

# Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education  
Legislation Committee

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

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**Submitter:** Daniel Lau  
On behalf of Members and the Executive Committee

**Organisation:** University of Wollongong (UOW) Oxfam Club

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The aims of the University of Wollongong Oxfam Club are:

- To raise awareness of the problems of poverty and social injustice addressed by Oxfam.
- To facilitate fundraising for Oxfam Australia campaigns and projects in Australia and around the world

### **Who we are**

The UOW Oxfam Club is a non-sporting club affiliated with the University of Wollongong. In 2005, our club is a group of 35 dedicated staff, students, and members of the general Wollongong community. Our email list reaches over 150 people. In the first 12 months as a university club, over 400 people have participated in our 7 events, as well as gaining 10 news media articles. Over \$10,000 has been raised for Oxfam.

Small Oxfam Australia (or Community Aid Abroad) groups of less than 5 people have probably existed in Wollongong intermittently since the 1970's. Immediately prior to the formation of a University of Wollongong Oxfam Club, a small network existed between 2001 and 2003. Without the support of the University, three dedicated people contributed significantly less to Oxfam and the Wollongong community. There was no website, fair trade market stall days, awareness raising events nor university marketing to attract new members to the group. Walk Against Want in Wollongong was attended by between 4 and 10 people in the years 2001 to 2003, and up to 25 people prior to that. Walk Against Want in 2005, the first organised by the club, attracted over 100 people.

Under VSU legislation, it is likely that in time, the club will revert to the circumstances experienced pre-2004, for the following reasons. The categories are taken from the 1995 experience at WA campuses.

### **Complete Loss of Funding**

We do not receive funding from Oxfam. Donations to the club go directly to Oxfam. Without university funding of \$1000 a year, the club's only alternative is to seek sponsorship from businesses off-campus. This can compromise the effectiveness our work. Firstly, sponsors are restricted to those who Oxfam deem as 'socially responsible'. Accepting sponsorship then puts us in a delicate commercial environment. For example, one Oxfam campaign seeks to promote fairly-traded coffee at retail outlets. But being sponsored by one café restricts our ability to approach competing cafés to offer fair trade coffee. Finally, continually seeking sponsorship from the same businesses weakens that relationship, and thus our ability to campaign that business to support other lines of fairly-traded goods.

### **Reduced Membership**

Funding for orientation events, clubs days, and promotion by staff on campus will be lost or significantly reduced. The climate of participation and care for others will deteriorate. The erosion of cultural diversity, activity, and representation means that students will not be asked to consider the rights of other students. Many will then hardly think twice about the rights of humans in other less fortunate countries. This is a difficult environment for our club to retain membership in. Administrative and marketing assistance for clubs and societies currently allows the rejuvenation of a club after years of low activity, in which there may be, say, only one member. After just one such year of VSU, there will be no record of the club's existence, and no club presence to speak with future generations of students.

### **Why ought there be an Oxfam Club on campus?**

As the only NSW regional University Oxfam Club, we reach students, indeed the region's current and future intelligentsia, whose education is required to be broader than that obtained by attending lectures (Attributes of a UOW Graduate, University document<sup>1</sup>). The club demonstrates the capacity for the University community, and students in particular, to act with compassion and responsibility. Several media releases and significant media attention have come as a result of the University's involvement with Oxfam. Conversely, the university contributes to the club by being a financially and culturally supportive incubator for small groups to reach out into the Wollongong community.

Sincerely,

Daniel Lau  
President

Meagan Palmer  
Vice-President

Tajeen Huque  
Treasurer

Dr Steven Roodenrys  
Club Member and  
UOW Senior Lecturer

Eva Cheng  
Former Treasurer

Alison Ewart  
Secretary

Oshie Fagir  
Club Member

Heidi Nettelbeck  
Club member

David Clunas  
Fair Trade Coordinator

Danielle Durland  
Club Member

Lakshal Perrera  
Club Member and  
Fair Trade Fairy

Tom Flanagan  
Club member, International  
Exchange student

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.uow.edu.au/about/teaching/attributes/>

HESA submission to the Senate from UOW Oxfam Club

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