

To: The Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee.

From: Bingxin Wang, President La Trobe University Postgraduate Association Inc. (LUPA).

Re: Senate Inquiry – Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005.

Introduction.

On behalf of the postgraduate students of La Trobe, LUPA would like to express its concern at the proposed VSU legislation, and request the committee consider the following information:

(1) Assessment of the likely effect of the legislation on the provision of our student service and the related consequences;

LUPA's funding is entirely derived from La Trobe's General Service Fee, off which it receives a small percentage. The effect of the proposed Bill would be to cut off LUPA's only source of funding, putting the following services to postgraduates at risk:

- Free attendance at 23 Academic Seminars, with topics ranging from writing a literature review to leading a balanced life.
- Free Advocacy and Advice in the event of academic difficulties or grievances.
- A range of social events, including orientation days, cultural evenings, pizza, karaoke and trivia nights.
- Representation on key University committees.
- Free subscription to a fortnightly E-newsletter, with information on Seminars, events, conferences, scholarships and anything of interest to postgraduates.
- Use of the LUPA lounges at the Bundoora and City Campuses.
- Support for postgraduate academic groups within schools and facilities.

The consequences of the loss of services and support for postgraduates are far more widespread than the odd individual failing to graduate. International students, facing cultural and language difficulties, as well as loneliness, really appreciate the emotional and practical support LUPA provides. International students make an economic and cultural contribution to this country that may well be reduced as a result of this proposed legislation. The graduation of research students not only benefits the individual and the University, but society at large. Postgraduates often come to their studies at a stage in their life when they are already burdened with work and family, and need all the help they can get. Currently LUPA is able to provide that help, but if this proposed Bill is passed the funding will disappear, and so will the services.

(2) Consideration of the experience of Universities and students where legislation has been adopted to regulate student unions, such as in Victoria and Western Australia.

LUPA believes the so called “Victorian Model” which requires us as an incorporated association to sign a funding agreement with the University, and pass an external audit, works in students interests as applied at La Trobe. It is transparent, and provides equitable distribution of student fees. LUPA believes that the “Western Australian Model” will lead to the death of the student bodies, as there will be insufficient funding to support them.