

## **VSU SUBMISSION FOR SENATE ENQUIRY**

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

I am the Student Guild Education and Welfare Officer at Edith Cowan University, Faculty of Regional & Professional Studies. As such, my role is to act on behalf of the students and provide an essential link between, the students and the academic and administrative bodies of the University. It is clear from my association and role as a Student Guild officer that both sides have a lack of understanding in the needs and wants of others.

The Student Guild provides to the student body a very large support structure. The social aspects provided by the Student Guild such as clubs, social activities are obvious. However the bigger, more important function of the Student Guild is to represent individual students on academic concerns and the whole student community on the provision of Tertiary Education. It is the potential loss of this latter function that is of greatest concern.

In the delivery of any service, it is essential that there exist robust and healthy accountability and input provisions for all the major stakeholders. The area of Tertiary Education is no exception. The major stockholders in this area are the Federal and State Governments, Industry and the students. Given the immense resources of the first three stakeholders these provisions for accountability and input are well established. For the students, who are generally under-resourced the only provision to enable them to have representation and provide accountability is through the Student Guild. Without adequate financial resources the Student Guild would not exist and the only true independent voice of the students would disappear.

There are arguments put forward on why there should not be student guilds. One of these is that of free choice, that is students should not be forced to join a student guild. The guild supports this and is happy with the current provision where students can choose to be or not to be a member of the guild. A further argument that has been suggested is that Universities be given the ability to collect and hold, what is now called, the services and amenities fee. This argument however is made without a clear understanding of the role of student guilds. As stated, the guild does provide a social atmosphere for the students but a far more important role is to represent individual students on academic concerns and the whole student community on the provision of Tertiary Education. In essence only the student guild can provide a true, independent and representative voice of the student body.

The proposed abolition of the student guild resource base that is the Service and Amenities Fee will have a devastating flow-on effect for one of the larger stockholders in the delivery of tertiary education, that of the primary uses of the service, the student.

Dianne Webster  
Education & Welfare Officer  
Edith Cowan University (Bunbury campus)  
Faculty of Regional Professional Studies  
Robertson Drive,  
BUNBURY WA 6230  
ph/fax: (08) 9780 7786  
email: [guild.edwelfare.bu@ecu.edu.au](mailto:guild.edwelfare.bu@ecu.edu.au)