

**SENATE EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION  
COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition  
of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005**

I support the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005 on the following grounds.

These views are based on my experience in the 1970s as a part-time postgraduate student at the University of New South Wales, while engaged in full-time employment. Union fees were mandatory for both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Compulsory up-front (or periodic) union fees result in substantial student inequity. Many, if not most, students lack the time to take advantage of services or facilities that are funded by mandatory student union fees. This applies particularly to fulltime university students undertaking time-intensive courses, such as medicine or engineering. The same applies to students who are in employment and attend university part-time to do undergraduate or graduate courses. Such students effectively subsidise other students who enjoy the benefits, e.g. use of services or sporting facilities, which are funded by the compulsory union fees.

Such inequity would be avoided by abolishing compulsory union fees and replacing them with non-compulsory union fees. Alternatively, charges could be levied on those who make use of the services or facilities, that is, by applying a user-pays system. This would encourage the provision of services or facilities that are justified by demand, and thereby minimise their wastage or over-provision. It would encourage their more responsible provision and usage.

There have been claims that abolition of compulsory student union fees would rob Australia of future sporting champions, by denying those students the services or facilities to train. It is considered that these claims are grossly exaggerated. Such facilities could be funded by a user-pays system. It is noted that the large number of sporting champions who do not attend university, manage to train without the aid of mandatory-union-fee-funded facilities.

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