

**Submission to the Senate inquiry on the Higher Education Support
Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill
2005.**

As a paid student office bearer in the University of Sydney's Students' Representative Council in 2005, and a member of its Executive for the last two years, I have had a unique opportunity to view the operations of the SRC and the benefits we provide to our members. I do appreciate the burden that any upfront fee may pose upon students, however that small burden is far surpassed by the benefits of being a member of a representative organisation such as our SRC.

In the first instance, students suffering from genuine financial hardship can get a loan of up to \$750 interest free, or an emergency loan of up to \$80 with minimal paperwork. This kind of assistance alone makes it worthwhile to pay the \$66 per annum we charge in compulsory membership. Aside from this, the SRC has been engaged in successful campaigns to lower the costs of ancillary fees such as course readers at the University of Sydney, thus saving students even more money.

Ironically, it is the provisions relating to ancillary fees in the Higher Education Support Act that the Government is attempting to use to shut down student organisations. In the SRC's absence there will be no body devoting substantial resources to monitoring the functions and practices of the University; no body tackling the problem of ancillary fees. With no independent watchdog, the University will be able to charge students substantially higher ancillary charges, and students will not even have anyone to inform them that what the University is doing is against the law, let alone any body that can actually take action (legal or otherwise) to prevent the University charging such fees.

Students need representation to ensure that the University takes our interests into account when making decisions that affect our studies, our degrees and future careers. I have been on innumerable University committees where decisions would have been taken against the interests of students if it were not for the presence of student representatives who had been briefed by our paid research staff (staff we could not afford under VSU). The University does not usually make decisions against the interests of students out of malice, but simply because they are not students and often fail to consider modern student life. Under VSU the SRC would not be able to make such well-informed and valuable contributions to the University Committee process.

For these reasons, as well as the substantial loss of campus culture and student support that will result from VSU, I urge the Government to revisit its legislation and withdraw it in its entirety.