

# FLINDERS POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

---

## SENATE ENQUIRY INTO VOLUNTARY STUDENT UNIONISM

Submitted by: Mr Nigel Palmer, President  
Flinders Postgraduate Students' Association

Address: GPO Box 2100  
Adelaide, SA 5001

Phone: (08) 8201 3174  
Fax: (08) 8201 3232

Email: [postgrad.assoc@flinders.edu.au](mailto:postgrad.assoc@flinders.edu.au)

## **Senate Enquiry into Voluntary Student Unionism**

On 16<sup>th</sup> March the Minister for Education Science & Training, Dr. Brendan Nelson, introduced into Parliament the Higher Education Support Amendment Bill 2005 proposing the abolition of compulsory up-front student services fees. In Australia, as in Europe and North America, the compulsory student services fee provides the funding base for student organisations, and consequently student services. The passing of this Bill will seriously disadvantage students by adversely affecting their access to services necessary to their academic progress. This submission is presented by the Flinders Postgraduate Students Association and draws attention to the adverse affects this bill will have on the abilities and opportunities of current and future students to successfully undertake and complete their postgraduate education. Background information about the Association, its function, aims and achievements is also included.

### **Background Information**

The Flinders Postgraduate Students Association is concerned with the welfare of postgraduate students. The Executive body of the Association is comprised of elected postgraduate students. The election process is extremely low key, political affiliations of candidates are not a consideration and PGSA funds are not used for election campaigns.

The majority of postgraduates who nominate for positions on the Executive do so because of prior contact with the PGSA, either at induction programs, training seminars or because of information, advice or assistance they have received. Apart from the President, who is paid a small honorarium, members of the Executive are unpaid volunteers.

The PGSA aims to ensure that postgraduate students have a voice in the University decisions that affect them. The Association is also charged with protecting and promoting the rights and interests of postgraduate students. In meeting these aims and objectives the PGSA provides a range of essential services to students that are funded entirely from the student services fee collected each semester. These services include:

- Free computer training and academic skill development programs for honours and postgraduate coursework students.
- Small grants to assist postgraduate coursework students suffering economic hardship purchase essential academic materials
- Advocacy – providing one-on-one support and help with problems affecting students' academic performance and progress, including formal student appeals and grievances.
- Providing advice and information about supervision, candidature, assessment, teaching methods, scholarships, intellectual property, fees, resources and facilities and all other matters affecting students' academic performance and progress.

- Training and advising postgraduate student representatives sitting on university committees
- Attending university committee meetings
- Contributing to reviews of postgraduate courses and programs, resources and facilities
- Participating in university quality and review processes (i.e. AUQA Audits)
- Monitoring student fees and charges
- Free loan of videos, textbooks and journals to improve students' academic skills and professional development
- Free delivery of resources and free telephone consultations for external students
- Handbook and regular email bulletins with information about scholarships, seminars, conferences, publishing opportunities, university policies and procedures

The Flinders Postgraduate Students' Association is an independent and autonomous body that exists alongside five other independent student organisations; Clubs & Societies, Sports Association, Flinders University Union, The Students' Association of Flinders University and Flinders International Students Association. Together, we provide a further range of valuable services to students, just a few of which are listed below:

- Low cost, flexible childcare
- Subsidised food outlets
- A Health Food store
- 96 Student sports and social clubs
- Resources and support for international students
- Welfare and financial counselling
- Sports and recreation facilities

The student services fee funds all these activities. All of the above mentioned services are essential having evolved in response to student needs and each student has access to them whenever they want them. If the proposed Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Student Union Fees) 2005 (Voluntary Student Unionism or "VSU") Bill as currently proposed becomes law, these organisations will lose their funding base and the essential student services they provide will cease to exist. The following examples illustrate the importance of the PGSA's activities to postgraduates and the adverse effects for students if this occurs.

## 1. Postgraduate Student Representation

Postgraduate student representatives play an important role on behalf of the student body. Their main responsibility is to represent the needs and interests of postgraduate students on all the major University Committees, working parties and advisory groups. These include:

- Council
- Academic Senate
- University Research Higher Degree Committee
- Resources Committee
- Fee Monitoring & Advisory Committee
- Research Advisory Committee
- Scholarships Committee
- Occupational Health, Safety & Welfare Committee
- Information & Technology Users Group
- Course Reference Group

The President also meets regularly with the Deputy-Vice Chancellors (Research & Academic) to discuss issues of concern to postgraduate students.

There are two major reasons why postgraduate student representation on University Committees is important. Firstly, it is the single most important method for enabling students to participate in decisions that affect them and, secondly, it contributes to their professional and personal development as it provides students with useful skills and opportunities that are beneficial in their academic life. These benefits are aptly demonstrated in the attached article written by Dr. Kathleen O'Toole (see Appendix A).

The following are a few of the issues raised by postgraduates and acted upon by their student committee members that illustrate how important student representation is for addressing postgraduate issues and initiating improvements for the benefit of the entire student body:

*Supervision training*

*Equalising the Thesis Allowance grant for non-scholarship holders*

*Formal skill development training for Research Higher Degree Students*

*Induction Programmes for Research Higher Degree Students*

*Policy on Minimum Resources for Research Higher Degree Students*

*Students' Intellectual Property Rights*

*Research Student Maintenance for students undertaking coursework degrees that have a research component*

*Revision of the Annual Review of Student Progress*

*Revision of Fee Structure for postgraduate coursework programs*

*Revision of Guidelines for the allocation of scholarships*

*Revision of Examination Procedures for Research Higher Degrees*

*Revision of Policy on Animal and Human Ethics and Biosafety*

Being a student representative on University Committees can be a daunting experience for students, even when they have had substantial experience in their private and professional lives. Committee work can also be extremely time-consuming. To enable students to participate effectively on behalf of the student body, postgraduate student representatives are trained in meeting procedures by PGSA staff, both of whom are very experienced and have extensive knowledge of the University, its structures, policies and procedures and decision-making processes. Because the PGSA staff are in daily contact with students as well as academic and administrative staff they are able to provide up to date information and advice about all matters covered by each of the committees. In addition, the PGSA staff provides administrative support for postgraduate student representatives serving on University Committees.

Postgraduate student representatives receive no pay, awards or study concessions for the work they do. Furthermore, they generally remain involved with the PGSA for the duration of their candidature and often remain in contact with staff and other Executive members after graduation. The fact that they do so is not only testimony to their commitment, but also the efforts of their postgraduate predecessors and hardworking staff, who are the single most important resource for the successful accomplishments of postgraduate representation.

If VSU becomes law, the PGSA will have no funding base and its infrastructure, including staff, office premises and equipment will no longer exist. Without the support of an established infrastructure postgraduate representation cannot be effective. It is the right of all students to have a voice in University decisions that affect them. Postgraduates may still elect to be student representatives, but they will be operating in isolation with no training, no support or reliable access to the student body and without a solid knowledge base to draw on. The right of students to have a voice in University decision making is recognised throughout Australia and overseas. **VSU not only threatens to erode effective postgraduate representation but will also violate students' rights to have their needs, interests and concerns heard and taken seriously by those in positions of Authority within the University.**

## 2. Essential Services

### 2.1 *Advocacy*

Students' rights to have access to an independent advocate is supported in University Policy and one of the major functions of the Postgraduate Students' Association is to provide advice, support and assistance to students experiencing problems that adversely affect their academic performance and progress.

The advocate assists students with a range of matters including:

- Supervision
- Assessment
- Thesis examination
- Resources & facilities
- Candidature
- Academic progress
- Course fee disputes
- Suspension/expulsion/preclusion
- Intellectual property disputes
- Harassment and bullying

Advocacy is often a lengthy and time-consuming process requiring a considerable allocation of PGSA staff time and resources. On average the PGSA receives an estimated 2000 enquiries every year from postgraduate students seeking information, advice and assistance with concerns and problems affecting their academic performance and progress. In addition the PGSA Research Staff are actively involved in resolving complex, long-term problems for approximately 100-120 students each year. Some of the cases may take weeks or months to resolve fully and often students require ongoing support from the PGSA for the duration of their candidature. The service is confidential and the primary aim is to facilitate students completing their degrees in a timely fashion. The PGSA staff are experienced advocates with extensive knowledge on all aspects of the University's grievances procedures and the PGSA serves as a contact point for both students and staff for information, advice and assistance with problems, conflicts and disputes. The PGSA also serves as a referral point for University departments, units and staff who see postgraduate students experiencing problems, i.e. the Equal Opportunity Unit, Student Learning Centre, Health & Counselling Services, Fees Office, AusAID Liaison Officer, International Office, Faculty and School Offices.

If VSU becomes law the advocacy service provided by the PGSA will no longer exist. Students may still approach staff in any of the above mentioned University departments and Units and while they can all provide emotional support and counselling, as employees of the University, they cannot advocate on behalf of students. The importance of this service to individual students and the potential adverse effects if the VSU Bill is passed is evidenced by the following example.

### Student Case June 2002 – January 2003

A PhD student contacted the PGSA for advice concerning an ongoing intellectual property dispute that they had been unable to resolve by their own efforts and subsequently sought legal advice resulting in a debt of \$8,000. Not only had the problem not been resolved but the student was faced with a debt they could not possibly repay. Eventually, the student contacted the PGSA Advocate who was able to negotiate an outcome with the University for the student that included the clearing of his debt.

Although this may appear an extreme example, the commercialisation of students' intellectual property is becoming more prevalent and it is inevitable that disputes of this kind involving students and supervisors will arise. Intellectual property disputes are complex and often fraught with difficulty for students who are not only vulnerable and powerless, but also, unlike the University, are not in a position to pay the high costs of independent legal advice. Also postgraduate research is often a solitary endeavour and students simply do not have either the time or the expertise to negotiate their way unaided through the array of problems, conflicts and mishaps that are likely to occur during their 4 years of candidature. In these kinds of situations, the vast experience and knowledge of the PGSA is especially important for assisting students to facilitate positive outcomes with minimal impact on their academic performance and progress.

The following student comments also highlight the value of the advocacy service:

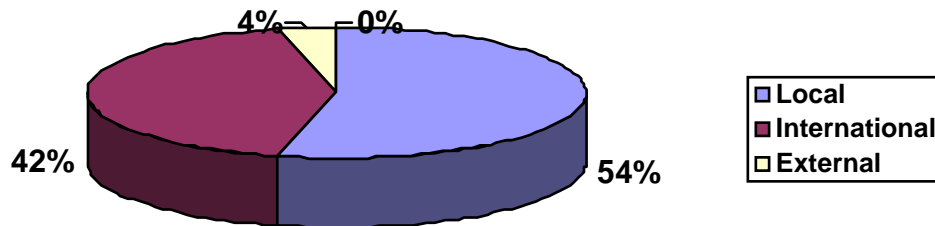
*recently, i found myself in a difficult situation with my supervisors.... as a student i was confused and disturbed by their actions, and my questioning to the supervisors to gain further understanding was squashed. consequently not only was i confused and disturbed but felt isolated and alone without a knowledge of how to go about addressing the situation. fortunately for me, another student advised i see the student representatives. this lead to me having an independent person to speak with about my concerns, who understood the university concerns better than i did. Consequently the student rep informed me of university requirements, procedures and thus gave me a better understanding of other agendas apart from my own. This person also set up a meeting with my supervisors and the research administrator of the department, but most importantly, came with me to that meeting to be my voice. with that persons guidance and knowledge, we were able to discuss and negotiate an outcome that was positive for all parties concerned. As such, I have regained my enthusiasm for my studies and will be continuing, where as at the time i had thought of dropping out, which would have had a very negative effect on my and would not have been the best outcome for the industry partners and the university department. I found the PGSA's strategies for resolving problems, wisdom and guidance priceless. Most extraordinary was the PGSA's focus on gaining positive outcomes for all parties, not just the student. The university, not just the students, cannot do without this association. If another system was to be put in place to replace the current student services provided, it has a very high benchmark to achieve. The Student Associations is a critical component to the university*

*life and bridges the gap between university beauracracy (sic) and student.*  
(Email received from PhD Student 2005).

*The potential loss of the PGSA through Voluntary Student Unionism threatens students' skill building and particular post-grad advocacy where no-one else intends to or can step into the void. The PGSA offers without favour, timely advice and a seasoned wealth of resources to all post grads as they face new challenges peculiar to their higher degrees. The PGSA must be preserved if the success rate of post grads is to be preserved!*  
(Email received from Postgraduate Student 2005)

Advocacy is especially important for international students and the numbers requiring direct assistance from the PGSA to resolve their problems has grown over the last few years

#### **PGSA's Caseload 2004: Distribution by Mode of Attendance**



Advocacy not only provides vital support to students in need, but also contributes to improving University policies and procedures. This serves the dual purpose of assisting students and promoting successful completions. Examples of how advocacy has identified and improved the quality of postgraduate experience at Flinders University are mentioned below,

- Specific Policy & procedures section for research higher degrees students & coursework students with a research component
- Implementation of Faculty Induction programs for students
- Training and induction for new supervisors
- Specific statements on the responsibilities of supervisor, AOU and University to students
- parity in thesis allowances for non-scholarship holders
- improvements to the Examination and arbitration process
- free skill development training for RHDS



- improvements to guidelines for the allocation of scholarships
- preparation of a Statement of Minimum Resources
- contributions to the student section of Intellectual Property Policy to ensure students rights are protected
- implementation of a Required Program of Structured Activities for students
- improvement to submission of Thesis process
- introduction of “Thesis Write-up Stipend” to improve completion rates

The PGSA also participates in external and internal course reviews. As well as collecting information from students enrolled in each particular course under review the PGSA also utilises the data collected from the Advocacy Caseload. This enables the PGSA to identify gaps, problems, flaws etc. in academic policies and practices that need to be improved. In the period 2003/04 the PGSA prepared submissions to the following reviews of graduate programmes offered in each of the University’s four faculties:

- Graduate Program in Public Policy and Management
- Master of Audiology
- Master of Biotechnology
- Master of Education
- Master of Nutrition & dietetics
- Graduate programs in Business administration
- Graduate programs in Technology
- Postgraduate programs in the School of Nursing and Midwifery

The PGSA provides a platform for students to comment freely, and without fear of reprisal to University reviews. Students are in the best position to identify positive and negative aspects of courses and identify areas in need of improvement. In this regard the PGSA makes a significant contribution to ensuring the quality of programs offered to students at Flinders University.

## *2.2 Computer Training & Academic Skill Development Programs*

Since its inception as an independent student organisation, the PGSA has always recognised the importance of equipping students with a range of both generic and specialised skills. As one of its first tasks, the Association organised induction programs and skill development seminars for honours and research higher degree students. In response to the introduction of the Research Training Scheme (RTS) the Office of Research contacted the PGSA to discuss its existing training and skill development programs. Following these discussions the University agreed to fund the training program for research higher degree students through its Staff Training and Development Unit. This has been highly successful and is widely recognised within the Higher Education Sector as an innovative model for research training.

In the past few years there has been a proliferation of postgraduate coursework programmes. Many of them include a research component of some kind and contribute

significantly to the research output of the university. It is also evident from our experience that the candidates require equivalent levels of knowledge and skills to those used by research higher degree students. Nevertheless, postgraduate coursework students are not recognised under the Research Training Scheme.

Furthermore, many of the candidates, especially those with a health, teaching or business background have either not been to University at all or have been absent from study for long periods of time. Consequently, many simply do not have the high level of specialised skills to produce work of the academic standard expected at postgraduate level. It is also the case that large numbers of international postgraduates undertake coursework degrees and they too face even greater problems that can only be overcome through regular and extensive academic training and skill development.

While the University has accepted responsibility for training research students it does not provide equivalent programs for the skill development of fee-paying postgraduate coursework students. Since, postgraduate coursework students do not have access to the University training programs for research students they are dependent upon the PGSA in meeting their research training and academic skill development requirements. In this regard the PGSA provides a range of computer training and academic skill development programmes for postgraduate coursework students, including:

- *Critical Thinking*
- *Organising and Writing an Essay/Assignment*
- *Assignment Writing Workshops*
- *Referencing Techniques*
- *Thesis Writing for honours Students in the Sciences*
- *Thesis Writing for honours Students in Social Sciences, Education Humanities, Theology and Law*
- *Scholarship Applications*
- *Endnote 1 & II*
- *Basic Word*
- *Basic Excel*
- *Powerpoint*
- *Formatting Long Documents*

The courses are organised by the P.G.S.A. and the costs funded entirely by the portion of the student services fee allocated to the P.G.S.A. The demand for courses are high and places usually filled within hours of being announced. This service is particularly important for international students and the P.G.S.A. serves as a resource for University departments and staff in charge of international students such as the International Office, School/Faculty Offices and Course Coordinators. The following email is one example of the collaboration between the PGSA and University departments and staff:

I look after the School of Education's offshore programs. We have a group of 8 Thai EdD students coming to Flinders for a study tour in October for 4 weeks. ((10 October – 4 November). They are third year into their EdD program and have done all their course work topics. They are in the process of finishing their two research projects (some of them have almost completed their first project).

I'm interested to know whether you will be able to provide them with some seminars/workshops during their stay here. Alternatively, if there will be other seminars that are scheduled during that period, can you please let me know so that I can make bookings for them?

Look forward to hearing from you.

Kind Regards

(Email received: June 2005)

**After VSU, funding will not be available and the computer training and academic skill development programmes will cease to exist.** The only remaining avenues for postgraduates to seek assistance with their skills are the Student Learning Centre and academic staff. Both are already over burdened and simply do not have either the time or resources to provide the range of specialised programmes postgraduates need and have come to expect. As a result postgraduate coursework students will either have to forgo essential academic training and skill development or pay private service providers. Currently, the average costs for computer training in the private sector is around **\$300 per session** and the basic rate for a private tutor is between **\$30.00** and **\$50.00 per hour**. Furthermore, the largest group of Postgraduate coursework students are women, many of whom are already struggling to pay large amounts of money in tuition fees, so it is highly unlikely that they could ever afford to meet the additional costs of training. Without access to this service, many will not complete their degrees, performing badly and withdrawing or failing and being unable to pay again to repeat. The impact of VSU on postgraduate coursework students could be devastating.

### 2.3 *Postgraduate Coursework Student Grant*

The PGSA is aware of the financial burden facing postgraduate coursework students and one of the ongoing aims has been to assist students experiencing financial difficulties. In 2002 the PGSA was successful in obtaining funds from the Student Organising Committee to establish the Postgraduate Coursework Student Grant Scheme. The main purpose of this grant is to assist postgraduate coursework students suffering economic hardship with the financial costs of academic materials essential to their study. The grant is offered twice a year at the beginning of each semester.

So far the PGSA has provided \$45,700.00 in grants to assist postgraduate coursework students on low incomes with the costs of study materials essential to their course. The grant scheme is highly valued by postgraduate coursework students and the number of applicants has always exceeding the funding available. The majority of coursework students at Flinders, and no doubt elsewhere, are women. Many are returning to study after long periods caring for families. It is also well documented that women are over-represented among low income earners and that this, in addition to the escalating costs of up-front fees, decreases their opportunities to participate in higher education. The demographic information about recipients of the Coursework Grant in 2004 supports these findings:

- Average weekly was \$258.00 per week

- 43% of Grant recipients earned less than \$200.00 per week
- 63% of recipients with weekly earnings of less than \$200.00 per week were women
- Disposable income after general weekly expenditure ranged from \$10.00 - \$30.00 per week
- The most frequent item for which the grant was used was essential reading material for the topic (i.e. text books)
- Costs of text books essential to courses ranged in price from \$89.00 to \$144.00 each.
- Most applicants listed 3 essential books per topic

If this bill is passed the grant scheme will not continue and for students on low incomes, especially women, who are already struggling, the prospect of successful and timely completions would be far more difficult to achieve.

#### 2.4 *Childcare*

A significant number of postgraduates have children and require full-time or casual childcare, vacation and after school care. Childcare is expensive and can be inflexible. The Parents Centre funded by the Students' Organising Committee provides a range of childcare arrangements to suit individual student needs.

This vital service saves students hundreds of dollars per year. For example, the Parents' Centre which is funded by the student services fee, charges students **\$60.00 per semester for one child** plus **\$5.00 for each additional child**. By comparison, the closest private childcare facility available to students at Flinders, charges **\$235.00 per week for 1 child** and even if students on low incomes are entitled to the full amount of government subsidies they still have to pay the gap fee of **\$94.00 per week**. According to one student, private childcare would cost her more than she pays in rent per week and if the child care service was no longer available because of VSU she might not be able to complete her degree.

### 3 Student Comments

In preparing this submission the PGSA contact students informing them of the Senate enquiry and inviting them to contribute comments. Of the numerous comments received only one student opposed compulsory collection of student services fees and only one was critical of the PGSA. These have been including in the selection of student comments presented below:

[I am very upset at the move \(although my thesis is the excuse I tell myself that I have not written directly to the Minister to say so\). It seems based in a ideological \(sic\) position which sees the word "union" and therefore despises it. There is no appreciation that student unionism is primarily about the provision of student services on campus. I wonder what would happen if everyone simply](#)

replaced the word "Union Fee" with "Student Services Fee". I am particularly concerned about those for whom university study is a struggle: those with mental health issues, those with young children, those who are the first in their family to undertake tertiary study.

(Email from student: 2005)

*As much as we all hate parting with our cash, I'm appalled that the government want to scrap VSU, although it doesn't surprise me. In the 4 years I have been at Flinders I have used a number of services. I strongly believe that these 'necessities' should remain on campus. Sadly I hear the occasional student saying "yep wouldn't that be great if we didn't have to pay those fees". Furthermore, what a sterile and morbid place campus would be without all these services.*

(Email from student: 2005)

Thank you for all you do – I appreciate the emails and sense of connection with other postgrad students. Since I am part-time – as many students have to be – I am not available to be involved in uni life, but I am very glad that such organizational support is available for me if I need it, and for others. I strongly condemn the proposal and offer my support

(Email from Student: 2005)

I support the contention that the introduction of VSU would unfairly and unnecessarily harm postgraduate students. The services provided to Postgrads via the PGSA would be severally undermined. Given the relatively low waged position of many postgraduate students, the provision of subsidized services such as the postgrad library and advocacy services are essential to the successful **timely completion** of PG degrees. The provision of such services at "market cost" would be impossible to pay for by the vast majority of PG students, if they even existed at all, post-VSU. Given the imposition of reduced timelines for timely completion of all PG degrees, the removal of such services would thus increase the possibility that timely completions would be far more difficult to achieve. The representation of PG students (assisted by the PGSA) on a variety of University policy boards means that reasonable representation is afforded to PG students and the issues associated with PG-University interactions.

Is it the governments' aim to reduce the advanced learning and research capabilities of Australia? It seems clear to me that this is the inevitable outcome of the current push for VSU. Are we to import knowledge from overseas because the current Government chooses to make the completion of PG degrees more difficult for current and future students? Where will the "knowledge economy" be in 10 years from now if VSU is imposed? I suggest far fewer PG completions, and a dire shortfall of those with essential advanced degrees. This will be detrimental for the country as a whole.

The way Universities Student Associations distribute the monies raised through the collection of Union fees is beneficial to the University as a whole, and the introduction of VSU Legislation will leave the University system of Australia depauperate and bereft of essential services. I whole-heartedly oppose the introduction of such legislation.

Sincerely,

Tim Moore

PS: I am not concerned about confidentiality in this instance: feel free to include my name associated with these comments. I stand by them.

(Email from student: 2005)

My comment would be that if the students believe you provide a worthwhile service they will support you. However I am against compulsory collection of fees. I would support 100% the bill

(Email from student: 2005)

I would like to offer the following comments in support of the PGSA. I believe that the PGSA fills a large gap in the University's services to postgrads and that if it should cease to exist then this would have a devastating effect on the postgraduate community.

I personally have made use of the services provided by the PGSA and I do not feel I could have come as far in my postgraduate study as I have if the PGSA had not been there supporting me all the way. There is no other association that would be able to fill this gap - I see the removal of the student Union as yet another attack on the university as a whole. There is no-one else to advocate for services on our behalf and without the PGSA many of us would be unable to undertake our degrees, particularly those of us who do not hold a scholarship. The PGSA has argued for increased thesis preparation allowances for non-scholarship holders as well as office space and access to training schemes. They also provide invaluable resources such as books for loan that we cannot access any other way. They are also the only way we can be kept in the loop as the registry building occupants seem not to be able to comprehend that postgraduates have different needs from undergraduates. We are tired of receiving emails to 'ALL' students concerning web enrolment (which does not concern postgrads) and never receiving any information that directly concerns us. The only organisation that sends information concerning postgrads to postgrads is the PGSA.

I hope these comments are of use and I desperately hope that the Bill does not pass. Over the years I have come to know the PGSA as my friend on campus who looks out for me and I don't know how I will be able to finish my degree without them.

(Email from Student: 2005)

*Re the Postgrad Student's Association. We need to have someone representing the rights of the postgrad students, a voice to make ourselves heard, to share ideas, information and facilitate our learning experience. We are in a particularly unique situation not 'staff' but not 'students' either, in the generally accepted sense of the words. We have unique needs that are not met by another other association on campus. Our supervisors certainly do not have time to facilitate the swapping of information, lending of books, writing newsletters, or directing us to appropriate people when we have concerns. You play a very important and specialised role.*

*I personally would have really been off to a very slow start without going to numerous staff and development trainings when I commenced my PhD.*

(Email from Student: 2005)

This proposed Bill is an extreme violation of student rights and welfare. This government is trying to enhance educational opportunities for the oligarchs and the demise of equal opportunity for all regardless of social and financial status. It is appalling.

(Email from Student: 2005)

From the post graduate, fee paying student perspective, one of the really important things you do is provide training and advocacy for students - really important both for young students and mature age students returning to study - none of us have all the skills we need. And also for overseas students - the ones in my course have sometimes had considerable problems dealing with bits of the university bureaucracy..... Where courses are new, or not very well organised/administratively supported, that help has to come from elsewhere within the university, and you [PGSA] are really it, along with the library, the uni statistician etc - all partly funded from student service fees. Not to mention issues such as incompetent supervision or teaching, plagiarism of student work, exploitation of students etc which do require advocacy.

(Email from Student: 2005)

*What do I get for my money? Nothing. Should Unionism remain compulsory? Yes.*

(Email from Student: 2005)

Thank you

I think it should remain as is. Overseas students will find it very difficult to afford the same kinds of services off campus, and may have difficulty finding them anyway. Much easier to join in with other OS students. I think the Unis should be left alone. They are hardly the hot bed of unrest that used to exist in the 70s.

(Email from Student: 2005)

*I have not used any of the services provided by the Student Union, however I may use services at some time in the future. I am an external and mature age student, and the full range of services may not be suitable for my needs now. The services need to be available for all students whenever they are needed and they need to be funded to a level at which they can operate efficiently and speedily. I approve of a compulsory Union fee being charged to allow these services to operate. If the funding is reduced or not sufficient to cover the range of services, by the introduction of the legislation, this is a retrograde step and I condemn it.*

*If you use the analogy of council rates for example, it is clear that all payers of rates do not use every service at any particular point in time, however at certain times in life, we have all used libraries, rubbish collection, roads and the other services provided. The payment of rates are enforceable. We do not have an option to refuse. The principle also applies to Student Union contributions. We all may need or want to use the services at some stage. If by removing the compulsory element, the service is forced to be reduced or does not exist, then this is unfair and unjust*

(Email from Student 2005)