

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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We are both independent of any political organisations. We ran for the position as Activities Office Bearers because we have been heavily involved in the activities and entertainment program on the Parkville campus. We felt we could represent and facilitate the interests of the student population in regards to this portfolio. We were elected to our position as Activities Office Bearers based on our commitment and level of involvement. Our desire to see this office run well and the challenge of revitalising a student union fraught with difficulties was our incentive. We felt more strongly about the importance of an active Activities department than any of the other office bearer positions.

The Activities Office is the heart of student life on campus. We run Comedy, Film, Band and DJ competitions, we provide free food and entertainment as part of our weekly lunchtime program, we run the Orientation Party, several theme weeks, and add life and colour to the campus. Our events are well attended by all students and the main feedback we receive from students regarding our entertainment program is simply “we want more.” Our events are where people meet new friends and provide an essential networking opportunity which assists in the difficult transition from high school to university life. Coming from schools underrepresented at the University of Melbourne, the events provided by the Activities Office provided our connection to meet new students and has significantly assisted my enjoyment and success in my course as a result. This bill will remove the social networks and significantly affect the mental wellbeing of students as a result.

In our first year at university, if we had the choice we would not have paid a non-academic fee. At that point we had no idea where this money went and why it was important, but after our first year this all changed. We would gladly have paid the fee, but only after an exciting and informative year on campus could we make this decision. The campus was only exciting and informative because EVERYONE had paid this fee, and there is no way that a reduced student union under VSU can provide reasons for students to pay this fee. By giving people the choice to pay this fee or not, they are receiving no choice at all.

With the introduction of the proposed bill we expect the immediate consequence to be a decline in funding, as indicated by the situation in Western Australia. As a result of reduced funding, either the quality or the amount of entertainment or both will suffer. Students witnessing an entertainment program under VSU will not be experiencing the full university experience and will not enjoy their time at university. The potential also exists for our department to eventually be removed completely. This is not what students want.

As representatives of the student population at the University of Melbourne, we are telling you that students do not want this bill. Our role as student representatives is as a conduit of information between the students and higher level political representation. This bill directly affects all students in Australia, and so the people you should be listening to are students. As representatives of all Australians, you are required to represent our interests. The largest student rally in years saw students take to the streets to oppose the introduction of this bill on April 28th 2005. There have been many such indications to show that students do not support this bill. As our representatives you must listen to us and represent us. Reject this bill.