

**Submission to the Employment, Workplace
Relations and Education Legislation Committee
regarding the provisions of the Higher Education
Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory
Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005.**



Murdoch Guild of Students

June 2005

Introduction

Murdoch University Guild of Students was one of four Western Australian Universities to be affected by the State VSU legislation from 1994-2002. Under this model, the student services available to students at Murdoch University were greatly diminished, despite Murdoch Guild having the highest percentage of members out of the four WA universities, at around 1/3 of the total number of students at Murdoch. Over the VSU period the Guild was only able to survive because we had savings in the bank and the University was able to provide the Guild with loans and in-kind support. Under the proposed legislation this support will be greatly diminished, because of restrictions on the use of university funding. Furthermore, the Guild has not been able to accumulate sufficient funding due to the debts incurred during VSU and the reintroduction of beneficial student services that were unviable in a VSU environment.

It is important to consider the VSU experience in Western Australia because it provides a good example of not only the initial effect of VSU, but also the longer lasting repercussions of the legislation on student services and the holistic university experience. Under a VSU model such as the State legislation in Western Australia and the proposed legislation from the Federal Government, student guilds, unions and organisations face financial restrictions on their activities. This means that opportunities to provide new services, explore other income sources and expand onto new campuses are missed. The effect of these missed opportunities is that students on newer campuses do not receive anywhere near the support of those on the older, more established campuses. As a result, the guild has greater problems expanding its membership base on the newer campuses, which is crucial in a VSU environment. VSU also left all of the guilds in Western Australia starved of funds, which could have otherwise been used to expand services and make them sustainable.

Once VSU is repealed there is a significant recovery period, where the existing services of student guilds are expanded and more free events are run on campus to cater to the increased numbers of guild members. The focus of the guild is to provide tangible benefits to, and manage the expectations of, a student body not used to paying compulsory fees, rather than investing money into a project that could (and often does) cost more money than can be spared in a single year. The drawback of this tactic is that very little money is saved as a contingency fund in case VSU is reintroduced or invested for more campus facilities, placing the long-term sustainability of student guilds at risk if VSU is reintroduced.

For these reasons both the past situation and the recovery of student organisations must be taken into account when considering the potential effect of the proposed VSU legislation. As such, this submission is divided into 4 sections, with an appendix-

- ◆ The reasons provided for voluntary student unionism
- ◆ The effect of VSU on the Murdoch University Guild of Students
- ◆ The recovery of the Guild after the change in State Government legislation; and
- ◆ The potential effects on the Guild with the new legislation.
- ◆ **APPENDIX:** The services currently offered by the Murdoch Guild of Students

The reasons provided for voluntary student unionism

Choice

One of the reasons provided by the Federal Government for the proposed introduction of national Voluntary Student Unionism is freedom of association. The argument is that students shouldn't be forced to join an organisation that they don't support. The major flaw in this argument is that no student is forced to join a student union, guild or organisation as a condition of enrolment; every university student has the option to either opt-in or opt-out of Guild membership. The only compulsory nature associated with Universal Student Unionism is the compulsory fee that either goes to the student guild, the university, or an outside body..

Funding of Political Activity

Another reason provided for VSU is that student guilds and associations spend student fees on political activity that is only supported by a minority of students. While student guilds and associations have undoubtedly funded political activity in the past, and are likely to do so into the future, the amount of money that student associations use for political activity is a smaller percentage of overall students contribution than the percentage of students who would support these activities. In 2004, the Murdoch Guild of Students used less than 0.05% of the income it received from student fees on political activity and this activity was limited to raising awareness about the proposed HECS increase at Murdoch University. Furthermore, it has been the experience of the Murdoch Guild that student unions, guilds and associations contribute more to political activities under Voluntary Student Unionism, because there is a greater proportion of Guild members who would support the Guild's involvement in political activity.

Financial

Currently almost 100% of students are members of the Guild and that has been the case since 2003 after the State Government passed the Acts Amendment (Student Guilds and Associations) Act 2002. This allowed universities to charge a compulsory Services and Amenities Fee with students automatically being members of the Guild unless they choose to opt out. In 2002, while Voluntary Student Unionism was still in force, the Guild membership was more like 30%. This shows that the fundamental reason why VSU will result in less Guild members is not due to political issues with student representatives in the Guild or an express desire not to support or use guild services.

The reason that VSU results in fewer members is because students in receipt of Centrelink benefits are living below the poverty line. In 2000, students received an average yearly income of \$12,513 dollars from all sources, including Centrelink benefits and paid work, approximately one third of the average yearly income across Australia¹. As a result, while most of the student population can afford to pay a Guild fee *if they have to*, many will choose not to pay if it is voluntary because of their own financial situation. The issue of student income is the fundamental reason why we have the Higher Education Contribution Scheme. When HECS was first introduced, several models were explored and rejected. The committee that was looking into expanding higher education with budgetary constraints concluded payment of upfront fees might represent a substantial obstacle to access to higher education for those without the immediate resources to finance such access.²

As Brendan Nelson correctly points out in a press release on VSU, student union fees are compulsory and must be paid up front — unlike HECS which is a deferred loan repayable when graduates are earning more than \$35,000 a year.³ This assumption that, unlike any other university fees, student union fees must be paid up-front is one of the greatest problems with any student unionism model. The up-front nature of the fee places an undue financial burden on students and ensures low membership numbers under a Voluntary Student Unionism system. In order to be truly equitable, Student Union Fees must be payable in the same way that other up-front fees at university are paid. That is with the option of taking a loan from FEE-HELP, to ensure that fees are paid when the students can afford them.

1 Senate Community Affairs References Committee Paper on Poverty and Financial Hardsh

² Phiangles, Ian Buchanan, Kaitiaki and Maurine Lachlan, 2002. HECS and Opportunities in Higher Education: A paper investigating the impact of the Higher Education Contribution (HECS) on the higher education system. Available at

http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/docur

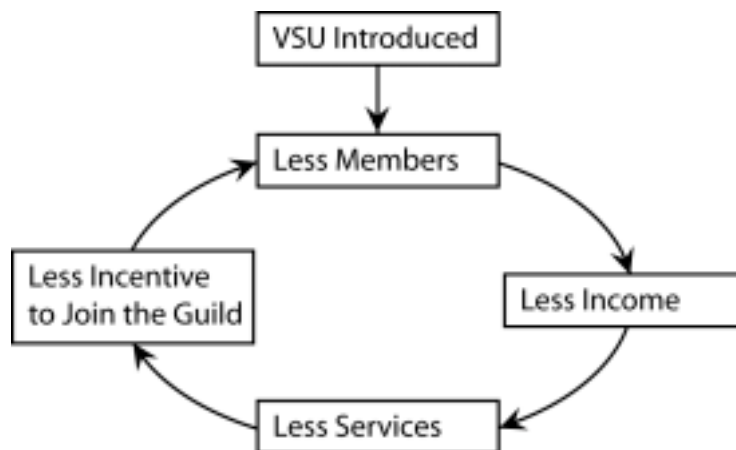
3 Press Release: Labor a barrier to slashing up-front fees for university students- S students \$153 million each year, 2004. Available at

<http://www.dest.gov.au/Ministers/Media/Nelson/2004/06/n770250604.asp>

The effect of VSU 1994-2002

General

One of the first things to occur when VSU is introduced, is severe cost-cutting to make up for the difference in income coming from membership fees. This causes severe problems for student guilds because under the financial limitations of a VSU model, guilds must offer less to students and voluntarily receive a fee for this decrease in services. Therefore, VSU can be described as an endless unsustainable feedback loop (as shown below).



The VSU Spiral

VSU lead to the redundancies of several employees of the Guild including the Accountant, Recruitment & Training Officer and Activities Officer. The Guild Shop and the Guild Services Centre were closed to cut costs, leading to further retrenchments. The Guild s Media Officer was made part-time which limited the amount of media and artwork we could offer to students, clubs & societies and the Guild as a whole. All of these redundancies decreased the Guild presence on campus and the support that we could offer to students, which negatively impacted on the Guild s ability to successfully recruit members. The financial pressure on the Guild also meant that Guild staff and representatives were unable to purchase new office equipment, computers, phones and technology, with most of our equipment being donated by the university when the University updated their supplies, leading to decreased productivity of the Guild.

At Murdoch University, VSU didn't only affect students and Guild employees. With less Guild members, the number of students who frequented the Guild Centre was reduced. This led to the closing of an independently run computer shop and an independently run record/CD shop and ticketing agency that were located in the Guild complex. The financial pressure put on the Guild also meant that Guild facilities and equipment used by external customers couldn't be upgraded. This caused a problem in the Guild's Sports and Recreation Centre, which helped provide funding outside of teaching weeks, when the financial pressures meant we couldn't update our sporting equipment or fix leaks in the roof. This led to a loss of gym members and community groups utilising the facilities and less incentive to join the Guild because of the substantial discount provided at the Sports and Recreation Centre.

Perhaps most importantly, the Guild was reliant on the University for its survival, with the Guild offices and businesses being offered rent-free, whereas the University previously had charged the Guild. The University also provided the Guild with a loan of \$450,000 and other in-kind support for the Guild during the VSU period. This reliance on the University for funding and support put the Guild in a dangerous position, because a major role of student guilds is to represent and advocate for students to the university on educational issues. Although the University never threatened to remove their support of the Guild, the position of the Guild as an independent representative for the student body was compromised under VSU.

Culture

A national study of the experience of first years at university has shown that a major influence on a student's success and satisfaction at university is the university environment⁴. This includes the social and cultural aspects of university, which are predominantly provided by student guilds and associations. Before VSU, the Guild used to fully fund the University's Orientation Day, which was the first real experience of University for a lot of students. We also used to run an Orientation Camp, where commencing students could spend a weekend getting to know other students and making friends, vitally important for a beneficial university experience. This could not be done during VSU, which meant that students missed out on some crucial opportunities to interact with other students and gain confidence.

⁴ McInnis, C. and James, R. First year university: the initial experiences of Australian undergraduates. Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne, 19

The onset of VSU meant that the Guild had less money to spend on events and activities catered to the student body. Our activities budget was slashed, restricting a wide range of cultural experiences for students. These experiences would have allowed domestic students to better understand the international student population, which would have produced a more dynamic and vibrant university community. Weekly films, providing cheap entertainment for students, were cancelled due to financial reasons. And the Guild could no longer run events like Mudslinger, an all-ages Summer music festival, because the financial position meant we couldn't take the risk.

Clubs & Societies (including University Sport)

When VSU was introduced, the Guild's Media Officer became a part-time position, which meant that there was less media and artwork support for Clubs and Societies. We were also unable to provide funding for clubs and societies or other support. The Guild Van, which was available for hire to students and students clubs, had to be sold due to financial reasons. Funding for sports services and intervarsity sport was lost. Plus, the Guild Sports and Recreation Centre had to be run as user-pays, which meant that university sporting clubs were unable to access sporting facilities for free, increasing their costs. As a result a number of clubs and societies, both sporting and regular, ceased operation during VSU.

Guild Businesses

Under the previous model of Universal Student Unionism (USU), Guild businesses were expected to break-even or were subsidised to ensure that they could be kept affordable for students. This isn't possible under VSU; the businesses must make a profit to subsidise other non-income generating services that the Guild offers. This places more financial burden on students, one of the most under-privileged sections of society. The Guild Shop and the Guild Services Centre both had to be closed down under VSU because they were unable to return a substantive profit to the Guild. The opening hours for the library coffee shop, Sir Walter's Caf, had to be reduced, especially during evenings and weekends, because it was economically unviable to keep it open during those times. This resulted in less of a service for students studying in the evenings and on weekends.

International

The Murdoch International Students Association (MISA), a subsidiary council of the Guild, was decimated under VSU because of low numbers of Guild members amongst international students. This meant that the support role of MISA and the Guild was severely limited and the student body suffered accordingly. Many International Students feel uncomfortable talking to Academic Staff about problems that they have in their units, turning to other students instead. MISA would normally have been the first place for International Students to go if they needed to discuss a problem with someone, but under VSU, this was not possible.

Regional

The Rockingham Campus of Murdoch was first opened in 1996, two years after the onset of VSU. Due to the constraints we were under during the VSU period, we were unable to offer student services at Rockingham Campus. We were also not able to run the catering facility on that campus, because we couldn't take the risk of it losing money. As a consequence, students in a disadvantaged location were once again disadvantaged. The campus has now entered its tenth year of operation and only has one catering facility, no sporting facilities and no Guild staff member dedicated to the provision of services at the Rockingham Campus.

Representation

The user-pays philosophy, being hailed as a reason for VSU, doesn't work in the context of the Guild's main role- representation of students to the University. As an example, in 2000, during VSU, the Guild was involved in a campaign to convince the University not to discontinue seventy small courses. The courses had low enrolments at an undergraduate level, but attracted a lot of research funding, offered a lot of support teaching to different courses or were beneficial to the University in offering a more holistic course profile. When the Guild successfully lobbied the University to continue offering these courses, both Guild members and Non-Guild members benefited, though only the Guild members contributed to the Guild's resources utilised in the campaign.

Under VSU, Guilds are forced to use their finite time and resources attracting members to the Guild. To do this, the Guild must offer tangible services (cheap coffee at Sir Walter's Caf, discounted Gym memberships etc) to convince students to voluntarily pay Guild fees. This results in more time spent on the more tangible services and the intangible services, such as representation and advocacy, suffer. Representation on non-University issues increases, however, under a VSU environment because of the nature and personal politics of those students who join and take part in the Guild. This can further alienate the Guild from other students, adversely affecting the ability to recruit members.

Welfare and Support

Prior to the introduction of Voluntary Student Unionism in Western Australia, the Guild offered Emergency loans to students who required them. This could not be offered under VSU, because the Guild couldn't take the risk of losing the money. Assistance with welfare and student rights counselling also had to be reduced for financial reasons under VSU and the service was restricted to Guild members only. A fully resourced parenting room was also lost due to VSU.

Post-VSU

Since VSU was repealed in 2002, the Guild has reintroduced student services that were cut during VSU, expanded current services, introduced some new services and made some plans for the future to put ourselves in a better position. If VSU is reintroduced, this hard work will have amounted to nothing.

Previous Services we could offer again

The Guild has reintroduced an Emergency Loans Scheme for needy students, available to students who need a loan of up to \$500 and are not eligible for the University's Emergency Loan. This service has been running for 18 months and 43 students have received loans from the Guild. As the University's Emergency Loans Scheme has been suspended for the next semester, we can expect that the number of students seeking an emergency loan from the Guild will increase.

The Guild has reopened a Guild Service Centre located in the main courtyard of Murdoch University. The Service Station is the first point of call for students seeing advice and assistance on anything from finding classes and academic offices to finding a home and getting legal advice. There is also a microwave for students to heat up their lunch. The exam helpdesk (see Appendix 1) is also located in this area on the University's main campus (other locations include Sports and Recreation Centre Reception (main campus), and the Administration Buildings of both regional campuses).

Expanded Services

Since the repeal of VSU, the Guild has increased its contribution to the Book Subsidy Scheme and the University has done likewise. The Book Subsidy Scheme is a scheme that provides book vouchers redeemable at the University Bookshop and Guild Second-hand bookshop to students who otherwise could not afford their university text books. Since the repeal of VSU, the amount available to students has increased from a \$50 book voucher in 2004 to \$70 this year, and it will increase to \$125 in 2007. The scheme is administered by the Guild.

After VSU was repealed, the Guild was able to contribute to the capital funding required to update the newly relocated Guild shop. The upgrade included more space for the shop and the specially dedicated Service Centre, the Guild Service Station, which was mentioned previously. It also included the relocation of the second-hand book shop, allowing more space for students to sell their text books and unit materials in a better location. This upgrade has allowed the Guild to supply a greater range of memorabilia, second hand books and other retail items, ensuring that students have a range of options at cheap prices.

New Services

Financial pressures on the University in 2002 meant that the University could no longer afford to offer a security escort service for students studying on campus late at night. Since the repeal of VSU, the Guild was able to provide the University with a Van for the purposes of providing a safe escort for students who were studying on campus late at night. This service has been very successful with more than 700 people escorted off campus from August to November last year. Importantly, the Guild was able to take some financial burden off the university to provide this service since VSU was repealed, but couldn't do this during VSU. This meant that the service didn't run from mid-way through Semester 2 2002 until Semester 2 2004 when the Guild purchased a vehicle for this purpose

In the first year after the repeal of VSU, the Guild introduced \$1000 grants for clubs. The grants are provided to clubs for capital works or for purposes that increase the culture or sport on any of our three campuses. More established clubs must match the grant dollar for dollar by fundraising, but this rule is waived for clubs that have been in existence for less than one year. This support has been vital for some clubs, with grants being supplied for various student publications, a language library, football jumpers for the University football team and the purchasing of equipment for club rooms.

This year the Guild has offered five \$500 scholarships to students who have been at Murdoch University for more than a year and are in good standing with their studies. Approximately 200 students applied for the 2 scholarships available in first semester, with more expected to apply for the remaining 3. The scholarships are means tested, so the most needy students who apply receive the scholarship, and the money can be spent on anything the student needs. These scholarships have been of great assistance to the students who received them, but can only be offered under a Universal Student Unionism environment.

The increase in income that the Guild saw after the repeal of VSU has allowed us to update and increase our internet capabilities. This has allowed us to move more services online to increase the service that we can offer to external students and students from the two regional campuses. The Guild's second hand bookshop is now available online, with students able to order their book and get it sent to them anywhere in Australia. The Guild's accommodation register is also offered online, so students don't have to come into the Guild Service Station to find a place to live. We are looking into getting the employment register, skill-sharing register and general for sale register (the last two are new registers, started this year) online as well.

The Guild switchboard is now accessible outside of the Metropolitan area by a 1300 number. This allows external students and students located on the regional campuses to access anyone in the Guild without the hassle of worrying about the call costs. The Guild can also transfer students through to anyone on campus, allowing students from outside the metropolitan area to access anyone in the university for the cost of a local call.

The Guild opened a new take-away coffee outlet, Little Walter's, for students and staff who didn't have the time to go to any of the coffee shops on campus between lectures or classes. This facility is additional to our existing coffee shop, Sir Walter's Caf, so costs to the Guild are kept low and we can carry over that discount to customers. Like all Guild outlets, Little Walter's employs Murdoch students, providing on-campus employment and experience for the student population. The coffee outlet now opens earlier so students and staff can get a cheap coffee or muffin before classes.

University

Since 2002, the Guild has contributed more than one hundred thousand dollars to capital works at the University. This money has been spent on building upgrades, the security escort vehicle and replacing the roof on the Sports and Recreation Centre. This contribution removed the pressure on the university to fund this capital works expenditure and the student body benefited, particularly from the roof replacement and the security escort service.

Over the past three years, the Guild has contributed to the costs students incurred for attendance of the Australian University Games and Intervarsity Games. This is something we would have been unable to do under Voluntary Student Unionism. Guild staff also assisted in the organising and coordination of the teams attending these sporting events. As a result, the participation levels in University sport has increased since the repeal of VSU in 2002.

Since the repeal of Voluntary Student Unionism, the Guild was able to once-again fully fund the University's Orientation Day. This system is beneficial to the student body and the University alike. Because the Guild is run by students, we are in the best position to know what students will want and need at the Orientation Day, making the transition to university as easy and painless as possible. The Guild's funding and organisation of Orientation Day is beneficial to the University, because it frees up University staff to deal with enrolments, re-enrolments and the start of semester, without having Orientation added to their already full workloads.

Future Plans

The Rockingham Students Association (RSA), a subsidiary council of the Guild, has invested \$25,000 for future capital works spending at either regional campus. This was a deliberate move from the RSA to ensure that money could be collected over a few years to ensure that they could carry out a large-scale project for the regional campuses. If VSU is reintroduced, there are three possible scenarios that could occur. The money could be used up to ensure the survival of the RSA or Guild, it might be used for a smaller scale capital project or will be left in the investment account for years until there is enough money to carry out a capital project. Either way, the onset of VSU will destroy the plans put in place by the Rockingham Students Association to provide student services on the regional campuses.

The Guild is currently attempting to acquire a housing block close to the University that could be used as a source of income when the Guild is under Voluntary Student Unionism. The irony is, the housing block has a \$100,000 mortgage that we won't be able to pay off under VSU. From past experience, no bank will secure a mortgage for a student guild under VSU. The sort time span between the different VSU models (State from 1994-2002, Federal proposed to start 2006) means that the Guilds in WA are unable to make themselves self-sustainable and will almost certainly be lost if the current Federal legislation is passed unamended.

The Guild is currently looking into a system of recycling the University's old computers to provide them to needy students. A member of the Guild Secretariat currently does this on an ad hoc basis, but the Guild is exploring ways of making this a sustainable scheme. The Guild is exploring ways with the university to get the computers set up, whilst giving Information Technology students, amongst others, some valuable experience in computer hardware. While it is envisioned that this scheme will, for the most part, run itself, there are some set-up costs that could be unreasonably prohibitive in a VSU environment.

The Potential effects of the new legislation

General

If VSU is introduced in the proposed form, many student services around Australia will be axed completely as a way of cutting costs. This effect will be more marked on regional campuses and smaller, younger universities. Western Australian Guilds will suffer tremendously because we have had insufficient time to recover from the State legislation. As a result, the lessons learnt in Western Australia will not be passed on to other guilds and student unions, which will decrease the chances of other student guilds to avoid the pitfalls, resulting in a greater loss of student services nation-wide. Staff in student guilds will be made redundant and as a result, student guilds will not be able to expand or improve their services, which again will have a negative impact on students around the country.

Clubs & Societies (including University Sport)

University clubs and societies will receive less administrative, in-kind or financial support from student guilds. At Murdoch, the Clubs and Societies Grants are likely to be cut, leaving these clubs with less financial support, crucial for increasing their membership base. Club rooms provided by student guilds will be removed to allow guilds to lease out more space, and hence increase their income. Clubs might also be charged more for room bookings for club meetings and functions, because the free hire of facilities to clubs might have to be abandoned. And the reprioritisation of student guilds and unions to profit-making ventures rather than subsidising ventures is likely to result in less media and artwork support for clubs and societies.

These effects will make it harder for clubs and societies to attract new members and hold events that have money-making potential for the club. This will decrease the chances of many university clubs and societies to exist under the new system and many clubs will cease operation. Consequently, students will have less of a social life and campus culture, losing many important social opportunities to make new friends and contacts that will help them through university and later life.

With sporting clubs in particular, all of the Murdoch Guild's sporting facilities will have to be made user-pays, including for those who are representing the university at the Australian University Games and Intervarsity Games. The Guild would also not be able to contribute funds to assist the students attending either of these sporting events. This would greatly increase the cost to those students attending the Australian University Games and Intervarsity Games, potentially making it too expensive for them to be able to attend. Murdoch Guild's Sports and Recreation Officer position would possibly become part-time or made redundant. Past experience has shown that this would significantly decrease the participation levels in university sports.

Culture

University Culture, as explained previously, is important to the success and satisfaction of students. However, a lot of activities on campus are provided free of charge or on a subsidised basis. Under VSU, the cost of running on campus activities may often be too prohibitive, so the events and activities on campus will be severely limited. This would decrease the opportunity for students to socialise and make friends at university. The Murdoch Guild predominantly has student bands play at the Tavern. This exposure gives the band members confidence and a source of income. Unfortunately, this could not occur as frequently under VSU, because of financial constraints.

Guild Businesses

It would be reasonable to expect a price increase in all of the Guild outlets once VSU is introduced, which would be a further financial burden to students. The trading hours in the Tavern and the coffee shop, Sir Walter's Caf, would probably have to be reduced. This would not only affect the service that we could offer students but would also reduce the employment of Murdoch students on campus. The decrease in service and increase in price combination, necessitated by Voluntary Student Unionism, that will be seen in all of the Guild outlets will actually be seen by some students as a disincentive to join the Guild, resulting in fewer Guild members.

The trading hours in our coffee shop would have to be decreased to cut costs, which would reduce the service to students studying on campus out of hours and the students currently employed as casuals would have less work. The discount that is currently offered to all students would only be offered to Guild members in a VSU environment. This would decrease the patronage of the coffee shop, potentially making it commercially unviable. In a VSU environment, we would not be able to keep the business operating, resulting in job losses for many students. And importantly, the students who joined the Guild specifically because of the discount provided at the coffee shop would no longer have a reason to become Guild members.

The repercussions of cutting costs by reducing casual employees in our retail outlet will be increased waiting times and decreased service. Low profit-margin items, such as phone cards, may have to be removed or only made available from a vending machine. This would mean that we couldn't offer advice to students about what suits their individual needs best, and students may get a bad deal as a result. The second hand bookshop would need to be reorganised to provide a discount to Guild members buying books, additional to differential of the commission for Guild members and non-guild members. This would cut down the profit margin, potentially making the Second-hand bookshop unviable in a VSU environment.

Representation

The Guild's Alternative Handbook is a free yearly publication that provides feedback from past students about units offered at the University. This helps students choose their elective units, know whether a textbook is worthwhile to buy and keeps academic staff accountable for their behaviour in classes. Under VSU the Alternative Handbook may have to be scaled back or only offered online. This will lessen its effectiveness, which will decrease the number of submissions we get.

Welfare and Support

Providing assistance and advice to students on education and welfare issues is a costly service that must be subsidised from elsewhere. The education and welfare services we currently offer would be reduced and this would be seen more on the regional campuses. The employment register, accommodation register, skill-sharing register and for sale register would all need to be decreased in size because of the time required to keep these up-to-date. And Stamp Out Stress, a day of activities designed to lower stress levels before exams and show students some ways to de-stress might have to be cancelled.

Due to the decrease in amount of income the Guild will receive from student fees under VSU, we would not be able to offer Guild scholarships again. The emergency loans scheme would probably have to be cancelled, as the Guild could not take the risk that the money wasn't returned. The amount of money the Guild contributes to the University's Book Subsidy Scheme would also have to be reduced or the Guild contribution removed altogether, which would reduce the support for students in need. All of these Guild services help ensure that students stay in university to complete their studies and would be jeopardised under VSU.

The Tax Help programme run by the Guild at the end of each financial year assists students who need assistance filling in their tax forms and gives the student volunteers some valuable experience. Almost 200 students used this free service last year. Under VSU, this programme would have to be greatly reduced or potentially cancelled altogether. This would reduce the experience of those students who volunteer to help with the Tax Help programme. It would also increase the likelihood that students would get unjustified tax debts due to inexperience in filling in tax forms.

University

Under VSU, Murdoch Student Guild will not be able to contribute to capital spending in the university. Therefore, the Guild's ability to improve its businesses and facilities can not be realised and competitors both on and off campus will increasingly be put in an advantageous position. This also means that the Guild will not be able to offer more facilities on the regional campuses, as has been planned. As a result, more pressure will be placed on the university to find replacement funding, or it will take longer for facilities at Murdoch to be built or upgraded.

The worst case scenario of the introduction of VSU is that the Guild does not survive at all. This was the case at Edith Cowan University under the State legislation and there is likely to be other guilds or student unions that are forced to shut down in a VSU situation. This will completely destroy the student services on offer by the Guilds and the campus culture at universities. As a result, attrition rates will be affected and the university will find it harder to attract International students, because of the lack of student services. However, the students will be the worst off in that situation, because with no Guild, students would receive nowhere near the amount of services, support, social opportunities, advice, advocacy and representation. And if history is anything to go by, the students who will be most affected by this are the students on regional campuses.

Appendix 1: The services currently offered by Murdoch Guild

The Murdoch Guild of Students offers a lot of services to the student body at Murdoch University's three campuses and is always looking at expanding the services offered. The current services offered are outlined below.

General Services

- ◆ For Sale Register
- ◆ On and off campus discounts (food, retail and recreational etc.)
- ◆ Promotional giveaways
- ◆ Student diary
- ◆ Security Escort Service- providing a safe escort home for security purposes from 6 p.m. until 1 am during teaching weeks and the pre-exam study break

Culture

- ◆ Activities - on and off campus
- ◆ Clubs and societies
- ◆ Concerts & events
- ◆ Cultural events
- ◆ Discounted tickets (events & concerts)
- ◆ GAME (Guild Activities Mind Expansion) - Student development programme with various short courses available at a discounted rate
- ◆ Meteor student newspaper - 2002 runner-up for most outstanding student magazine (ACUMA conference)
- ◆ Meteorite: weekly (electronic) information bulletin
- ◆ Muddy Shorts film competition
- ◆ National Campus Bands competition
- ◆ Song writers competition - supporting student musicians
- ◆ Sustainability works

Education

- ◆ Alternative Handbook- reviews of units based on student feedback, available for free online or in hard copy
- ◆ Assistance with academic appeals and other educational issues
- ◆ Developmental transcripts- if students volunteer for 40 or more hours per year representing students on university committees, this is listed on a student's developmental transcript, improving their job prospects
- ◆ Exam Helpdesk- where necessary exam equipment, such as pens, pencils, calculators and rulers as well as tampons and tissues, are provided or loaned to students who have forgotten something they need for an exam
- ◆ Representation on university councils and committees

Guild Businesses

- ◆ Guild member discounts at all Guild outlets
- ◆ Jobs for students - all the Guild outlets employ Murdoch University students)
- ◆ Guild Tavern
- ◆ Triple Crown- end of semester event
- ◆ Guild Sport & Recreation Centre
- ◆ University sports (including cross-campus events)
- ◆ Guild Shop & Second-hand Book Exchange
- ◆ Dry cleaning service
- ◆ ID Photographs
- ◆ Photographic service - photo developing
- ◆ Rentals furniture and appliances payments
- ◆ Second-hand book exchange
- ◆ Guild Service Station- a place for students to go for advice and information about services on and off campus
- ◆ Faxing Service
- ◆ Transperth Timetables and Assistance
- ◆ Sir Walter s Cafe
- ◆ Little Walter s- A take-away coffee outlet

Welfare and Support

- ◆ 24 Hour Personal Accident Insurance
- ◆ Accommodation register (assisting students to locate affordable housing)
- ◆ Advice & Assistance with tenancy issues
- ◆ Assistance and advocacy in relation to appeals to the Social Security Appeals Tribunal (SSAT) and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT)
- ◆ Book Subsidy Scheme (financial assistance for low-income earners)
- ◆ Complaints Handling Service
- ◆ Education & Welfare Service
- ◆ Emergency loan scheme
- ◆ Employment register (providing part-time, casual & seasonal employment opportunities)
- ◆ Guild Scholarships
- ◆ Legal service
- ◆ Legal Will Kits
- ◆ Representation and advocacy in relation to academic issues
- ◆ Representation on Homeswest Tier Two Regional Appeals Panel
- ◆ Skill-sharing register
- ◆ SOS - Stamp Out Stress
- ◆ Tax Help