

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References
Committee

Inquiry into Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Upfront Union Fees) Bill 2005

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Terms of Reference

- (1) Assessment of the likely effect of the legislation on the provision of student services, and related consequences.
- (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.

Executive Summary and Recommendation

The proposed legislation to enforce voluntary membership to student organisations will only serve to decrease welfare, campus life and culture, freedom of expression and the convenience of having commercial outlets on campus, which will result in a decline in enrolment and retention rates, erosion of student rights and destroy regional communities. The current services which are available to students that are likely to be reduced or cease include; advocacy, personal accident insurance, health services, orientation programs, equipment hire, distance education support, legal services, scholarships, student loans, clubs, social events, sporting and recreational facilities, theatres, exhibitions, representation, affiliation with national student rights groups, student newspapers and radio. These services provide the backbone for a strong and vibrant student community and without them, Australian universities will become less internationally competitive.

The experience of WA Guilds under voluntary membership is testament against the popular opinion that student organisations will flourish under this arrangement. With one of the four guilds becoming insolvent and the remainder having to, in some form, rely on university support whilst experiencing staff redundancies and associated cuts in education research, advocacy, clubs and sporting support, this precarious situation is not desirable. Fortunately the legislation changed in 2002, enabling Guilds to have access to Amenities and Services Fees. This has helped the Guilds to begin repairing the damage that was caused and gradually rebuilding and restoring services and facilities that were lost. Although the repair work is occurring, the present threat of being placed in the same situation again would result in forfeiture of the positive work which has been done. The legislation amendments in 2002 also ensured that guild operations were transparent and directly accountable to their respective universities. This process of accountability has provided students with the assurance that their amenities and services fees are being used appropriately.

It is from our firsthand experiences of voluntary membership that the Curtin Student Guild strongly recommends that the Federal Government:

- Implement the current WA model of student membership
- Ensure that student organisations can continue holding exclusive commercial rights and benefit from subsidies, such as favourable rent arrangements with respective universities, which acknowledge the positive contribution that student organisations make to universities
- Include provisions to ensure that students who are financially disadvantaged have the choice of accessing flexible payment options, regardless of whether in a voluntary or universal membership system
- If following the Senate Inquiry, the Federal Government still wants to pursue the legislation of voluntary membership, that it should only do so with the approval of a national student ballot on the issue.

Introduction

The Curtin Student Guild welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into the *Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Upfront Union Fees) Bill 2005*. The Curtin Student Guild was impacted upon by a similar type of voluntary membership legislation from 1994-2002. During this time the Guild received a relatively small portion of membership funds and subsequently had to reduce or abolish some facilities and services offered to students. With these experiences in mind, the Guild can confidently outline the likely impact of the proposed Federal legislation on student organisations, universities and local communities.

Since the state legislation was repealed in 2002 and the collection of Amenities and Services Fees began (2003), the Curtin Student Guild has been able to offer a wider range of services and facilities to students. After seeing the effects on student life during and post-voluntary membership at Curtin and other WA universities, the ideological standpoint of offering membership on a voluntary basis does not benefit the student population as a whole. This submission will outline the consequences of implementing the *Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Upfront Union Fees) Bill 2005* and the effect that voluntary membership in Western Australia had on the Curtin, UWA, Murdoch and Edith Cowan Student Guilds. Also included is a comparison of the two similar models of voluntary membership experienced by WA and Victoria under the *Acts Amendment (Student Guilds and Associations) Act 2002* and the *Tertiary Education (Amendment) Act 1994*, respectively.

Part A: Assessment of the likely effect of the legislation on the provision of student services, and related consequences

(i) Likely effects of voluntary membership on student organisations

The proposed legislation's impact on each student organisation will result in one of two scenarios. The first and most severe scenario is a total collapse of student services which may result in a forced dependence on the associated university. The second scenario would result in a reduction of student services. In either circumstance students studying in Australia will face losses in welfare, campus life/culture, freedom to express their voice and convenience on campus. These in turn will have negative consequences on regional communities, participation in higher education, student rights and the development of leaders in political, arts and sporting arenas.

Welfare

Student organisations are recognised as a central point for assisting students in academic and non-academic areas. There are various forms of support for students, including speaking to professional student rights staff or mixing with groups of students who are like minded or share similar situations. Most advocacy staff are trained to help with direction choices, study skills, appeals, academic misconduct, exams, grievances, career and resume assistance, legal referral, tenancy advice, budgeting advice and harassment and discrimination. Student organisations provide staff to counsel students and resources which enable students with specific equity issues, such as women's, sexuality, Indigenous, disabled and international, to form support collectives. A survey by the Australasian Campus Union Managers' Association (ACUMA) showed that these welfare provisions and others such as personal accident insurance, subsidised health services, orientation programs, equipment hire, distance education support, legal services, scholarships, student loans, safety/security transport and taxation advice are likely to be reduced or cease with the implementation of voluntary membership¹. Welfare is one of the key services which would not be a complementary provision by universities, nor equitably or profitably feasible for a private provider. Some New Zealand universities previously contracted selected services provided by student organisations when voluntary membership was introduced, to ensure that these services would continue².

Campus Life and Culture

Traditionally attending university has involved many hours at the library, tutorials and lecture theatres as well as being involved in clubs, social events and sporting competitions. Participation in extra curricular activities has become a point of interest for employers looking for educated and well balanced team players. Not only do individual students benefit from being involved in student organisation events, it also fosters a sense of community on the university campus. The ACUMA survey showed that clubs and societies, activities and events, entertainment, sport and recreation

¹ Ashwin, A., 2003, *Optional Membership of Student Organisations (OMSO) Proposed Legislation Impact on Regional Universities and their Community*, ACUMA.

² Anon., 2000, *Submission on the Education Amendment Bill*, Association of University Staff of New Zealand (Inc) Association of Staff in Tertiary Education (Inc).

facilities, theatres and galleries were likely to cease with voluntary membership legislation¹.

All of these non-academic components are integral in sustaining a vibrant campus life and showcasing the talents of students. For example, students at the Victorian College of Arts may currently be financially supported for cultural activities, exhibitions, film nights and performances through the Student Union³. The benefit of developing and supporting campus life and culture extends beyond the university community. Without the Melbourne University Student Union the Melbourne Theatre Company would not exist⁴. Similarly their support has helped the initial development of The Working Dogs enterprise which has produced internationally recognised movies such as the *The Dish* and *The Castle*³.

Being a nation which prides itself on excellence in sport, it naturally follows that most student organisations financially support sporting facilities, clubs and teams. Students of all abilities benefit from the sporting facilities provided for social competition, regional intervarsity or even overseas competition. The annual Australian University Games would be under pressure if voluntary membership is implemented as many student organisations who currently can afford to provide grants for athletes to represent their respective university, may no longer be able to do so. The absence of strong interstate competition will reduce Australia's representation in international sporting events. Although much attention is often given to high performance athletes, student organisations encourage all students to participate in sport for their overall well being.

Freedom of expression

Student organisations, which are the representative bodies for all students, have the privilege of being the intermediary between the student populace and the university governance officials. Student representation on university boards, committees and councils is an often unrecognised service. As universities generally have numerous meetings, this requires the preparation and attendance of reliable elected student representatives. As the amount of time required to be devoted to these tasks significantly impacts on the student representatives' study load, these representatives often receive an honorarium or salary reflecting the level of work undertaken. Money is also allocated to promotional activities to raise student awareness of issues that need to be resolved or improved. Often these student led initiatives result in improvements to facilities, services or conditions supplied by the universities. Voluntary membership would ultimately result in fewer funds for student representatives and their associated educational campaigns.

The ability of student organisations to affiliate with national representative groups, such as the National Union of Students (NUS) and the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA), would virtually disappear and it would be highly likely that these groups would collapse. Without the affiliation fees these groups would not have the funds to employ staff and generate campaign material to lobby in support of student rights on national student issues. NUS and CAPA also facilitate

³ Hastings, G., 2005, *Student Organisations in Australia*, NUS.

⁴ Pheasant, B., 2005, New theatre of war- Joining forces to fight union fee changes, *Financial Review*, 19 May.

communications of student representatives across almost every Australian university campuses. Such an extensive network that provides support and research to student organisations would no longer exist.

Student publications have always been an accessible forum for any student to voice their opinions, no matter how conventional or unconventional, in an uncensored fashion. Most student publications have this freedom because they do not have to rely on commercial advertising or enticing corporate sponsors. Voluntary membership will inevitably result in the collapse of some student newspapers and force others to seek advertising deals. Smaller print runs and mailing newspapers to members only will be challenges to securing local business support that would prefer a larger audience which universal membership would bring.

Radio is another avenue of expression for students which is supported by student organisations. Radio stations provide the opportunity not only to express original thought, but for students to gain real practical experience that may not be available in their coursework. Radio is also one of the services which is likely to cease as listed in the previously mentioned ACUMA survey. Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane, Sydney, Armidale, Melbourne and Hobart all have at least one community radio station which was founded with student organisation support.

Convenience on campus

Many commercial outlets on campus are either operated or leased by student organisations. This process ensures that students have a choice of what is offered on campus. The introduction of voluntary membership would make it more difficult for student organisations to keep break even outlets open. Although in a business world this may not make sense, student organisations operate for the benefit of students. For example the College of Fine Arts Students Association provides a Campus Arts Store which sells materials at almost cost price, and although this means it only breaks even, it makes students' lives easier as they have access to affordable art resources for their studies⁵. Student organisations aim to provide quality products/services to students on campus at either the same or cheaper prices compared with off-campus outlets. Since students are typically from a low income group and are only on campus during the teaching weeks, it is difficult to make large profit margins, particularly when demand is synonymous and highly cyclical in accordance with teaching weeks and staff need to be retained over the study/holiday breaks. Due to these conditions any outlet on campus that does not make a profit would be closed in a voluntary membership environment. It is also likely that private providers would either not be successful in offering goods and services to this type of market, or would need to significantly increase prices in order to make a return on their investment. Unlike student organisation run outlets which provide flexible opening hours for part-time evening students, this convenience would probably not be offered under a private service. Any food services that cater for various dietary requirements that are consumed by a minority of the student population may not continue to be offered as mainstream fast selling items would be prioritised by private providers.

⁵ Collins, A., 2005, *The impact of VSU on the Arts at COFA*, www.theprogram.net.au [Accessed 23 May].

(ii) Likely effects of voluntary membership on the Curtin Student Guild

Whilst the Curtin Student Guild is recovering from the voluntary membership period (1994-2002), there have been recent improvements to the support level offered to students at Curtin's regional campuses. All Amenities and Services Fees that are collected from regional students are returned directly back to the respective campuses through improvements to general facilities and support of events. It is most likely that any return to voluntary membership will result in a significant loss of support to Curtin's regional students.

The activities and services provided by the Guild for Curtin students, which are listed below, are under threat of being exclusive to a smaller portion of the student population (members only), reduced or closed under voluntary membership. As many of these services are essential in maintaining a healthy, active and social student community, any losses in these services may be left for the University to provide. This would detract teaching and learning funds away from the University's core purpose of providing high quality education.

Academic and Welfare

General

Student Assist

Provides free assistance on academic matters, such as study skills, appeals, exams and grievances, and also assistance with welfare issues, such as budgeting, tenancy advice, harassment and discrimination.

Free legal service

Explore Tours

Provides first year students with informative tours of the main Curtin campus

Coordinates Really Handy Workshops

Workshops which mostly range from \$3-\$8 on subjects such as car maintenance skills, cooking on a budget and power point presentation skills

Administers the Bookshop Equity Grants

Organises Bookshop Grants to be provided to students based on financial need

Student representation

Annually elected students attend University Boards and Committees to highlight student concerns and comment on proposals on behalf of the Curtin student population

Department representation

The international, sexuality, women's, Indigenous, part time and mature age departments each have their own office and student representative. The offices are open for students to access resources, hold meetings or meet with the department representative.

Produces the survival guide

Provides practical information for first year new-to-Curtin students

Operates the childcare centre

Postgraduate

Research and Student Support Officer

Provides free grievance support to postgraduate students on a full time basis to deal with academic problems or provide referral to other non-academic support services.

Sponsorship of Postgraduate Academic Events

Examples of major sponsorship provided in recent years include: the Humanities Postgraduate Conference, the Health Sciences Mark Liveries Seminars, the SMEC Colloquium, the Muresk Biothon and the Biology Seminar Series.

Postgraduate student representatives

Funding of postgraduate bookshop grants

Scholarships for low income students

Organises postgraduate seminars

Seminars cover areas such as research methodology, conference presentations and poster presentations

Coordinates networking sessions

Provides study equipment

Computer, lounge and noticeboards have been made available for the Library's Postgraduate Reading Room. There is a computer loan equity scheme for financially disadvantaged students. Postgraduate students can also access free hire of a digital camera which is suitable for scientific use.

Weekly e-letters with information on conferences and seminars

Produces the postgraduate student survival guide

Campus Life and Culture

Provides financial support for intervarsity competition

Supports Curtin students in regional intervarsity competitions and students involved in the Australian University Games

Coordinates Campus Sport

A Guild program which caters for novice or social athletes providing friendly sports competition. Activities include mixed netball and 3 on 3 basketball

Provides clubs support

Grants are available to Guild registered sporting, academic, international, religious, social and special interest clubs. Clubs are also able to use the Clubs and Societies meeting room, computer room, lockers and mailboxes at no charge.

Coordination of the Recreation and Leisure Program

A large range of activities such as yoga, rock climbing and certificate courses are available to members at cheaper than commercial rates.

Coordination of activities

A wide variety of events are coordinated by the Guild which range from coffee mornings, Divisional Games, awareness raising informational days, market days and the Annual Guild Ball. During semesters, the Guild provides free BBQs on a fortnightly basis. The Guild supports and is involved in Curtin University community activities such as fundraising events.

Communications

Produces and distributes the student newspaper (Grok - 8 issues a year)

Emails electronic newsletters (Grapevine)

Produces and distributes on campus activities newsletters (LowDown)

Produces and distributes the Curtin Student Guild Annual Report

Details Guild operations and how student funds are spent

Maintains a Guild website

Currently being redeveloped and will include Guild meeting minutes and resolutions

Produces and distributes (on campus) the Alternative Handbook

Publication which provides student reviews on Curtin University units and student services

Conducts lecture talks

Student representatives announce Guild events and activities at the beginning of lectures

Produces and distributes posters and leaflets

Production of these to inform students of their rights, any changes that will affect their study and general events

Conducts surveys

Surveys are intermittently conducted to gather student feedback on university facilities, teaching and learning. The results and recommendations are often submitted to the relevant University committee. Surveys are also conducted on Guild services to ensure that the Guild continues to meet the needs and expectations of Curtin students.

Convenience on campus

Operates outlets

7 food outlets

Sports Store

Second Hand Bookshop

Guild Copy and Design Centre

Vending machines

Amusement Centre 'Megazone'

Subleases space for external businesses

Pharmacy

Hairdresser

Travel Agent

University Credit Society

Optometrist

Printer Fuel

Georges Kebabs

Discounts

Most outlets on campus provide discounts to Guild members. Guild membership also attracts discounts at over 120 off campus businesses, which Guild staff have negotiated.

(iii) Related consequences

Enrolment and retention rates

Australia is one of the few countries in the world which from time to time advocates voluntary membership. If implemented, this would ensure that international students think twice about selecting Australia for higher studies. Although it may take a couple of years to see the detrimental impact of this legislation, with the high reliance of universities on international student revenue and having reached the much speculated peak of international student enrolment, it should be of great concern that this legislation is even being considered in this fragile environment. International students not only provide revenue directly to Australian universities, but inject approximately \$6 billion into the Australian economy. Therefore any reduction in numbers of these students would impact the Australian economy and have an even more detrimental effect on universities, which are already struggling for funds. Australia could quickly gain a reputation for not having an active student life on campus. This would make other overseas institutions instantly more attractive. With Australia already competing with European universities for students, voluntary membership will give our competitors a head start. International students do not only come to Australia to gain a good education, but to experience the culture on Australian campuses. The lack of this in combination with the loss of welfare support services and orientation activities will not earn good feedback to their friends and family back home. It is highly likely that one of the major consequences of voluntary membership in the long term is a decline of international student enrolments.

Not only are enrolment rates likely to decline, but retention rates also will suffer. A reduction in welfare and advocacy services will only lead to unresolved issues and dissatisfactory outcomes. Without the essential assistance provided by student rights officers, a portion of students will be left confused, disgruntled and have a higher chance of dropping out. Although not every instance of advocacy has a positive outcome, it provides a source of relief for students to know that people are always available to help them. As universities are increasingly moving towards the category of 'being in trade or commerce' and falling under the Trade Practices Act, students are more aware of the importance to discuss issues with staff that are autonomous from the institution. As this type of help will become a decreasing service under voluntary membership and the fact that students usually don't have the funds to employ legal representation, they could be forced into situations where withdrawal is the only option. Apart from welfare services, the campus life is integral in retaining students by involvement. By student organisations facilitating the provision of a welcoming and interactive atmosphere this can make the transition to university less stressful and a more positive experience. Voluntary membership will indirectly lead to a declining retention rate as welfare and orientation services suffer due to inadequate funds.

Examination of the support and facilities provided to specific groups of students, including equity groups, also helps their transition to university. Most student organisations provide rooms and resources for women's, indigenous, disabled, part time and mature age, postgraduate, sexuality and international groups. Without these, it would be harder for these people to gather regularly or support each other. Considering the fact that at most universities enrolments of equity groups, such as

indigenous students, fall below their respective State Reference Numbers, it would seem that retention of these students should be a priority. Implementing voluntary membership will not support this priority.

From evidence detailed later in this report about the WA experience, Guilds that do survive typically have a membership base of approximately a third of the student population. If the membership consists mainly of young, domestic undergraduates, it is inevitable that limited funds would be largely directed to meeting the needs of the core group. It is likely that postgraduate, distance education, regional and mature age students will suffer as a consequence. As the issues that concern these smaller groups of students may not be immediately addressed and the specific support levels decline, this will adversely affect the retention rates of these students.

Erosion of student rights

With the decrease in student representation and campaigning on campus, there will be nothing to stop universities from implementing negative changes to teaching and learning and also nobody to pressure them to make improvements. Without student input into university policy development, university administrators can afford to become complacent and the end result of this is a lower quality of education being offered to students. Similarly government proposals to changes in higher education will not receive extensive student feedback or recommendations. The experience of a New Zealand student who was studying at the time when voluntary membership was in place at Waikato is testimony to this:

“Student activists faced a lack of support from their associations, and became dispirited and pessimistic. Opposition to the loans scheme was weakened by a debate about its inevitability, and whether students would be better to focus on making it as student friendly as possible. As a result, the National Government faced little significant opposition to implementing the student loans scheme, and made few concessions to students.”⁶

Any democratic country should have mechanisms to encourage debate and convey the people’s opinion on areas controlled by the government. The proposed legislation will accomplish the opposite of this and stifle the voices of thousands of students. Not only will this encourage the free passage of any higher education legislation, whether positive or negative, student rights at individual universities will be undermined as they will not have a strong representative voice.

Communities

Student amenities fees provide approximately 7 000 Australian jobs, of which ACUMA estimates 1 400 will be lost under voluntary membership⁷. The hardest hit will be those regional communities where the majority of the local population are employed at the university campus. For example, the Monash University Gippsland Student Union contributes more than a million dollars to the local community through wages and consumption of various goods and services³. Employment and boosts to the economy are not the only losses that regional communities would face. Many

⁶ Tanczos, N., 2005, State of the student union, www.varsity.co.nz [Accessed 20 May 2005].

⁷ Jukums, V., 2003, *ACUMA Submission to the Inquiry into higher education funding and regulatory legislation*, ACUMA.

student organisations provide facilities that are used by local residents as well as students. The University of Southern Queensland Guild has a recreation centre which is utilised by Toowoomba and Darling Downs residents³. The University of New England Student Union co-owns the Armidale cinema and operates the public house⁸. It is likely that communities in Albury-Wodonga, Ballarat, Bendigo, Cairns, Canberra, Darwin, Hobart, Launceston, Lismore, Newcastle, Townsville, Wagga Wagga and Wollongong will experience a wide negative impact from voluntary membership⁸.

Student organisations promote excellence within communities. Elected student representatives undertake positions of responsibility and leadership in various forms, such as contributing to discussions in university committees, campaigns and organising activities. Athletically gifted students are supported to participate in regional, interstate and international competition. Artistic students have opportunities to display their works and submit designs to exhibitions. There are many noteworthy people who have gained their first opportunities through the experiences afforded to them by student organisations. These include Olympians, politicians, artists and people who have simply applied their skills to their chosen profession. Student organisations provide a platform for all interested and enthusiastic students to make a positive difference in a section of their community.

Many of the services offered by student organisations enable accessibility of higher education to those who would otherwise be unable to study. This is an important element to breaking the cycle of poverty and removal of these support mechanisms could have a noticeable detrimental effect particularly in smaller regional areas. For example child care facilities at La Trobe University are 76% cheaper for students compared with staff rates (after the deduction of childcare benefits)⁹. Childcare services at Curtin are subsidised by the Guild, enabling prices to be kept low, while maintaining a high quality, accredited childcare facility. Additional support is also made available to student parents on an “as needs” basis to enable children assessed as being at risk to remain enrolled in the centre. Voluntary membership would inevitably result in a reduction to childcare funding across the nation and this will subsequently make it more difficult for single mothers to improve their family’s situation. It is in the interests of the broader community to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to grow and learn as this will ultimately lead to their knowledge and expertise to benefit society.

⁸ Clark, T., 2004, Humble pie may ease the blow, *The Australian*, 17 November.

⁹ Maiden, S., 2005, Unions fail on childcare costs: Nelson, *The Australian*, 18 March.

Part B: The WA and Victorian experience of universities and students where legislation has been adopted to regulate student unions

(i) WA Guilds under the Voluntary Membership of Student Guilds and Associations Act 1994

Examination of the experiences of WA Guilds during voluntary membership highlights the obvious fact that student organisations and their services do not flourish under voluntary membership. Similar to government taxes, although the community knows that it would benefit them, very few would pay if they were presented with the choice. With the reduction in funding, of which most WA Guilds previously relied on as a primary source of income, services had to be reduced. One of the Guilds in WA did not survive the voluntary membership period and most were forced to rely heavily on university assistance. Outlined below are the consequences of voluntary membership as experienced by the four WA Guilds, Curtin, UWA, Murdoch and Edith Cowan.

Curtin Student Guild

While later stabilising at approximately 30% of the enrolled student population, Guild membership in 1995 dropped to roughly 10% of the previous year's membership base. This resulted in a decrease in revenue of over \$3 million. There were 14 redundancies which incorporated advocacy, research, recreation, activities and media staff. This meant that students had less access to academic and welfare assistance, student representatives lost research support and there was a reduction in activities and recreation.

The Emporium, Sports and Tool libraries which provided students with easy on-campus access to these goods were forced to close. The prices in other Guild operated outlets increased as the Guild could no longer afford to subsidise costs. The Guild could only afford to fund 30 student clubs (previously 70) and 9 sporting associations (previously 25). Recreational lounges were no longer resourced, Guild Films, cultural hall and orientation camp were discontinued.

The Guild ceased to provide weekly campus newsletters, student loans, funding for student conferences, or grants to support students on field trips or placements. Student representative budgets were reduced along with funding to regional campuses. Along with this, student representatives were forced to spend more time trying to recruit members and less time representing student interests and helping improve teaching and learning.

Support for specific student groups was diminished with the closure of the women's, sexuality, disabled, part-time, mature age and external student departments. There was no longer a women's room on campus and the Guild's contribution to childcare was significantly reduced. The Guild discontinued sponsorship of the Health Promotions Centre and the International Students Council and Postgraduate Student Association suffered funding cuts.

UWA Student Guild

At UWA students lost their Sexual Assault Referral Centre, Guild computer lounge and 24 hour/365 day personal accident insurance. There were 28 redundancies which included Education Research Officers, finance and administrative support officers. Student welfare was significantly affected as the budget decreased by \$25 000 and the Textbook Subsidy Scheme dropped by \$14 000 from 1992 to 2000.

The student representatives were severely limited in activity with an 81% decline in their budget in 1995. Cuts were made to campus activities and funding for clubs and societies almost halved. Students lost control of University Sports, with the Guild Sports Division being operated by the University as a separate organisation. Funds for maintaining Guild property fell from \$320 000 to \$120 000 making the Guild increasingly reliant on the University for the development of any new services for students, and resulting in the steady run-down of Guild facilities.

Murdoch Guild

Advocacy services were reduced and access to these services was restricted to Guild members. Students lost a Guild Service Centre, a resourced parenting room, 24 hour/365 day personal accident insurance, access to emergency loans, funding for sports services and intervarsity sport and funding for student clubs. The Guild offered 6 staff redundancies. Food outlets, social activities and recreational facilities were required to operate on fully commercialised for profit basis, which increased costs to students.

ECU Student Guild

Of all WA Guilds, ECU suffered the most. It became insolvent and required the University to take over the administration. The University also had to financially support the Guild to ensure that essential services were maintained. This put further pressure on funds for teaching and learning. All 28 Guild staff lost their jobs, with all Guild activities ceasing for a period of time. Students no longer had the Guild service centre, Guild Bookshop, student newspaper, advocacy services, welfare services, campus activities, funds for clubs and societies and 24 hour/365 day personal accident insurance.

Similarities of WA Guild experiences

All Guilds experienced a dramatic drop in membership in 1995 which ranged from 10% to 38% of total enrolments, which in later years stabilised to approximately a third of the student population (except for the ECU Student Guild). Although this was an achievement, it was not without significant marketing efforts and usage of student funds that would otherwise have been directed at improving student services. The Curtin Student Guild was also able to boost membership levels with the cooperation of the University by offering cheaper parking permits to Guild members, which effectively lowered the real cost of Guild membership to those who would normally purchase permits. The assistance offered by Curtin University, UWA, Murdoch and ECU have been gratefully received from all WA Guilds. However, this has put the Guilds in an undesirable position of trying to be an autonomous body representing students to the University, while reliant on the universities for support. For the same reason the universities could not effectively provide students with advocacy against themselves, Guilds have been forced into a balancing act trying to please both parties.

The Curtin Student Guild did not turn away any non-member from accessing advocacy services, but even when these services are not taken into consideration, all students, members and non-members, receive benefits from the Guild. It is an unfortunate situation whereby a few students subsidise the majority who 'choose' not to pay for campus life, sporting and clubs, activities, representation of student rights on university boards and committees and campus outlets. Furthermore, the students who made the choice to become members received fewer services.

Voluntary membership forced all Guilds to become more business oriented with profits being a strong focal point of any trading activities, in order to cross subsidise non-profitable welfare services. As the ECU example has shown, those who are not successful in generating profits quickly lose the ability to offer any student welfare services. The increase in resources directed at marketing, promotions and recruitment detracts from the essential core function of a non-profit organisation.

The firsthand experience of voluntary membership at the Curtin Student Guild has made it evident that the potential consequences that have been outlined in Part A are not only possible, but probable. Most of the losses in services listed have already been witnessed in WA and all the effects are negative. If the student's relevant student organisation is fortunate enough to survive, students still face reductions in welfare, social and sporting support.

(ii) The Curtin Student Guild under the Acts Amendment (Student Guilds and Associations) Act 2002

Expansion of services has occurred since WA Guilds have been operating under legislation which encourages universal membership and ensures that there is a regular flow of funding. Apart from growth in student services, the corresponding regulatory environment which accompanied the amendment has forced Guilds to be transparent and accountable, which ultimately benefits students. Not only do these measures ensure that students know that their funds are being spent appropriately, the respective university also, on receipt of audited financial statements, can be satisfied that their students are being properly represented.

The collection of Amenities and Services Fees ensures that the Guild can afford to employ support staff, who have the expertise to enact procedural accountability measures, for example the production of the Annual Report. The ability to employ administrative support staff enables proper documentation of permanent and temporary records which serve as useful reference tools for future Guild Councils.

The positive differences of the *Acts Amendment (Student Guilds and Associations) Act 2002* (WA) compared to the *Tertiary Education (Amendment) Act 1994* (Vic), which implemented Amenities and Services Fees (ASF) and Compulsory Non-Academic Fees (CNAF) respectively are:

- The WA legislation outlined a minimum percentage (50%) of ASF to be passed to student organisations, whereas Victorian legislation did not provide any minimum percentage which allows universities to retain all CNAF.
- The WA legislation encouraged universal membership by stipulating that students would become members of the student organisation on enrolment, unless they selected not to. The Victorian legislation did not outline similar membership procedures which promoted universal membership.
- The WA legislation did not define areas of expenditure for the Amenities and Services Fees, instead allowed each university to determine what was acceptable. The Victorian legislation identified the allowable areas of expenditure and universities in turn had to decide on whether student organisation spending fit into one of the categories. Instead of having a two tiered process of decision making, a one step university approach of decision making would be responsive to local student community environments and more efficient.

If the ultimate aim of the Federal Government is to ensure that there are greater accountability measures within student organisations, the current WA legislation can be shown to serve this purpose, whilst still providing adequate funds to continue quality service provision.

Recommendations:

- That the Federal Government implement the current WA model of student membership
- Ensure that student organisations can continue holding exclusive commercial rights and benefit from subsidies, such as favourable rent arrangements with

respective universities, which acknowledge the positive contribution that student organisations make to universities

- Include provisions to ensure that students who are financially disadvantaged have the choice of accessing flexible payment options, regardless of whether in a voluntary or universal membership system
- If following the Senate Inquiry, the Federal Government still wants to pursue the legislation of voluntary membership, that it should only do so with the approval of a national student ballot on the issue.