

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

Submitter: Clubs and Societies Office Bearer

Organisation: Melbourne University Student Union – Interim Student
Representative Committee

Address: Clubs & Societies Department
1st Floor
Union House
The University of Melbourne VIC 3010

Phone: 03 8344 9768

Fax: 03 9347 1945

Email: C.Dobbyn@union.unimelb.edu.au

I make this submission to the Senate enquiry in my capacity as the Clubs and Societies Officer for the University of Melbourne Student Union. Whilst I am aware of the political environment in which this legislation is being tabled, it is the practical and personal implications of this legislation that I request the Senators take into consideration.

In taking up this office I have been placed at the coal-face of this issue. It has been over the last six months that I have seen firsthand, almost every way in which the Amenities and Services Fees (ASF) contribute and enrich campus life.

My experiences as a clubs and societies officer have exposed me to the many disparate communities whose time on campus is enriched through the collective contribution and distribution of ASF. It is with these experiences in mind that I have difficulty in understanding the motivation of the Liberal Party in attacking the collection of up-front union fees.

Clubs and societies at the University of Melbourne are at the heart of campus life. For many, they are the first point of social contact with other students. When making the often difficult transition from high school to university, they can often be an invaluable tool in acclimatising young students to their new situation. Clubs and societies are also a key element in assisting the transition of International students into a difficult new environment. Clubs and societies are the medium, through which many students are able to establish social networks, develop politically, juggle, practice religious beliefs, role play, debate and be Friends of Unnatural Llamas.

The University of Melbourne Student Union holds a night market once a year. This event exemplifies how the collection of the ASF is able to benefit everyone in the University community. Clubs and societies representing all walks of life on campus come together to celebrate the diversity of campus life, Indonesian students sit alongside Dutch students and as the campus community is able to sample home recipes from around the world. This will not be able to continue if this legislation is passed. I would urge all Senators to come to this event or attend one of the many colourful events staged by any of the clubs before you consider passing this legislation.

Clubs and societies draw the vast majority of their funding from the ASF. Event costs and membership fees are subsidised by the union. Without these subsidies, clubs and societies' ability to hold these events would be severely reduced, or removed altogether. There are over \$73,000 worth of grants directly available to the over eighty clubs and societies at Melbourne University Student Union. The Western Australian experience would indicate that without subsidies from the ASF, funding available for clubs and societies was dramatically reduced.

I question why the Federal Government would make this move at a time when numbers of international student enrolling in both secondary and higher education is in decline. This legislation will continue this trend. International students are some of the most highly active participants in clubs and societies. Passing this legislation will be a further

disincentive for international students to choose Australia as their destination for higher education.

This bill would reduce funding to student unions, and as a result, funding for clubs and societies. It would have a negative affect on clubs and societies. It would have a negative affect on students from every campus around Australia. It would have a negative affect on the quality of education and the “university experience”.