

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

I am writing to voice my concern at the proposed legislation that would abolish the compulsory fees system that currently

I am an active member of the Education Action Group at the University of Sydney, a collective run by the Students Representative Council Education Department that lets ordinary students such as myself have a say in the direction that campaigns around issues concerning students. Issues that have in the past been campaigned about have concerned things like ancillary fees (students being forced to buy a course reader to pass their course, which obviously disadvantages students of a lower socio-economic background and discourages them from attending university) and increases to our HECS fees.

When I began my Bachelor in Liberal Studies degree in 2004, I found the university to be quite a daunting experience. None of my school friends were doing my course, and I found this loneliness in such an alien environment to be quite psychologically taxing and demotivating. Luckily in Orientation Week (another experience that under VSU would not be available for new students) I was able to join the Sydney University Labor Club. Meeting a group of people who shared similar interests to myself made me actually want to go to uni every day. Of course it is hard to understand how important a sense of community on campus is without having experienced the situation of being a first year on a big bad campus of 40,000 other students! Through the Labor Club I was able to get involved in campaigning around issues that were important to me, such as women's rights, education, and issues to do with world conflict, through my involvement in various collectives in the SRC.

Universal Student Unionism has made my time at university so far an enjoyable experience through the sense of community that it provides.

In addition to making my time at university enjoyable, it has given me peace of mind in terms of academic security. Because the SRC provides free academic advocacy for all members (i.e. currently all students) I know that if I fail a subject due to a poor mark in an exam that I find is completely undeserved, I can get independent advice and help in filling in special consideration forms from the professional staff hired by the SRC. Under VSU, with the severely diminished funding situation that would inevitably occur, there would not be enough funds to continue the employment of these staff. The University also employs staff to assist students with their academic appeals, but there is clearly a conflict of interest in their position as aids to students: if the university has failed a student, and will profit from the student retaking that particular subject, and then the student visits staff employed by the university, what guarantee is there that that staff member will be impartial in the process.

The implementation of this legislation would be detrimental to all students, creating a harsh and alienating campus environment, taking away student representation in matters that concern students, and destroying advocacy services.

Victoria Brookman