrors trick. The real issue is that core university services should be funded from core university revenue. Non-core university services should not be funded by slugging students with high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees.

What do you think about general student awareness of VSU across Monash University?

Most students will be delighted to hear that they will not be forced to pay high, compulsory up-front and unfair and amenities fees from 2006.

While some student unions fight against it, I genuinely believe that if a fair poll were conducted of Monash students, overwhelming support would be recorded. Anecdotally, on the evening that VSU was announced, I attended a committee meeting of the Monash Marketing Students Society, and told them that, from 2006, the Australian Government was going to abolish high, compulsory up-front and unfair and amenities fees. They cheered!

Do you consider the National Union of Students (NUS) to be politically biased?

The National Union of Students has about as much independence as the ACTU. The NUS is essentially a proud, paid-up and passionate subsidiary of the Labor Party. It also has links to other, more extreme groups.

Less than a fortnight after ending her term as 2004 National President of the National Union of Students, Jodie Jansen walked straight into an adviser's role in Mark Latham's office.

The NUS proudly spent over a quarter of a million dollars on political advertising during the last election campaigning against the Coalition, on the topic of VSU – “NUS was fighting to let the community and students know about the impact of student fees under the Coalition and voluntary student unionism.”² Clearly, the Australian community has rejected that view, and the Howard Government now needs to deliver on its election commitment to high, compulsory up-front and unfair and amenities fees.

In addition, since nearly all of its funding is obtained from high, compulsory up-front and unfair and amenities fees, it is hopelessly conflicted. The NUS office bearer’s wages are ripped from the pockets of Australian students who do not want their services. If Australian students wanted the services of the NUS, they could subscribe individually.

Do you think NUS represents Australian students adequately?

The National Union of Students is a national disgrace.

In recent years, it has:

- Endorsed theft (They distributed a poster saying “If Centrelink Can’t Get You Over the Poverty Line, Try Theft”)
- Endorsed a series of violent protests and extremist political causes
- Planned to blockade street intersections near major Melbourne hospitals.
- Publicly endorsed an ‘Attack on Liberals.’
- Wasted over a quarter of a million dollars in electioneering for the Australian Labor Party.
- Flown Melbourne-based office bearers on a junket holiday to campaign for the Labor Party in Western Australia.
- Been repeatedly reprimanded by the Australian Electoral Commission for breaking the Commonwealth Electoral Act for improper authorisation of electoral material.

Felix Eldridge, the President of the NUS was quoted on National Nine News on the 16 March as stating: “It [VSU] will make Australia’s universities into an international joke and it will make them a lot less internationally competitive”. (<http://news.ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=12383>) Do you think that

²Felix Eldridge, Nat baulks at student union bill, The Australian, 31 March 2005

international students will be less inclined to study in Australia pre- VSU?

No. The United States, the largest supplier of international student education, does not have compulsory unionism. It doesn't seem to hurt their industry.

Reducing high, compulsory up-front and unfair and amenities fees by up to \$590 per annum can only increase demand for Australian educational services overseas.

What do you think about comments such as the one by journalist Ian Kirkwood, who said in the Newcastle Herald (30/03/05, p.9) "If it [the government] was really worried about people paying for services they might not use, it would get someone to look into voluntary taxation."

The analogy between high, compulsory up-front and unfair and amenities fees and taxes is intellectually bankrupt.

The reason that high, compulsory up-front and unfair and amenities fees are different from taxes is that taxes are progressive, and tied to people's wealth and ability to pay - whether it be income taxes (linked to level of income), consumption taxes (linked to level of consumption), payroll taxes (linked to payroll level), land taxes & rates (linked to land value), etc. In Australia, to the best of my knowledge, there are *no* compulsory, flat taxes (although there certainly are a few government levies tied to use of particular services).

The closest thing I can think of was a short-term, emergency measure that Jeff Kennett implemented in Victoria in the early 1990s to help the state pay off Labor's \$30billion debt. He implemented a flat \$100 land tax for a few years, to howls of protest, that was levied on every property owner in Victoria - even beach box owners. However, it was abolished soon afterwards, when he got the economy moving again, primarily because the tax was unfair.

High, compulsory up-front and unfair and amenities fees are not the same as taxes. They are unfair, flat, and have no link to the individual's ability to contribute.

I don't understand why NUS and others support high, compulsory up-front and unfair and amenities fees when student organisations get the money, but oppose voluntary up-front fees when others get the money. You can't have your cake and eat it too.

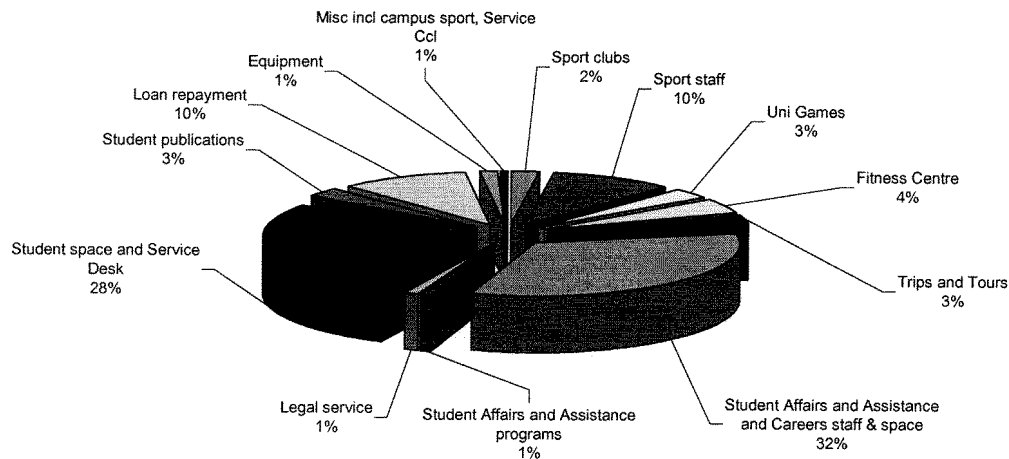
Briefly, where does the \$373.40 amenities fee go? -Is it secret information not disclosed to students?

The high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees currently paid by Caulfield students goes (as highlighted on the publicly available website online at <http://www.monash.edu.au/fees/other/amenities.html>) "employment services, sports and recreations facilities and services, student social and recreational services, and student assistance."

I've attached a more detailed break-down in a graph format that may be of more information. In addition, this information is reported in Monash University's Annual Reports to State Parliament.

Clearly, this information is not secret.

Allocation of 2005 Monash Caulfield Amenities Fee



What are the “miscellaneous services” you talk about that are currently funded by amenities fees?

The services currently provided by high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees are detailed in the graph reproduced above, and online at <http://www.monash.edu.au/fees/other/amenities.html>

The miscellaneous services in the graph above include some campus sport and administrative costs for the Caulfield Campus Service Council, the body that recommends to Monash University how to spend the amenities fee.

Will services at Caulfield such as legal representation, queer lounge etc. be under threat because they rely on set and assured funding, only possible through compulsory amenities fees?

The queer lounge is not funded from amenities fees.

The use of a phrase like “under threat” to describe the effect on other services, like legal representation, is misleading, because such services will only be “under threat” in the same sense as the local baker is under threat – if the local baker produces crap bread, customers won't pay for it. If any on-campus services, are crap, students won't pay for them. This "threat" will ensure that student services are excellent - by aligning student services with student needs, we'll all be better off.

If a service is useful to a student, they'll choose pay for it. If a service is useless to a student, they shouldn't be forced to pay for it.

I see the abolition of high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees as an opportunity for our services to be truly excellent – to ensure that they're able to serve student needs better than ever before, and to ensure that they're self-reliant.

Some people have said VSU is undemocratic. Like council rates, we should pay for services collectively (obviously not social clubs) but things like childcare. And just like council rates not everyone uses the services that they pay for (e.g. roads, street lights). What are your thoughts? Should people pay for services they may not necessarily use?

Suggestions that VSU is “undemocratic” are simply absurd. It is a fundamentally democratic concept – each individual will have a choice about how to spend their money.

The argument linking high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees to taxes is intellectually shallow.

The reason that student fees are different from taxes is that taxes are progressive, and tied to people's wealth and ability to pay - whether it be income taxes (linked to level of income), consumption taxes (linked to level of consumption), or land taxes & rates (linked to land value), etc. In Australia, to the best of my knowledge, there are *no* compulsory, flat taxes.

Compulsory, up-front fees are not the same as taxes. They are unfair, flat and have no link to the individual's ability to contribute

“Core uni revenue” is our HECS fees right? Aren't we just shifting payment of core services from amenities fees to HECS fees, which are going to mean less revenue going towards the things HECS revenue currently funds?

Monash University receives income from a variety of sources, including from Student Contributions (for Commonwealth Supported Places), but also including many other sources such as research funding, other student fees, and so on.

Disappointingly, money from Commonwealth Supported Students is currently being used to subsidise research – I believe that money would be better used funding services for the students paying the fees.

As the new legislation states, “higher education providers prohibit requiring a student to pay fees for non-academic services” How then are non-essential + non-academic services, such as on campus toilets, student microwaves, going to be funded? Is there going to be a slot next to toilets for the user to pay when they use? Is this how far you envisage the user pays system will go?

Universities will only be prevented from funding such services from compulsory, up-front fees. The services you mention are not currently funded from compulsory, up-front fees, and will not be affected.

Some services have already announced that the new legislation will make it difficult for them to continue in their current form. Such as ‘Monash Postgraduate association (MDA)’ who receives a small portion of postgraduate amenities fees that they say forms the primary source of funding for the association. How are small associations representing important but relatively minority needs going to be able to survive without the help of amenities?

They’ll be able to survive like any other service in the community – by delivering excellent services that students decide are worth supporting.

In addition, it is likely that Monash University will provide some funding from other sources for such services.

Do you think in a non-profit community based environment, such as Monash, the proposed “user-pays” system is viable?

The alternative to a “user-pays” system is a “free lunch” system. Currently, we have an external PhD student living in Philadelphia, USA, who is being forced to pay high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees for sporting facilities she’ll never see, let alone use.

Isn’t part of the ethos of the uni to protect the collective rights and needs of students?

Monash University’s website proclaims that it’s purpose is to seek “to improve the human condition by advancing knowledge and fostering creativity. It does so through research and education and a commitment to social justice, human rights and a sustainable environment.”

Only allowing students who are able to pay high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees to study at Monash University is inconsistent with principles of social justice. Denying students freedom of association is also inconsistent with human rights.

We have Universities to research, educate, and make a better world. These goals will be enhanced by abolishing high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees.

How will this be the case under the new system where the individual student

represents their individual needs?

Nothing could better represent the “collective rights and needs of students” than allowing students to make their own decisions about which organisations and services to fund.

Isn't part of the idea of the user pay's system that people will inevitably find the cheapest, most efficient service even if those services are outside campus?

The purpose of VSU is to allow students to make their own decisions about which services are best for them. If none of us are fit enough to make our own decisions, how can any of us possibly make decisions for others?

Shouldn't we be encouraging students to partake in extra-curricular activities on campus?

We should be allowing students to make their own decisions about what activities to participate in.

Where does MONSU Caulfield get their \$ from- obviously not our amenities fees right?

MONSU Caulfield receives funding from the profits of the commercial operations of Monyx Pty Ltd.

Briefly, what is MONYX? Where do they get there funding from and what is their role?

Monyx is a joint-venture between Monash University and the student associations at Caulfield, Clayton and Peninsula.

Monyx receives funding from a variety of sources, and the largest source is from commercial transactions at over 15 locations in Melbourne. Other sources include Monash University and amenities fees. Less than 20% of Monyx revenue is from amenities fees.

How are subsidised services possible at Caulfield?

Subsidised services are possible at Caulfield because students are slugged with high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees every year.

Don't some of our amenities fees go towards subsidised and free services?

Yes, some of our high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees fund subsidised services.

There's no such thing as a 'free service' – someone's paying for it, even if it is not borne by the user at the point of transaction.

Why do you think similar VSU legislation had such a detrimental effect on student services when it was released in the W.A?

The only services that may have been hurt by VSU were those services that students did not want to pay for. I disagree that the overall impact of VSU was detrimental in W.A. – students had hundreds of dollars extra in their pocket as a result.

Do we have strategies to ensure that student membership rates don't "drop to as low as 6%", as they did in W.A?

The strategy that we have is to deliver excellent services that generate value for students.

13. Why do you think we are the only Monash student union who supports the new legislation?

I support the proposals because they'll save Caulfield students \$370 per year in high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees and, in addition, deliver better services. Presumably, other student associations don't think that that's sufficient – but you'll have to ask them.

Do we operate differently/ receive funding from diff. places than the other Monash campuses?

Slightly – hopefully the earlier answers explain how.

Here are just some of the key benefits that are essential to any balanced consideration of the topic:

Currently, only students who are able to afford to pay high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees are able to study at Monash University. If the Government's proposals are enacted, students will be able to study at Australian university regardless of wealth.

Students will have an addition \$370 extra in their pocket next year to either use to fund services at Uni, or elsewhere.

By ensuring that services are better aligned with student needs (by the 'invisible hand' of the free market) student services will be improved on campus.

Students will no longer be forced to fund inappropriate services from high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees, such as external students who are paying for services they'll never see.

What is the view of the MONSU Caulfield towards the proposed abolishment of up-front student union fees?

We strongly support the move to abolish high, compulsory up-front and unfair and amenities fees. We believe that core university services (such as Sport, Careers & Employment etc.) should be funded from core university revenue. Non-core services should not be funded by slugging students compulsory up-front fees.

For example, I received an email from a student last week, who is currently completing a PhD externally, and is living in Philadelphia, USA. She is currently being forced to pay for services she will never even see, let alone use. This is clearly unfair.

Why does the MONSU Caulfield view the abolishment of compulsory amenities fees as great news for students?

We see the abolition of high, compulsory up-front and unfair and amenities fees as great news for students because they will have up to an extra \$440 in their pocket every year (Source: <http://www.monash.edu.au/fees/other/amenities.html>)

Monash students are Australia's future leading lawyers, doctors, artists, musicians, accountants, managers, politicians and scientists. They're certainly able to make decisions about what organisations they join and fund.

How can the Caulfield Union have such a differing opinion to that of other student organizations?

A particular view doesn't become 'right' (or 'wrong') on the basis of popularity. We're committed to being held to the highest possible standards, and are convinced that if we provide services that students want, students will choose to use our services.

We're convinced that our services are so good that students don't need to be forced to use them – they'll use them out of choice. I wish that other student associations provided services that were equally responsive to students' needs.

Even though many other unions are saying that the legislation will force many student services to close, the Caulfield Union is saying that the legislation will improve services, how is this so?

The proposed changes will force student services to be aligned with student needs by using the 'invisible hand' of the market. Just as the baker will go out of business if he doesn't bake bread that his customers want, student organisations will be forced to provide services that students want.

By aligning funding mechanisms with service delivery, only those services that students want will continue. Services that students don't want, but are forced to pay for, don't deserve to continue.

It's also worth highlighting that other student associations also support the legislation, including (I understand) the University of New England Student Association and the James Cook University Student Union.

Why do you think other unions would say that the legislation would affect student representation?

I can only speak on behalf of MONSU Caulfield – you'll need to ask other student unions for their view.

Does MONSU Caulfield have any plans to persuade other student organizations to support the legislation?

Our goal is to focus on representing Caulfield students to the University, Local, State and Federal Governments. We have no plans to lobby other student organisations, even though we would obviously prefer more student organisations to support our view.

How can you explain the difference in reaction toward VSU between the Caulfield and Clayton student unions? The Clayton student union sees the legislation as an attack on the student body while the Caulfield student union views it as a positive development.

We think this is great news for students for three key reasons:

1) Clayton students will have an extra \$440 in their pocket (Source: Monash Uni)- a massive help given the high costs of textbooks, transport and the cost of living

2) The new system will be fairer. Last week, I received an email from an external PhD student currently living in Philadelphia, USA, who is being forced to pay for facilities that she'll never see, let alone use. That's just not fair.

3) Services for students will improve. By forcing services to be responsive to the need of students, they will become more closely aligned with what we all want. If a particular service is good, students will choose to pay for it. If a particular service is bad, students won't pay for it - and neither should they be forced to.

Further the position of Monash University is that clubs, societies, debating and sports activities will be threatened. Surely this is not a good thing for students?

They'll only be "threatened" in the same sense that the local baker is threatened - if the local baker produces poor bread, customers won't pay for it. If clubs, or

societies, or other services, are poor, students won't pay for them. This "threat" will ensure that student services are excellent - by aligning student services with student needs, we'll all be better off.

Who provides funding for the Caulfield Student Union and the campus magazine Esperanto?

Funding for MONSU Caulfield (including its services such as the magazine Esperanto) comes from the profits of our bookshop chain, Monash Bookshop, which is the second largest post-secondary academic retailer in the country, and our food and beverage services. Both these services are operated via Monash University Campus Life (also known as Monyx).

Do you think it is possible that the Liberal government has other motives for abolishing the student amenities fees?

While it is theoretically possible, conspiracy theories about plots to destroy student unions have no credibility. It says more about the ego of student unionists than anything else. I can't imagine John Howard lying awake at night dreading the continued existence of student unions - it's just not realistic.

You say that some people are conducting a scare campaign in relation to VSU. Why would they protest against something that would reduce their university costs if they didn't have some evidence that VSU was a threat to either the student union or other student associations?

It's not a matter of having evidence, but rather, a difference of opinion. When the National Union of Students wastes a quarter of a million dollars (Source: AEC) to produce election propaganda about VSU in 2004, it's unsurprising that many people believe it.

I'm surprised just how fearful other student associations are about allowing their students to have a choice. If a student association provides good services, student will choose to fund it. I see this as an opportunity to provide more excellent services to my students.

Do you think VSU will make it "very difficult for students to have their opinions noticed" as claimed by the Clayton student association?

Individual empowerment doesn't occur as a result of a collective fee being imposed - the opposite occurs. By allowing each student to make their own decision about what services they fund and what organisations they join, their voice will be amplified through basic principles of freedom. If you like your student union, you can join it - but at the same time, if you don't like your student union, you shouldn't be forced to join it.

If what you say is true and student life is not under threat by VSU then what is

the true motivation behind the mass student rallies taking place at present?

The abolition of high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees will lead to changes - the status quo will be challenged, and student organisations will be forced to be more responsive to the market needs of students. This is confronting for many people. MONSU Caulfield, however, welcomes the challenge to be even more responsive to students, and to keep providing excellent services to students.

What has the reaction been towards the Caulfield Student Union given that you are taking a stance different to the official stance of the University?

It has been overwhelmingly positive - primarily because most students don't want to pay high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees. This has been similar to experience in Western Australia when they had VSU there - for example, at Curtin University, 90% of students chose not to join their student association (Source: NUS Research Paper).

If you could ask any question of an opponent of VSU, what you it be?

I think the key question to pose to anyone opposing VSU is this:

"Today's students are the future leading doctors, lawyers, nurses, accountants, managers, artists, musicians, engineers and scientists of this country. Why can't they be trusted to make their own decisions about what services they fund and use at university? If none of us are fit to spend our own money, how can anyone be fit to spend other people's money?"

The only thing I wanted to clarify, or perhaps for you just to explain a little more, is the point that MONSU doesn't receive any funding from amenities fees. It seems that most student unions Australia wide are funded with the amenities contributions so I don't really understand why MONSU is an exception to this. If the amenities fees from Caulfield students don't go towards the union then what are they used for?

The high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees currently paid by Caulfield students goes (as highlighted on the publicly available website online at <http://www.monash.edu.au/fees/other/amenities.html>) "employment services, sports and recreations facilities and services, student social and recreational services, and student assistance."

I've attached a more detailed break-down in a graph format that may be of more assistance.

Also any comment you'd like to make about the rally that took place last week would be interesting.

I've attached a copy of a press release that I distributed before the rally, but now that's it is over, the rally just demonstrated the whole point of VSU. For the

approximately 1% of students who attended that protest, they'll be able to keep paying their high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees if they want. For the overwhelming majority who didn't attend, they'll have choice about it.

We'll have a national referendum on this topic at the start of next year - when students enrol and decide whether to pay amenities fees.

Why is MONSU (Caulfield) supporting VSU?

We strongly support the move to abolish high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees because we believe that core university services (such as Sport, Careers & Employment etc.) should be funded from core university revenue. Non-core services should not be funded by slugging students with compulsory up-front fees.

I think, however, that the disappointing aspect of the current debate is that it is being presented as only a binary debate - there's an opportunity to discuss and debate the wider funding arrangements of Australian universities. Ideologues on "both" sides are not helping this situation.

How do you respond to claims that VSU will cause a reduction in services and a loss of university culture?

I don't think that's accurate, because I believe that students are the best people to decide which services are best for them. The only services that will be reduced will be those services that students don't want to support.

Monash students are Australia's future leading lawyers, doctors, artists, musicians, accountants, managers, politicians and scientists. I believe they're able to make decisions about what organisations they join and fund.

What did you think/how did you feel about the national day of protest held last thursday protesting against VSU?

For the approximately 0.5% of students who attended that protest, they'll be able to keep paying their up-front amenities fees if they want. For the overwhelming majority who didn't attend, they'll have choice about it.

We'll have a national referendum on this topic at the start of next year - when students enrol and decide whether to pay amenities fees.

How do you feel about the graffiti around Caulfield campus against VSU?

It's disappointing, and I condemn it strongly. Causing violence and damage is an unacceptable form of political protest.

It also highlights the sinister undertone of some extremists who are opposing VSU. Their opposition to choice and freedom is now being imposed upon us by vandalism and graffiti. It's just wrong.

How do you respond to claims that VSU is specifically targeting student activism, and suppressing students voice in political debate?

Individual empowerment doesn't occur as a result of a collective fee being imposed - the opposite occurs. By allowing each student to make their own decision about what services they fund and what organisations they join, their voice will be amplified through basic principles of freedom. If you like your student union, you can join it - but at the same time, if you don't like your student union, you shouldn't be forced to join it.

Farm lobbyists are funded by voluntary contributions from farmers. Trade Union lobbyists are funded by voluntary contributions from workers. Road lobbyists are funded by voluntary contributions from drivers. Student Union lobbyists should be funded by voluntary contributions from students.

Do you have a message for other student unions such as the MSA at Clayton who are against VSU?

Our goal is to focus on representing Caulfield students to the University, Local, State and Federal Governments. We have no plans to lobby other student organisations, even though we would obviously prefer more student organisations to support our view.

We believe that by providing excellent services that deliver value to students any student union can succeed and prosper.

Do you, either yourself or the MONSU Caulfield, believe the VSU legislation will affect student representation?

VSU will enhance student representation, and give greater validity to the voices of student representatives.

Farm lobbyists have legitimacy because they're funded by voluntary contributions from farmers. Trade Union lobbyists have legitimacy because they are funded by voluntary contributions from workers. Road lobbyists have legitimacy because they are funded by voluntary contributions from road users. Student lobbyists should be funded by voluntary contributions from students.

Individual empowerment doesn't occur as a result of a collective fee being imposed - the opposite occurs. By allowing each student to make their own decision about what services they fund and what organisations they join, their voice will be amplified through basic principles of freedom. If you like your student union, you can join it - but at the same time, if you don't like your student union, you shouldn't be forced to join it.

It's important to remember that many students don't want the representation that student associations provide for them - in Western Australia, under VSU, 62% (Murdoch Uni) to 90% (Curtin Uni) didn't want to join their student association.

Whom is MONSU Caulfield funded by?

MONSU Caulfield receives funding from the profits of the commercial operations of Monyx Pty Ltd.

This includes operations such as the Monash Bookshop chain, food and beverage operations and other consulting services.

Will abolition of amenities fees, lead to an increase in CSP fees? If the university has to pay for more essential services.

Monash's CSP fees are already at the legislated maximum, and I understand that the Howard Government has ruled out any increases in these fees.

How will abolition of this fee, ensure services are more closely aligned to student needs?

The proposed changes will force student services to be aligned with student needs by using the 'invisible hand' of the market. Just as the baker will go out of business if he doesn't bake bread that his customers want, student organisations will be forced to provide services that students want.

By aligning funding mechanisms with service delivery, only those services that students want will continue. Services that students don't want, but are forced to pay for, don't deserve to continue.

Simply put: If a service is worthwhile, students will choose to support it. If a service is not worthwhile, why are we forcing students to fund it?

Will clubs like Monash Sport face closure should the bill be passed?

No - We believe that core university services (such as Sport, Careers & Employment etc.) should be funded from core university revenue. Non-core services should not be funded by slugging students compulsory up-front fees.

For example, I received an email from a student last week, who is currently completing a PhD externally, and is living in Philadelphia, USA. She is currently being forced to pay for services she will never even see, let alone use. This is clearly unfair.

How are our amenities fees being spent at the moment?

The high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees currently paid by Caulfield students goes (as highlighted on the publicly available website online at

<http://www.monash.edu.au/fees/other/amenities.html>) "employment services, sports and recreations facilities and services, student social and recreational services, and student assistance."

I've attached a more detailed break-down in a graph format that may be of more assistance.

Quote from your newsletter "Some people are deliberately deceiving students about these changes and claiming that amenities fees currently fund health and counseling services, academic support, food outlets, theatre and music" So who are currently funding these services?

Health and Counselling services are provided by a department of Monash University, "Community Services." Academic Support is provided by Monash University's "Language and Learning Services" (<http://www.celts.monash.edu.au/about/units/lis/>). Both these services are funded from core university revenue.

Food outlets, operated by Monyx and various private operators, run at a profit, and therefore don't involve any funding from elsewhere.

There are no theatre services operating on campus, although MONSU Caulfield last week approved a trial service, with funding from profits of our catering and bookshop operations.

There are no music services operating on campus, although the Academic Director has sponsored a couple of recitals, both of which were funded from core university revenue.

I think the point here is that core university services (such as health and counseling services, academic support, employment, sport, etc.) should be funded from core university revenue, and that we should not fund non-core services by slugging students with high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees.

What services do MONSU currently provide? and who are currently funding these services?

We run a series of events and activities and personal development for students. We also provide representation and work to keep students informed of relevant issues. These services are funded from the profits of our catering and bookshop operations (and a few other minor revenue streams).

Why is MONSU not against VSU like many other Student Unions of other universities?

We think this is great news for students for four key reasons:

1) Caulfield students will have up to an extra \$370 in their pocket each and every year- a massive help given the high costs of textbooks, transport and the cost of living

2) The new system will be fairer. Last week, I received an email from an external PhD student currently living in Philadelphia, USA, who is being forced to pay for facilities that she'll never see, let alone use. That's just not fair.

3) Services for students will improve. By forcing services to be responsive to the need of students, they will become more closely aligned with what we all want. If a particular service is good, students will choose to pay for it. If a particular service is bad, students won't pay for it - and neither should they be forced to.

4) It will ensure that the Universities recognise that many services which are currently funded by slugging students with high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees are actually core services, and should be funded from core university revenue.

If according to you, MONSU will not be affected by the introduction of VSU then in theory it won't affect other Student Unions of other universities given that all unions operate in similar way. So why are these people protesting?

The protestors (presumably) disagree with the four key reasons for supporting the abolition of high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees that I've listed above.

One of the key effects that is scary to many people who are currently have their salaries paid by high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees is #3 above - under VSU, crap services won't survive, because students will choose not to fund them. While some other people might be scared of this, I think it's an opportunity to provide even more excellent services than we currently provide. We don't measure ourselves by "mediocrity," but rather, by "excellence." Our services should be good enough for students to choose to support them - if students are only supporting our services because they're forced to, we might as well pack up and go home.

On what grounds are they protesting on? what are their arguments for compulsory union fees? what are the arguments against VSU?

While I'd prefer not to get into highlighting arguments in favour of compulsory union fees (I'm obviously biased, and don't want to lead you up the garden path), two of the strongest arguments that I've heard are:

A) Student unions need an income stream, independent of universities, so that they can challenge them from time to time without fear or favour.

(This is weak because we don't currently have this system, and no one is genuinely advocating an introduction of a system whereby student unions set the fees)

B) The services contribute to the whole campus, and thus all students should fund them like a tax.

(This is weak because all Australian taxes are progressive - wealthy people pay more. A flat tax on students is unprecedented)

Please provide any other information that you think can help me on this topic. eg. websites, references etc.

Pro VSU:

<http://www.dest.gov.au/ministers/nelson/main.asp>

<http://www.alsf.org.au>

Anti-VSU:

<http://www.unistudent.com.au>

<http://www.msa.monash.edu.au>

What is the VSU?

The Government's bill, commonly known as "Voluntary Student Unionism," (or just "VSU") is a bill containing two key proposals. The bill will prevent universities from "requiring a person to become a member of a student association" (already optional at Monash) and to prevent universities "requiring a student to pay fees for non-academic student services."

The relevant part of the legislation will prevent Monash University from charging compulsory up-front amenities fees from next year. This is a progressive move to ensure that services are more closely aligned to student needs.

What impact will this have on universities as a whole, if any?

Universities will be prevented from charging compulsory up-front fees for HECS-based students.

What arguments are in favour of the VSU?

1. Students Support the Idea

Overwhelmingly, students support the abolition of high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees. This is revealed by the National Union of Students' own research – in Western Australia, around 70% of students chose to not join a student union when given the choice.³

2. Students Will Be Better Off

The key difference that most students will notice will be several hundred extra dollars in their pocket. That's a massive step forward, and eliminates the last remaining compulsory fee of the Australian university system for Commonwealth Supported Students.

³ National Union of Students, Student Organisations in Australia, online at <http://www.flinders.edu.au/stuassoc/Downloads/vsu.pdf>, p.22

3. It's Fairer – No Up-Front Fees

Until now, only students who were able to afford the high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fee were able to study at University. This equitable and progressive move forward will allow all Australians, regardless of personal wealth, to study at university without being slugged by up-front fees.

4. Campus Services Will Be Better

Many people have claimed that under VSU, student services will be “under threat.” Student services will only be under threat in the same sense that a baker is “under threat” to bake good bread. If a baker produces bread that his customers want, he’ll succeed and prosper. Alternatively, if a produces unwanted bread, he’s not going to sell it, and will quickly be in trouble.

The same principle *should* be applied to student unions. If we provide good services to our members, students will happily pay for the service, and we will succeed and prosper. If we provide poor service, we’ll be in trouble – and don’t deserve to continue. The free market has delivered wonderful advances in every other area of our economy. Student unions are no different.

This is a simple principle: if we deliver services to students that are worth our fees, students will pay. If we don’t deliver services that are worth our fees, why are we currently forcing students to pay those fees?

5. Universities Will Be Forced To Recognise Student Association Services as Core University Services

If a particular service is a core university function (such Careers & Employment, for example), then it should be funded out of core university revenue. If a particular service is not a core university function, students should not be slugged with high up-front fees to fund it.

One key argument against VSU is that the services provided by student associations are essential to university life, and that they should be part of a University’s offering in the competition for students. The proposed bill recognises this, by allowing Universities to fund such services as they want from core university revenue.

Integrating such services with the rest of the University has led to massive service improvements at Monash University.

6. Enabling Students to Make their Own Choices

The bill will allow students to make their own decisions about which services are best for them. If none of us are fit enough to make our own decisions, how can any of us possibly make decisions for others?

This is the core issue of this debate: who is better placed to spend students’ money - students, or a university bureaucracy?

What arguments are not in favour of the VSU?

You’d be better off asking that of someone who opposes VSU – any arguments I offered you would only be seen as self-serving.

What are the chances of the VSU going through?

I think it is highly likely that it will be endorsed by the Federal Parliament. It's a good idea, and it should be supported.

What is MONSU Caulfield's stance on the VSU, and what campaigns are they currently running if any?

We strongly support the move to abolish high, compulsory up-front and unfair and amenities fees. We believe that core university services (such as Sport, Careers & Employment etc.) should be funded from core university revenue. Non-core services should not be funded by slugging students compulsory up-front fees.

For example, I recently received an email from a student, who is currently completing a PhD externally, and is living in Philadelphia, USA as an Australian citizen. She is currently being forced to pay for services she will never even see, let alone use. This is clearly unfair.

In terms of campaigns that we're running, we are doing the following:

- ensuring that students understand the debate
- consulting and seeking students' views on the debate
- representing the views of our students to relevant stakeholders

In the last study of attrition rates by the Department of Education, Science and Training, Deakin University had the highest attrition rate for domestic students in 2002 (22%) and Melbourne Uni had the lowest (10.9%). Why do you think there is such a difference in these results?

I believe that the largest factor influencing 'attrition' or 'drop out' rates relates to the demographics of students attending a particular institution. I understand that some research has been conducted on this topic, and it has found that those students who have trouble affording the cost of living drop out to focus on work and other activities.

Students currently facing significant economic problems will be significantly helped by the abolition of high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees. They will no longer be slugged with high fees at the start of each semester or year, when they are also forced to pay for textbooks, and, in many cases, face challenges such as moving out of home, setting up a house, and so on. People struggling financially will be amongst the biggest beneficiaries of the Government's move to abolish high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees.

Who's responsibility do you think it is to lower attrition rates? Should this be funded by the university or it's student union?

People decide to cease studying university for a variety of reasons - it is not simply a case of universities (or student unions) having insufficient funds. The abolition of high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees will only help to reduce 'attrition' rates. It's also important to remember that many students leave university because it is not right for them - they enrol (often after experiencing significant pressure from

family and society) at university in particular courses without a genuine desire to complete the course. Students should not be pressured to attend university if they do not wish to.

Monash had an attrition rate of 15.5%, 2% lower than the state average. What do you believe your student union does to help lower attrition?

We provide services relevant to students needs, especially in terms of supporting students' social networks.

To what extent do you believe a student union can keep its students in uni?

We believe that a student union should support its students to make the best decision for each student - staying in university is not right for everyone, and we wouldn't advocate it for everyone. For those students, however, who do wish to stay at university, student unions are able to support this.

What is Monash University's Student Union's stance on VSU?

We support the abolition of high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees because:

1. Students Support the Idea

Overwhelmingly, students support the abolition of high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees. This is revealed by the National Union of Students' own research – in Western Australia, around 70% of students chose to not join a student union when given the choice.

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This is the core issue of this debate: who is better placed to spend students' money - students, or a university bureaucracy?

Why do you believe some universities are more scared about VSU than others?

That's a matter to speak to other universities or student unions about, however, the abolition of high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees will force changes. It will force us to work harder to serve students. We'll have to work smarter to deliver services that students choose to fund. No longer will we be able to continue, reliant on a compulsory fee. We'll have to deliver services that students actually want.

That's challenging for many people. The status quo is comfortable. The mediocre is easy. The future, of change, progress and excellence, is unknown. We'll have to be excellent - not merely adequate. Unsurprisingly, many people don't like that.

Do you think that by introducing VSU, student union's wont be able to reach out and help a lot of "at risk" students who may need support? (Academic support, health services support etc)

No. Academic Support and Health Services at Monash University, and, I understand, at Deakin University are funded out of core university revenue. Core university services should be funded by core university services - not by slugging students with high, compulsory up-front and unfair amenities fees.

If a student decides that a particular service provided by a student union is worthwhile, they'll choose to support it. It's how the rest of the world works, and it should work just fine for universities.