

17 June 2005

Committee Secretary
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: provisions of the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union fees) Bill 2005

I would like to make the following submission to the Senate Inquiry into this Bill.

I have been a student at the University of Western Sydney between 1997 and 2001 on a full time internal study basis, and as a part-time external basis during 2003 and 2004. In that time I have had the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of my student organisation in a number of different circumstances.

When I was a full time internal student I took great enjoyment from the activities provided by my undergraduate student organisation, then known as the Campbelltown Student Association and now known as the UWS Student Association. I studied at the Campbelltown campus, which has no facilities or events of significance beyond those provided by my student organisation. Not only did they provide the outlets at reasonable prices that I purchased my food, but also the bands and clubs that gave the experience of being at University more than study. They also provided a student newspaper and diary to spread student culture and give me a chance to find out what was happening at my campus.

Most importantly, I appreciated my student organisation when they were there to give me the support I needed when I couldn't support myself. When I feared failing a subject in my first year of study my student organisations' welfare officer helped me. I eventually got a pass for that subject. When I was short of money it was my student organisation that provided a free fortnightly BBQ just before Youth Allowance payments were made so that I didn't skip lunch. They ran for a small commission a second hand bookshop service so that I could get some money back to pay for my next subjects textbooks. They also provided a free shuttle bus service between the campus and Campbelltown station, meaning that I didn't miss class or worry about studying at late hours at night.

My student organisation also stood up for me when my rights, and the rights of my fellow students, were under attack. My student organisation protested against car parking fees, upfront fee degrees in 1998, increases to HECS, the 1999 leaked Cabinet submission for vouchers and deregulation of university fees, and funding and course cuts throughout my time at University. My

student organisation stood up for an affordable and accessible education with both University administration and Government, and when I was not satisfied with the way my student organisation was speaking out I had my say in the annual student elections that took place.

I also had the opportunity to make use of my postgraduate student organisation PAUWS (Postgraduate Association of UWS) when I was a part-time, external postgraduate student in 2003 and 2004. My student organisation provided forums and events to assist me and my fellow students in finding work during and after my postgraduate study. They also represented me in 2003 with respect to proposed changes to PELS, now known as FEE-HELP, where the Federal Government planned to place a higher than inflation rate of interest on postgraduate student debts. Like with my undergraduate student organisation, I participated in the elections for my postgraduate student organisation representatives. Even though I was an external student, I appreciated the services and representation that my student organisation provided.

I wish to express my condemnation at this Bill before the Parliament. From my readings of the Government MP second reading speeches on this Bill I am shocked that because a number of student organisations democratically elected by their student bodies have criticised Federal Government policy the Government now wants to remove all student organisations by starving them of the funds they need to operate. Making fees 'voluntary', as this Bill aims to do, will simply mean that students will not pay, thus destroying the student organisations and the services and representation they provide.

If the Federal Government is serious about 'choice' then they should make payment of taxes voluntary, as the Government's logic behind this bill could be extended to Government itself. According to the logic behind this Bill, if I don't support funding private health insurance why should I pay taxes that contribute to the Private Health Insurance rebate. The only choice that I currently have about how my taxes are spent is at the ballot box, which is exactly the same situation with a student organisation. Both are universal bodies using fees and taxes to fund universally provided services for the benefit of all.

I believe in progressive taxation as the price that citizens pay for a fair and civil society, and I believe that if I disagree with what my Government or my student organisation is doing then the sensible response is to vote and campaign for representatives that better reflect my views. I believe that we are part of a society, and one cannot opt out of society, but instead participate and make a contribution. Student organisation fees, and taxes in a broader sense, are our collective contribution to making society fair and functioning. I am happy to pay my taxes in exchange for a say in a democratic election, and likewise I was happy to pay my student organisation fees in exchange for a democratic election that gives me the chance to have a say about how my fees are spent.

I believe that crushing student organisations because some of them have spoken out against funding cuts and fee increases will destroy the vital and appreciated services provided by student organisations for all students. Those that will suffer most are those on the margins of society, both in terms of the student and broader community, such as students that are in regional areas, women, indigenous, from a Non-English Speaking Background or gay and lesbian. They rely more on student organisations because they have special needs. For example, students in regional areas cannot walk down to King St Newtown for a sausage roll, as stated by the Federal Education Minister, because their campuses are usually at the fringe of their town or city. That is the case at UWS Campbelltown, and this campus is on the suburban fringe of Sydney.

Student organisations are also important job providers. Media reports indicate that student organisations provide around 150 jobs at Southern Cross University, and another 150 jobs at the University of New England. I find it incredible that a Bill is being put forward that will destroy jobs in regional areas, especially as a substantial number of these jobs are held by students so that they need not rely on Youth Allowance to survive whilst they study.

I call on the Senate to reject this Bill that will destroy student campus life, silence the democratic voice of students, and have an impact on jobs of local communities.

I am happy to elaborate on my submission and provide a verbal submission to the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Daney Faddoul