

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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(SAUA)

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## **The Students' Association of the University of Adelaide**

The Students' Association of the University of Adelaide (SAUA) is the peak representative body for all students enrolled at the University of Adelaide. The University of Adelaide is comprised of four campuses – North Terrace, Roseworthy, Waite and Thebarton Campus and has 18,690 enrolled students. The SAUA is an affiliate of the Adelaide University Union (AUU), as legislated in Section 21 of the University of Adelaide Act 1971.

The SAUA welcomes the opportunity to present our opposition to the *Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005*. This submission will detail the SAUA's concerns about the possible impacts on Australian student organisations and their ability to provide vital services and representation to tertiary students, in particular, the impact the *Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005* will have on the Students' Association of the University of Adelaide.

### **History of The Students' Association of the University of Adelaide (SAUA)**

The Students' Association of the University of Adelaide and its members share an amazing history. For over 100 years students at the University of Adelaide have been supported, represented and encouraged by the work of the Students' Association.

The Adelaide University Union, of which the Students' Association is an affiliate, dates back to April 1895, when students, graduates, and staff members formed an organisation called the "Adelaide University Union Society". In 1927 a University of Adelaide statute made payment of a membership fee universal for all students enrolled at this university. As the services grew students began to see the value of universal membership.

The Student Representative Council was formed in 1946, laying the foundations for what would become the SAUA. Replaced by the Students Association of the University of Adelaide (SAUA) - in 1971, the SRC membership had been based on representation of the faculties and various groups, whereas the SAUA emphasised direct elections of student representatives from the general student body.

In 2004 the SAUA adopted a new constitution to incorporate a new department - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Department, and to allow for greater flexibility in the changing of the organisation so as to deal with the increasingly uncertain climate in higher education.

The SAUA is proud of its achievements, its history and proud of what we stand for. The SAUA exists to promote and protect the rights of students. We are the peak student representative body on campus, and the primary advocate for students to the University, Government and the wider community.

## **Students' Association of the University of Adelaide Policy on VSU**

The policy volume adopted by its members governs the actions of the Students' Association. The SAUA has very clear policy regarding VSU:

- The Students Association actively supports the concept of Universal Student Unionism. The SAUA believes that under the present system of compulsory Student Union membership students are delivered the highest levels of Representation, Advocacy and Services possible. The SAUA believes in every students right to be a member of a student union.
- The Student's Association affirms its support for universal student membership of Student organisations.
- The SAUA believes in the automatic and universal membership of Student Unions, and Student Associations
- The SAUA believes that universal student membership contributes to the welfare of the Student community
- The SAUA believes that without universal Student Unionism student representation and student services would suffer.
- The SAUA condemns any moves by any government to introduce any forms of Voluntary Student Unionism
- The SAUA believes any attempt to introduce VSU would result the removal of students right to representation and a voice.
- The SAUA recognises the differences between Student Unions and Trade Unions, but also recognises the links between Trade Unions and student organisations in their ability to collectively organise and represent their membership.
- The SAUA believes that in the event of the introduction of VSU, students would experience to their detriment a reduction in services, and a reduction in Student Representation.

The Students' Association is guided by its policy in day-to-day operation and as such, that policy provides the direction and foundation for this submission.

### **Universal Student Services Fees**

The 2005 Student Services Fee at the University of Adelaide for a full time student is \$326.70. After GST, collected by the Federal Government, the Adelaide University Union receives a fee of \$297 from each student. In total, the AUU receives \$3, 684, 720 in Student Services Fees, of which the SAUA is granted 13.8%. For a full time student this equates to a contribution of \$41 for 2005.

A universal student services fees ensures that all students contribute to the overall welfare and service provision to the entire student body. It represents a shared responsibility to the principles of accessibility, and an assurance that all students have the ability access the services and enjoy the benefits of

representation. The Vice Chancellor of the Australian National University, and outgoing Chair of the Group of Eight, Professor Ian Chubb explained the importance of universal service fee, saying the Group of Eight supports the existing system where,

“autonomous universities can charge for all students to provide services that are available to be used by all students. Not all will be used by everybody, of course; not everybody will play football or chess or need childcare or legal advice or counselling or help with accommodation, essay writing skills, statistics or the rules of cricket. Some services might be non-academic, but they help to ensure that campus life is a life and a community.”<sup>1</sup>

It has been suggested that VSU should not harm students organisations, that effective provision of services and representation should be all the marketing needed to maintain a healthy membership base. With only restricted access to students for the duration of their degree, and having to remarket services each semester for commencing students, fluctuating membership numbers will impact not only the range of services that will be able to be provided to students, but also the quality of those services.

The SAUA is disturbed by the ignorance and flippancy of Federal Government in their understanding of what is at stake in the debate about VSU. Brendan Nelson argues that,

“Why is it that a student in the 21st century goes to Sydney University to pay \$2 for a sausage roll when they can buy one for \$1.70 off campus and be served by a person who actually smiles at them.”<sup>2</sup>

In the Hobart Mercury, Senator Eric Abetz outlined his major VSU concern, “It is illogical and socially unjust to force every student, irrespective of means, to pay the same compulsory up-front fee just so, for example, the wealthier students can drink subsidised beer.”<sup>3</sup>

Comments such as these are shameful attempts by the Federal Government to avoid deal with the actual impacts of their legislation. Instead of engaging in meaningful dialogue with students and student organisations on the issue of VSU, the Government is more comfortable trivialising and misrepresenting the wider issues and impacts. This attitude also proves how out of touch the Minister is with student organisation around the country. The beer, the sausage roll, in fact the commercial operations at the University of Adelaide is not subsidised by student services fee and are actually cheaper than many other competitors. The AUU recently conducted a local traders comparison report in order to ensure that commercial operation are able to offer the best possible price to students.

### **Students' Association of the University of Adelaide**

The Students' Association of Adelaide University is comprised of the following departments who each offer unique and valuable services and representation to the SAUA's members:

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Chubb, ‘Campus services and Spirit will suffer’ *The Australian*, March 23 2005

<sup>2</sup> Nelson, Brendan, Hansard, House of Representatives, March 16 2005

<sup>3</sup> Abetz, Eric, *The Hobart Mercury*, March 19 2005

- SAUA President + SAUA Council (Elected Members + SAUA Office Bearers)
- Education Department – Education Officer + Education Standing Committee
- Women's Department - Women's Officer + Women's Standing Committee
- Activities and Campaigns Department – Activities Officer + Activities Standing Committee
- Sexuality Department – Male Sexuality Officer, Female Sexuality Officer+ Sexuality standing Committee
- Environment Department – Environment Officer + Environment Standing Committee
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Department – ATSI Officer + ATSI Standing Committee
- Student Media – On Dit: Adelaide University Student Newspaper + Student Radio (Broadcast on Radio Adelaide)

In addition to the departmental representatives, the SAUA also included a Council of elected general students, which form the governing body for the Association, and oversee the activities of the elected officer bearers and the Association.

Each department of the SAUA is key in the provision of information, support and action relevant to their portfolio. Some departments have more broad reaching responsibilities such as the Education Department and the Activities Department, while others are charged with the representation of more specific student demographics.

While university may be an environment more accepting and progressive than some other places, there is still a need for representation for groups at risk. Already this year the SAUA has responded to cases of sexual assault on campus, and the vandalism of the queer safe space on campus. Departments such as the Women's Department, The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Department and the Sexuality Department work to ensure students are able to enjoy a university free of discrimination, as well and running unique and valuable awareness campaigns that not only target issues relevant to particular groups of students, but the entire student body. These departments go to a great deal of effort to make students feel safe and accepted at University.

The SAUA Mission Statement asserts,

The Student's Association recognises its opportunity, and obligation to highlight issues affecting students in the education sector, and people in the broader community. The SAUA will uphold the principles of equity and accessibility in the Education sector. The SAUA will lobby all relevant bodies and do all possible to ensure that students, young

people, and people within the higher education sector are represented, and their views, convictions, and opinions are supported.

Each department of the SAUA makes the University of Adelaide a better place to student, and contributes to achieving that mission statement.

Under VSU, 2006 looks like a bleak year for the SAUA and students at Adelaide University. Financial restraints will see the SAUA have to share office space with at least three other AUU affiliates, as well as sharing administration and research staff. Recent budget preparations for 2006 indicate that the SAUA will be unable to fund office bearers for almost all the current departments, and it is unlikely that there will be any funds available for running campaigns throughout the year.

The impact of VSU on organisations such of the SAUA severely threatens our ability to provide student representation and facilitate student action and participation in the community.

### **Student Representation**

The SAUA believes that student representation is an essential service for students and vital to create an academic environment that is aware of student needs and concerns.

The majority of the work done by student representatives relates to academic representation of students to the university. SAUA office bearers are active members of university committees such as:

University Council	Assessment Monitoring Committee
Academic Board	Coursework Scholarships Committee
University Teaching and Learning Committee	Library Committee
Undergraduate Entry Committee	Program Approval Committee
Technology in Education	

This selection represents a small sample of the range of responsibilities student representatives have. The SAUA is alarmed at the lack of discussion about academic representation during the VSU debate. The work done by the students on these committees cannot be applied to a user-pays system. They are of benefit to the entire university community and would be a detrimental loss under VSU. This representation is a part of the core business of running a university. SAUA representatives have sat on working parties to oversee the implementation of and compliance with federal legislation, new technologies and academic programs.

The SAUA is also responsible for the co-ordination of student representatives for University Faculty Boards. This relationship is of enormous assistance to both the faculties, Academic Board – the peak university board on Academic issues and the SAUA, helping faculties tailor their programs for an ever-

changing student population, and allowing the SAUA to better target and address any faculty specific issues.

Participation in student organisations provides students with incredible opportunities and experiences, the likes of which are not too readily available outside of professional condition. Students gain great leadership skills, an understanding of professional responsibility and governance.

Many of today's most prominent Australians gained valuable experiences during their time in student organisations - journalists, members of the arts and legal professions, sporting identities and numerous members of Federal Parliament. Many member of the current government have benefited from their experiences during their years in student organisations and the SAUA urges them not to deny current and future students the same opportunity.

### **Community Representation**

Students need to engage with the community that surrounds them. Students are a discernable demographic with unique interests and specific needs that should be represented to the bodies that make decisions about their education and standard of living.

Student representation to the community happens in many ways, despite the continual media perception of what Cabinet Ministers happily refer to as 'feral lefties'. As a collective group, students make an incredible contribution to the community.

Judith Bessant, Professor of Youth Studies at RMIT argues that student political participation is critical for universities.

"The issue of student political engagement clearly rankles the Howard Government. This is curious given the incessant complaints about the alleged 'politically apathetic nature of youth'. It is also curious given all the official rhetoric about encouraging 'youth participation'. Surely student participation is critical for good policy making and the basic right of students to have a say about decisions in universities that directly affect them."<sup>4</sup>

Advocates of VSU have worked hard to demonise the role of student representation in the community. Misleading comments and accusations have given many people the idea that student representation to the wider community is not necessary. The most common of these accusations that gets dragged out from time to time is from the 1970s and related to the precursor to the National Union of Students, the Australian Union of Students passing pro Palestinian Liberation Organisation resolutions.<sup>5</sup>

More recent attempts to discredit the relevance of student work in the community deal with campaigning in federal elections.

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<sup>4</sup> Bessant, Professor Judith, *The Age*, March 18<sup>th</sup> 2005

<sup>5</sup> Dr Southcott (Boothby), Hansard, Thursday, 12 May 2005, p.38.

“That NUS spent \$255,000 campaigning in support of the ALP in the 2004 federal election and against the government is but one example of the anachronistic and outdated concept of compulsory student unionism.”<sup>6</sup>

Quotes such as these from the Minister are a total misrepresentation of the role of student organisations. The issue in question on this occasion relates to funds spent on raising awareness of higher education in the last federal election, and not, as the Minister suggests, in support of the Australian Labor Party. The SAUA believes spending student money on ensuring that higher education remains a priority for Australia and should be a major part of responsible representation.

The SAUA cannot become a politically free organisation, to do so renders it ineffective. The very nature of the SAUA departments and office bearers represent a political statement. However there is a clear distinction between party politics and representational politics. Student organisations are democratic bodies, whose representatives are democratically elected as representatives of the Adelaide University student body. Actions such as campaigning for equitable access to education, ensuring that students can study free of sexual discrimination are political acts because students are a community grouping that need a voice, and have concerns worthy of consideration. A collective student voice is a powerful tool for social change. Student organisations primarily act as a support structure, a facilitator for students to get involved in

Community representation happens because people make it happen and the SAUA has a role in facilitating this. Environmental activism, women's activism, and education activism and so many more— these all happen because students have shown they are committed to the issues. Community activism is a very small part of what the SAUA spends uses its funds for, and it is clearly the main target of the VSU legislation currently being considered.

### **Impact on Teaching**

The SAUA fears the removal of a student services fee will have a double impact on students. Not only will it see the removal of essential services and representation provided by the various student organisations on campus, students might also suffer a decline in the quality in teaching resources available to them due to the university having to finance some of the services currently provided by the AUU and its affiliates. It may in effect totally counter the effect of increasing HECS fees as the additional money may need to be diverted to student services.

In an article published in the Advertiser on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, Adelaide University Vice Chancellor, Professor James McWha commented on the possible introduction of VSU and the impact on the University of Adelaide.

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<sup>6</sup> Minister Brendan Nelson, Australian Financial Review, 2 April 2005



Professor McWha stated, *"We are going to have to divert financial resources that otherwise would go into teaching."*<sup>7</sup>

Students are already paying more for their degree; to now be faced with a drop in the quality of their education is a consequence of this legislation that will affect every student. This is especially significant, as many of the support structures that would deal with academic grievances will be stripped away under VSU. The introduction of VSU at the University of Adelaide would effectively be a funding cut in excess of \$3.5 million.

## **Campus Culture**

The University of Adelaide is renowned for its campus culture. Students often cite campus life at Adelaide University as the deciding factor when choosing where to study in South Australia.

The commitment and contribution of the SAUA to enhancing campus life at the University of Adelaide is recognised by the University. As part of their award winning 'Life Impact' advertising campaign, campus culture is mentioned as being one of the main reasons for new domestic and international students to choose to study at the University of Adelaide.

VSU poses an enormous threat to the continuation and vibrancy of campus life. The SAUA is responsible for some of the major campus events throughout the year and believes their value is important, not only to a vibrant campus life, but also part of creating a student community committed to diversity and tolerance. The University of Adelaide has a student body made up of people from such diverse backgrounds, campus activities gives students a chance to meet and learn from each other in a way the academic forums do not provide. Tradition plays an important part with all of the major events and difficult to bring back once lost. VSU risks losing a core part of what university life has been about for decades.

## **Orientation**

Orientation is the most prominent campus event of the academic year. Traditionally the program incorporates a five day Orientation Camp at Normanville, a week long program of events on the main campus including a comedy night, dance party, cinema on the lawns, campus tours and the week finishes on a high note at O'Ball. Over the last twenty years, some of Australia's most exciting and respected talent have performed at O'Ball. Eskimo Joe, Gerling, The Cruel Sea, Grinspoon, Silverchair and Rebecca's Empire are just a few who have participated in Adelaide University O'Ball, Australia's largest student run music festival.

The entire Orientation program is a great opportunity for Adelaide University students and the wider community to see the kind of events student

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<sup>7</sup> 'Uni Revolt', *The Advertiser*, Friday April 1

organisations are capable of organising. Orientation is a student run event and provides new students with a welcoming and inclusive environment.

At a time when student organisations are being tarnished by one off examples of financial mismanagement, Orientation at The University of Adelaide stands as an excellent example of how well students can manage large scale events and budgets of significant value. All events at 2005 Orientation were well attended, including both O'Camp and O'Ball completely selling out providing a substantial amount of money to assist with orientation in future years.

It is fortunate that there will be a reserve to draw on. Without that money, Orientation in 2006, in whatever format it takes would not be able to happen. Orientation is an expensive and essential part of campus life at Adelaide University. It is when first year students form friendships, when rural and international students see what Adelaide has to offer, and hopefully, when the vibrancy and visibility of a diverse student population might make people feel less alone, less intimidated and welcome at the University of Adelaide.

Beyond next year, Orientation will have to be funded through sponsorship agreements, and it will not be a student controlled event, but one tailored to selling various products instead of giving students the best start to their year at university. There is of course the likelihood that without the support structures and facilities provided by the student services fee at the moment, the entire orientation program could be lost.

## **PROSH**

2005 marked the 100-year anniversary of one of the most famous Adelaide University, and indeed, South Australian traditions. PROSH originated as a procession of varsity students to protest social concerns and education issues, but is now revered by students across the country as the counterpart to high school muck up days. Oxfam Australia was the selected charity for PROSH 2005, with students raising over \$5000 and plenty of awareness of the great work of Oxfam Australia.

Over a century of PROSH, the SAUA has raised thousands of dollars for a variety of vital charities including Kids Future Kids Inc, Refugee Advocacy Service of South Australia, Multiple Sclerosis Society, Women's and Children Hospital Foundation, St Vincent de Paul, Don Dunstan Foundation and the Anti-Cancer Foundation.

PROSH is organised by the SAUA and is an example of the community interaction student organisations are involved in. PROSH is fondly remembered by Adelaide University alumni, and the South Australian community. Under VSU, this proud and charitable tradition will have to be scaled back, or sadly cancelled.

## **On Dit & Student Media**

On Dit is the student newspaper at Adelaide University and part of the student media department of the Students' Association. Established in 1937, On Dit is

very much a part of the history of South Australia. Currently it remains only one of two weekly student papers in the country.

Student newspapers have produced some of Australia's most prominent journalists including Laurie Oakes, David Penberthy, Annabel Crabb and Samantha Maiden.<sup>8</sup>

On Dit is first and foremost a student newspaper, an opportunity for students to see their work in print, a chance for public debate on issues effecting students as well as the local and global community. It gives young people valuable experience in journalism and media production.

The SAUA has already begun the process of scaling back On Dit in preparation for VSU. This will mean fewer editions published each year, and an increase in the need for advertising to supplement the On Dit operating grant. Increased advertising equates to less space for student contribution, greater constriction on content and the further silencing of student voice.

The impact of VSU on student media extends well beyond On Dit. Student Radio is one of the most unique and outstanding opportunities available for students provided by student organisations. Under VSU, the Students' Association will no longer be able to fund the affiliation fee to Radio Adelaide, the local station that facilitates Student Radio for all three South Australian universities. The loss of Student Radio will have serious consequences for the entire state. With student organisations from South Australia's three universities unable to pay affiliation funds to Radio Adelaide, the community radio station may be forced to shut down.

### **Job Losses**

Vital in the day to day running of student organisations are the support staff who assist student representatives in their work. The NTEU estimate that approximately 7 000 jobs will be placed in jeopardy should the Federal Government's VSU legislation succeed in passing through the Senate.

South Australia has a total of 470 staff employed in Student Organisations:

Adelaide University – 163  
Flinders University– 170  
University of South Australia– 137

The roles fulfilled by these staff members are extremely varied and all vital to the successful functioning of South Australia's student organisations. From administrative support, catering and bar staff to research and project work, graphic design, marketing and academic advocacy, the staff employed by the AUU all contribute to creating a better quality of university life for students at Adelaide University.

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<sup>8</sup> Cooney, Phillip, 'How Quickly Those Firebrands Forget', *The Advertiser*, March 21

The removal of a universal levy for students will have a serious impact on the ability of student organisations to maintain adequate staffing levels. Many staff members in student organisations have dedicated many years of their lives to providing valuable services to students. Within the AUU there are staff that have given close to twenty years of service in student organisations. The loss of jobs will have a serious impact on the South Australian community as a whole and the SAUA urges the Federal Government to consider the impact this legislation will have on the lives of student organisations staff and their families.

Adelaide University Union, like many other student unions across Australia, make a priority of employing students in many of the casual and contract employment positions. Working on campus provides enables students to more easily and successfully balance employment and study. Within the AUU students are employed in fields as diverse as catering, accounting and building maintenance. As well as financial supports, these are fantastic experience opportunities for students that will be lost under VSU.

### **Commitment to Fairness**

On many occasions during the VSU debate, the accountability, capacity and transparency of student unions have been under attack. The SAUA acknowledges that Australian student organisations are not without fault, or need for reform. Like all public organisations, student associations, guilds, and student unions do not do the right thing all the time and are open to flaws and abuses of power. The Government are not the only ones with concerns; student organisations share them as well. The SAUA believes however that students are in the best position to reform students organisations. The Government should be trying to help in this process, instead of dictating what should happen.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of June this year, the Presidents of many of Australia's student organizations met in Canberra to commit to set of Fairness Principles. Australian student are committed to the following principles regarding fairness and student services fees.

1. All students at Australian Universities deserve access to a range of quality student services and representation. The Higher Education Sector agrees that this is best provided by student organization.
2. No student is required to pay the full student services fee at the point of enrolment. In cases of financial hardship, flexible payment options and fee waivers are made available.
3. Part-time and external students are charged fee levels that reflect their differing needs and opportunities to interact with the campus community.
4. Students are not charged twice for student services and amenities fees when they study at two institutions for the same degree.

Student representatives have made a commitment to ensuring the best possible provision of student services and representation. The SAUA urges the Federal Government to take this opportunity engage in consultation with

student organisations on these issues, instead of simply throwing the baby out with the bath water.

## **Demand for VSU**

The SAUA is very alarmed by the Federal Government's insistence on the issue of VSU, when it is clearly apparent that they are the sole group pushing for its implementation. Strong opposition to the introduction of VSU has been voiced by every stakeholder groups in the higher education sector. The National Tertiary Education Union asserts that,

“Student organisations make a crucial contribution to a dynamic, democratic and creative educational environment in our universities, provide students with the means and ability to take part in many facets of university life, and given them a representative voice and participatory role in the governance of their institutions.”<sup>9</sup>

Vice chancellors from many Australian universities have clearly stated their support for student organisations. La Trobe University Vice-Chancellor, Michael Osborne told *The Age* that VSU would turn Australian universities into “*wastelands*” and the international education community would “*see Australian institutions becoming academic slums.*”<sup>10</sup> The Group of Eight Universities have released a statement condemning VSU and state that, “*Student representative bodies are part of this democratic environment and play an important role in the representation of student interests in the internal governance of their universities.*”<sup>11</sup>

However, the Federal Government has failed to consult with Australia's 600 000 strong university students. Any push for VSU should be student directed; it is their money, their representation and their services.

In 1999, New Zealand students faced the introduction of voluntary student membership. The proposed legislation was amended to allow student organisation to hold campus referendums in order to let students decide if they wanted universal membership. Students voted overwhelmingly for universal membership. Five of the seven campuses in New Zealand voted for compulsory membership. Whether a similar result could be achieved here will never be know because students have not, and as it stands, will never be asked what they think on the matter. However, recent market research from the University of Adelaide offers an interesting insight into the opinion of university students and their student services fee.

In September 2004, the University of Adelaide and the Adelaide University Union conducted a substantial research project investigating student need and services. A section of this research looked at the student services fee and

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<sup>9</sup> NTEU VSU Statement, <http://www.nteu.org.au/policy/current/vsu>

<sup>10</sup> La Trobe University Vice-Chancellor, Michael Osborne as reported in *The Age*, 18 March 2005

<sup>11</sup> GO8 Statement on Voluntary Student Unionism, <http://www.go8.edu.au/news/2005/Go8%20on%20VSU%20legislation%2016.03.05.pdf>

students' attitude towards it, what they are willing to pay for and what they view as essential.

“A major finding of the study was that 84% of University of Adelaide students supported a compulsory Student Services Fee to fund services and amenities, as opposed to a user-pays system.”<sup>12</sup>

Importantly for the Students' Association, 59% of students are happy for some of their student services to be distributed to representative organisations, such as the SAUA. If, as the Minister and the Federal Government frequently remind us, VSU is about choice, then it should be the choice of students who will experience the impacts, and not the choice of a government on an ideological vendetta. The Government should give students the choice as to whether VSU is implemented, because as it stands, students have already chosen a universal system and VSU will only take that choice away.

### **The Western Australia Experience**

From 1994 until 2002, Western Australian Universities operated under a system of VSU, with students who chose to be members of their student organisations paying a fee when enrolling. The *Acts Amendment (Student guilds and Associations) Act 1994* became more commonly known as 'WA Style VSU' and is very similar to the type of VSU currently proposed by the Federal Government.

According to NUS, the initial opt in membership rates for Western Australian students' organisations were;

Curtin University - 10%  
Edith Cowan University -13%  
University of WA - 28%  
Murdoch University - 38%

The most interesting of those results come from the University of Western Australia and Murdoch University, with opt in rates significantly higher than the other universities. These two universities continued to promote student representation and community involvement, while the other two focused primarily on services alone.

The scope of services and representation that was lost or reduced in Western Australia is expansive and disturbing. NUS have catalogued the VSU impact in Western Australia.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> University of Adelaide, Media Release, <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/news/news5061.html>, May 30, 2005.

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<sup>13</sup> NUS, *Student Organisations In Australia - At Risk With Anti Student Organisation Legislation*, March 15 2005

### **Curtin University**

Academic Rights Support - reduced  
Welfare Officers - reduced  
Full Program of Cultural Events - lost  
Women's Rooms - lost  
Weekly Campus Newsletter - lost  
Policy support for student reps - lost  
Women's Department - lost  
Environment Department - lost  
Orientation Camp for First Years - lost

### **Edith Cowan University**

Academic Rights Support - lost at undergraduate level  
Welfare Officers - retained only through university funding position directly  
Guild Service Centres - lost  
Full Program of Cultural Events - lost  
Women's Rooms - lost  
Weekly Campus Newsletter - lost  
Policy support for student reps - lost  
Women's Department - lost  
Environment Department - lost  
Orientation Camp for First Years - lost  
Funding for Clubs and Societies - reduced

### **Murdoch University**

Academic Rights Support - lost  
Welfare Officers - reduced  
Guild Service Centres -lost  
Full Programme of Cultural Events - lost  
Policy support for student reps - lost  
Women's Department - lost  
Environment Department - lost  
Orientation Camp for First Years - lost  
Funding for Clubs and Societies - reduced  
Student Emergency Loans - lost  
Sport Library - lost

### **University of Western Australia**

Academic Rights Support - reduced  
Welfare Officers - reduced  
Guild Service Centres -lost

Funding for Clubs and Societies - reduced  
Student Emergency Loans - lost  
Disabled Students Department - lost  
Sexuality Department - lost  
Sport Library - lost  
Subsidised Catering on Campus - lost  
Student Conference Funding - lost  
Student Publications - reduced  
International Student Campaigns and Projects - reduced  
Activities -reduced  
Postgraduate Support - reduced  
Regional Campus Funding -reduced  
Affiliation Fees to NUS - unable to pay  
Affiliation Fees to Sports Peak Body - unable to pay

Student Emergency Loans - lost  
Sexuality Department - lost  
Subsidised Catering on Campus - lost  
Personal Accident Insurance - Lost  
Off Campus Housing Advice - Lost  
Student Conference Funding - lost  
Student Publications - reduced  
International Student Campaigns and Projects - reduced  
Activities -reduced  
Postgraduate Support - reduced  
Regional Campus Funding -reduced  
Affiliation Fees to NUS - unable to pay  
Affiliation Fees to Sports Peak Body - unable to pay

Subsidised Catering on Campus - lost  
Sexual Assault Referral Service - lost  
Off Campus Housing Advice - lost  
Student Conference Funding - lost  
Student Publications - reduced  
International Student Campaigns and Projects - reduced  
Activities -reduced  
Postgraduate Support - reduced  
Regional Campus Funding -reduced  
Affiliation Fees to NUS - unable to pay  
Affiliation Fees to Sports Peak Body - unable to pay

Policy support for student reps - lost  
Women's Department - partly integrated into university equity office



Funding for Clubs and Societies - reduced	Student Publications - reduced
Student Emergency Loans - lost	International Student Campaigns and Projects - reduced
Disabled Students Department - lost	Activities -reduced
Subsidised Catering on Campus - lost	Regional Campus Funding -reduced
Sexual Assault Referral Service - reduced	Affiliation Fees to NUS - unable to pay
Student Conference Funding - lost	Affiliation Fees to Sports Peak Body - unable to pay

This list clearly demonstrates that there is more at stake here than cheap sausage rolls and subsidised beer. Murdoch University Student Guild lost their Sexual Assault Referral Service, University of Western Australia Student Guild had to dissolve their Disabled Students Department and Edith Cowen Student Guild was no longer able to provide students with emergency loans. It is completely untrue to state that student organisations thrived in Western Australia under VSU as has been claimed; the reality is clearly very different.

The VSU legislation currently being considered will see similar impacts such as those experienced in Western Australia, become common place at universities all over Australia.

## **Conclusion**

Student Organisations are an extraordinary part of Australia's history and a vital part of it's future. They have initiated and participated in some of the most defining moments of social change in times past and helped countless students achieve the most out of their time at university. Through their services and representation, students who may not have been able to stay at university have been able to complete their studies. A universal student levy ensures that crucial services and representation continues to be accessible and beneficial to all students.

VSU will result in universities becoming cold, degree factories where students only get a degree, and not an education. Support structures for students will be hit hard by VSU. Students who can least afford to lose these services will struggle to be complete their degree, leaving universities bastions of the privileged.

*The Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005* continues a long-term agenda of this Coalition Government. Should this legislation pass through the Senate it will be a short-term victory with very real long term consequences. The SAUA urges the Senate to see the real impact of VSU, consider the interests of all Australian students and reject this legislation, instead of rushing to settle a political score.