

To: Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and
Education Legislation Committee

From: La Trobe University Student Representative Council
Inc.

Subject: Inquiry into the provisions of the Higher Education
Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front
Union Fees) Bill 2005

Date: Wednesday June 22nd, 2005

The Victorian government Tertiary Education Act 1993, 'Victorian style' VSU legislation has had a devastating impact on La Trobe University SRC Inc. As I'm sure the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee are aware under the Victorian model of VSU student unions are only able to allocate the funding provided by compulsory student fees to the prescribed list of activities under the act. When this was applied to the SRC of La Trobe University Bundoora, vital student services such as the student magazine *Rabelais*, Office Bearer wages, and also payment of the SRC's affiliation to the National Union of Students, the peak student representative organisation in Australia were some of the most significant features cut after the initial introduction of VSU.

These essential services provide students with a breadth of learning experience together with enhancing their cultural appreciation at university. We believe that the introduction of VSU would erode the fundamental rights of students to be heard within the university structure and within the broader community.

If the proposed Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005 is passed in its current form, the La Trobe SRC and I'm sure along with many other student organisations will be completely decimated. At present the La Trobe Student Representative Council receives about 97% of its budget directly from the Compulsory Service Fee. If Voluntary Student Unionism is implemented, without the Compulsory Fee income, and if the need for staff redundancies is required, the SRC will have no income and no reserves to enable it to continue its operations.

The SRC neither has nor can foresee any additional funding sources other than a grant from La Trobe University. The only service that is provided by the SRC that could derive any kind of income source is our Dental Service. However, it is provided as a subsidised service for all university students. If we were to reshape this service in order for it to provide a source of income for our student organisation it would no longer be an accessible service for the vast majority of students on campus. Due to the independent structure of the SRC, a 'fee for service' or 'user pays' system would be untenable.

**La Trobe University Students' Representative Council submission to the 2005 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**

- 1 Representation and Services**
- 1.1 Representation**
- 1.11 - Office Bearers**
- 1.111 - President**
- 1.112- General Secretary**
- 1.113 - Queer**
- 1.114 - Environment**
- 1.115 - Womens**
- 1.116 - Education**
- 1.117 - Welfare**
- 1.118 - dis(Ability)**
- 1.119 - Indigenous**
- 1.12 - General Members**
- 1.13 - NUS**
- 1.14 - University Committees**
- 1.2 Services**
- 1.21 Service Departments**
- 1.211 - Clubs & Societies**
- 1.212 - Rabelais**
- 1.213 - Legal**
- 1.214 - Dental**
- 1.215 - Accounting & Tax**
- 1.2151 - Financial & Administration**
- 1.2151 - Student Services**
- 1.216 - Administration Assistant**
- 1.217 - Student Advocacy**
- 1.218 - SRC Organiser/ Activities Officer**
- 1.22 Additional Services**
- 1.221 - The Breakfast Club**
- 1.222 - 2nd hand online Bookshop**
- 1.223 - Miscellaneous Services**

1 Representation & Services

The La Trobe University Students' Representative Council (SRC) acts as the student voice on campus as well as within the wider community. All students of the Bundoora campus are members and the SRC represents the views and opinions of La Trobe University students in a diverse range of forums both on and off campus. The SRC encourages students to get involved with activities on a campus level by attending collective meetings or participating in various political and social events.

There are essentially two arms of the SRC that work in conjunction with each other and the University community to ensure the best outcome for La Trobe University Bundoora students. The representation arm encompasses the student council, committee reps and National Union of Students delegates whom are all elected annually. The services arm is administrated by the eight staff members of the SRC, under direction of the council and initiated in response to student need on campus. The student newspaper *Rabelais* and the Clubs & Societies fall under the services arm, but are not directly controlled by the student council.

1.1 Representation

1.11 Office Bearers

At the SRC annual elections nine students are elected as the SRC office bearers. These students are elected to specific portfolios for a period of twelve months. The portfolios cover President, General Secretary and seven activist offices being Education, Environment, dis(Ability), Queer, Indigenous, Women's and Welfare. Each of these departments have evolved over the past 30 years to create an effectively run student organization that promotes and upholds the ideals of student control of student affairs. With the exception of President & General Secretary, the individual office bearers are each in charge of a department, budget and office. Each builds a collective of students that in turn directs the office bearer in campaigns and departmental focus.

1.111 President

The President acts as the spokesperson and public officer for the SRC. This means that it is the role of the President to facilitate all official correspondence between the SRC council and the outside world. The President must also maintain an efficient office environment by co-ordinating between SRC staff and students on a daily basis.

1.112 General Secretary

The General Secretary completes the administrative branch of the student council, overseeing the budget, clubs & societies and meetings of the SRC. The General Secretary is responsible for the upkeep of the SRC website, www.srclatrobe.org.au – an archiving system of SRC minutes, meetings, news, services and information for La Trobe students.

1.112 Queer Officer

The Queer Officer is the first port of call for students who identify as being queer, bisexual or transgendered. They facilitate the Queer Collective, represent queer students on University Committees. The Queer Officer is responsible for the upkeep

and involvement of the Rainbow Room – a queer friendly space located in the Union Building.

1.113 Environment Officer

The Environment Officer facilitates a platform for students to engage with, explore and learn about environmental issues both on and off campus. They lobby the University and the student body on environment projects and concerns. In 2004 the Environment department hosted the National Students of Sustainability Conference.

1.114 Women's Officer

The Women's Officer is a point of call for all female students at La Trobe. They facilitate the Women's Action Collective, and like the Queer Officer is also responsible for the maintenance of the Women's Room- a women safe space located in the Union Building.

1.115 Education Officer

The Education officer is concerned with issues such as free education, or at least reasonably administered schooling. They facilitate the Education & Welfare Action Collective (EWAC) alongside the Welfare Officer, and represents education issues on University Committees.

1.116 Welfare Officer

In the increasingly difficult climate that face current university students the role of the Welfare officer is to represent the vast majority of students who are living below the poverty line. They organise events such as the Breakfast Club, facilitate the Education Welfare Action Collective (EWAC) alongside the Education Officer, and represents student welfare on University Committees.

1.117 dis(Ability) Officer

The (dis)Ability Officer position was appointed for the first time in 2004. It was initiated for students who identify as being disabled at La Trobe. This can include; physical, mental or psychological. They facilitate the (dis)Ability Collective and represent students on University Committees. The bulk of their work involves working with the University's Equity and Access department to address student concerns about disabled life on campus.

1.118 Indigenous Officer

It is the role of the Indigenous Officer to act as a representative for Indigenous students at La Trobe. Most of their time is spent liaising with the Indigenous Centre-Ngarni-gi Bagora on campus. It is also the job of the Indigenous Officers to ensure that all La Trobe Indigenous Students can easily and actively access all the services provided for all students by the SRC.

1.11 General Members

Each year nine general members are elected to sit on the student council. It is their responsibility, as directors of the organization alongside the elected office bearers, to ensure clarity and transparency in all operations of the SRC. Often these SRC members take on additional responsibilities such as representing the SRC on University committees.

1.13 National Union of Students

The National Union of Students is the peak student representative organisation in Australia. Over 90% of all University campuses are affiliated to NUS including the La Trobe University SRC. NUS holds conferences throughout the year that promotes solidarity among the student populous. They also run national collectives and campaigns that campus affiliates are encouraged to become involved in. At the SRC's annual elections six delegates are elected to NUS national conference. These delegates, in conjunction with all other national delegates set the policy framework for the coming year.

1.14 University Committees

The SRC council elects student representatives each year to the University Committees. These students are often the only student voice upon that committee and have great influence on committee direction. This was illustrated in 2004 on both the bookshop board of management and the car-parking committees where SRC representatives successfully argued to retain free car parking facilities on campus and to retain the bookshops 10% student discount. The committees that currently have SRC representation are:

- GSF Review Committee
- Parking Fee Committee
- Personal security on Campus Advisory Committee
- Student Services Advisory Group
- Student Loan Fund Metro
- Applications Committee
- Student Loan fund Standing Committee
- Disability Advisory Committee
- University Equal Opportunity Committee
- Academic Committee
- Committee for External Programs
- Selection and Enrolment Committee
- Westpac Banking Corp. Award Committee
- Library Committee
- La Trobe University Bookshop Board of Management
- La Trobe University Housing Limited
- Indigenous Education Committee
- Waste Wise Committee

1.2 Services and Service Support

1.21 Service Departments

1.211 Clubs & Societies

La Trobe University Clubs & Societies provides funding, infrastructure and general support to over 50 affiliated student groups under the auspices of the Students' Representative Council Inc. Individual Clubs and Societies promote a variety of aims and objectives both on and off campus including faculty membership, social activities, political viewpoints, religious affiliation and special interests. La Trobe Clubs and Societies are open to all students and staff at the Bundoora Campus, and currently receive approximately \$40,000 in annual funding for activities.

Clubs and Societies are widely recognised as an integral component of a comprehensive education. Clubs provide an opportunity for students to expand their existing knowledge base and social networks, a function which is especially important for international students new to Australia as well as students who have recently moved away from home. Faculty clubs provide an important role in developing communication between students, staff and the university, through their participation in faculty boards and other university committees. Along with faculty or course based social functions, clubs play a vital role in the creation and establishment of a sense of cohesion amongst students and form important social networks.

Clubs and Societies are one of the most readily accessible services offered by La Trobe Student Organisations and they are administrated by the Clubs & Societies Administrative Officer/SRC administration assistant.

The following is a comprehensive list of affiliated Clubs and Societies for 2005:

- ALP Club
- Agricultural Science
- Animal Rights
- Australian Union of Jewish Students
- Bi-Friendly
- Biochemistry Society
- Botswana Students Association
- BoysOwn
- Breakfast Club
- Buddhist Soc.
- Business Students Association
- Catalyst
- Catholics @LTU
- Chill Out Club
- CHOPS (country)
- Christian Union
- Engineering Society

GirlsOwn
Geeks Inc. (LTU Computer society)
Happy Go Lucky
Health Science Students Association
Indian Sub-Continent Students Association
Islamic Society
La Trobe Ladies Autonomous Social Soc.
Linguistics Society
La Trobe University Noble Anime Soc.
LTU Motor Sports
LaTrobe Org of University Debaters (LOUD)
Malaysian Students Association
Microbiology
More Beer
Music @ La Trobe
Naturalist Society
OTSA (Occupational Therapy Students Association)
Overseas Christian Fellowship
Physics Society
Physiotherapy Students Association
Podiatry Students Assoc. (PODSA)
Prosthetics & Orthotics (POSS)
Postgrads United By Science
Queers on Campus
RAC (Refugee Action Collective)
Resistance
Socialist Alternative
Students For Christ (SFC)
Speech Pathology Assoc. of La Trobe
Turkish Students Association
Womens Accapeolla Singing group.

1.212 Rabelais

Rabelais is the student magazine of the La Trobe University Students Representative Council. As a department within the SRC, the magazine provides opportunities for students to publish, debate and reflect. With an open editorial policy, youth focused content and student editors the magazine is one of few opportunities for students to publish while they are still honing their journalism or creative writing skills. *Rabelais* enables information to be reported directly to the student body, including details of University changes, important dates and events, social gatherings and other campus life information.

The editors are elected each year from the student populous, and facilitate a large group of writers, designers, photographers and other creative students. A student advertising manager is appointed each year to collect any extra revenue for the magazine.

Published ten times throughout the academic year since its inception in 1967, the magazine offers a wide range of opportunities to La Trobe students. In addition to the regular editions of *Rabelais*, there are also five special editions particular to various departments of the SRC. These are *Rebellious* (Womens), *Rebel Q* (Queer), *Green Rab* (Environment), *Indig Rab* (Indigenous-Australian) and an election edition. These special editions are co-ordinated and produced by the relevant collective on campus, with the assistance of the *Rabelais* editors.

1.213 Legal Service

The SRC legal Service is available to all students enrolled at La Trobe University Bundoora. The service is free with the exception of external fees such as court costs or government levies. They provide a full range of legal services including advice on legal issues, conduct of court proceedings and the preparation of legal documents.

1.214 Dental service

Situated in the La Trobe University Medical Centre since 1974, the SRC has operated a dental service offering basic dental care to the students on the Bundoora campus. The service contracts out to RMIT Northern Campus to provide dental care to those students on a cost recovery basis. The Dental Service treats in excess of 1,500 La Trobe University students annually.

1.215 Accounting and Tax

The SRC Accountant is the administrator of the SRC's accounting and tax services, both for the SRC council and the wider student body. The Accountant represents the interests of students on the Bookshop Board, Student Loans Fund and the Student Loans Standing Committee.

1.2151 Financial and Administrative

In conjunction with the SRC President and General Secretary the SRC accountant is responsible for the SRC budgets, monitoring of SRC expenditure, and preparation of all SRC financial reports/statements. The SRC Accountant maintains records and prepares the necessary records for SRC office bearer salaries, tax and superannuation, GST and regulatory statements. The administrative functions include the overseeing of the SRC office functions and supervising the SRC Receptionist/Administrative Assistant and the SRC Dental staff.

1.2152 Student Services

Since 1998 the SRC has offered a taxation and financial advice service. Under the Australian Taxation Office Tax Help Program the SRC Accountant assists students with their annual taxation returns. The service principally operates from July to October but operates throughout

the year, especially for international students. A number of taxation articles relevant to students have been written for student publications. The SRC Accountant is also available for document certification and witnessing of statutory declarations.

1.216 Administrative Assistant

The SRC Administrative Assistant similarly undertakes varying roles throughout the SRC to assist the smooth running of student services and student representation. The core role of the Administrative Assistant is to provide support to the student council, *Rabelais*, Clubs & Societies, the SRC Accountant, Student Advocate and all students.

In general, the administrative assistant is responsible for office maintenance, reception and clerical duties, office supplies, banking, clubs & societies, general enquiries, book binding, online 2nd hand bookshop, faxing and Age newspaper services, loaning of the badge makers and digital video recorder.

More specifically the Administrative Assistant plays an important role as the first point of contact with students. La Trobe Bundoora students often utilise the SRC when they are experiencing difficulties and are have trouble finding the right support. Therefore referral makes up a large and important component of the Administrative assistants duties.

1.217 Student Advocacy

The SRC currently and for a period of many years has retained a Student Advocate on a full time basis. The position has been funded by the General Service Fee and the operational needs of the Student Advocate and the supervision of that position have been provided by the SRC. The Student Advocate is, as a result, operationally and financially independent from the University.

The Student Advocate is the first point of contact for undergraduate students with academic and/or campus life problems one well-recognised example of academic concerns addressed by the Student Advocate is the area of 'Show Cause' applications arising from allegations of unsatisfactory academic progress. Apart from attendances at hearings where the Student Advocate provides an active advocacy role, there are also a large number of applications made by students where students are provided with advice about procedures and pre-requisites for applications. This advice and assistance can be provided without fear of favour due to the current independence of the position. Whilst there is also a prioritisation of assistance required, generally there is little complaint made by students of the resource allocation.

Advice and counselling is also provided to students who raise difficulties with the Student Advocate in areas as diverse as placement grievances, equity issues and disharmony between students and academics to bullying, harassment and discrimination. This is performed in such a way that many complaints are defused in a conciliatory and non-confrontational way, avoiding

of formal hearings, as a result of the assistance and occasional intervention of the Student Advocate.

The Student Advocate also plays a role in advocating change on behalf of the general student body and providing input into University policy and procedures. It is in connection with this function that the Student Advocate attends the majority of student based University committees. Advocacy in this area once again involves direct advocacy in the form of representation as well as advice and assistance for students in structuring and preparing their own

The assistance of the student Advocate is frequently a first point of contact for students with difficulties. The service is made available to the general student body as part of the service provided by the SRC. In addition to this first contact, the Student Advocate receives referrals from University bodies such as the International Programs Office, Equity and Access Unit, Counselling Service, Student Union, Faculty Offices and academics.

Whilst it is implicit in the operations of the Student Advocate that the advice is independent, there is a need to emphasise this independence during the course of assisting students. The Student Advocate commonly works in tandem with the University Ombudsman. This once again involves referrals from the Ombudsman. Students are assisted to distil and refine their grievances and the Student Advocate assists in the efficacious resolution of matters to be determined by the Ombudsman.

Any dispute between an individual student and an organ of the University is inherently imbalanced in much the same way as an individual involved in a dispute with an organ of government in the wider community is inherently disadvantaged. The Student Advocate on behalf of an individual student operates to redress that inherent imbalance and, in empowering the individual student, operates to help ensure fairness and provides balance and fairness that might otherwise be absent.

1.218 SRC Organiser/ Activities Officer

The SRC employs an activity and campaign officer who facilitates various functions in the running of SRC offices. This position offers advice and insight into situations that may occur in the running of official SRC campaigns, internal office issues, clubs and societies, departmental collectives and representatives of University committees.

This person acts as a link between the SRC's office bearers and various external organisations allowing the SRC to maintain communication between external bodies, as well as other student organisations nation-wide. The SRC Organiser/Activities Officer is also an active voice in negotiations between the SRC and other organisations based at La Trobe such as the Union, University administration, Ngarn-gi Bagora Indigenous Centre, La Trobe University Post Graduate Association, Sport and Recreation Association, and the International Students Association.

In addition to supplying advice and information to troubled students around the issues of enrolments, personal issues and workload concerns, the SRC Organiser/Activities Officer provides support to the Student Advocate during peak times and during absences. In conjunction with the SRC Accountant, Student Advocate and Administration Assistant, the SRC Organiser/Activities Officer provides induction and transition training of SRC council members from year to year.

1.22 Additional Services

1.221 The Breakfast Club

The Breakfast club was established in 2002 in response to the La Trobe University poverty report that investigated the standard of living for La Trobe University students. The results were incredibly disturbing with only one third of all La Trobe students being able to afford to eat breakfast on a regular basis. The Student Representative Council felt that providing a basic regular meal would be a concrete way of helping and engaging with students and thus the SRC began the breakfast club in the second semester of 2002. It has been running every Wednesday morning of semester ever since.

Over the years the Breakfast Club has gained a fantastic reputation with publicity in the local newspaper, the Diamond Valley Leader as well as The Age. Additionally, the concept has been embraced by other University campuses around Australia establishing their own breakfast clubs and food donation programs. The Bundoora Breakfast Club services hundreds of students on a regular basis and is an important point of contact between the SRC and the student population. This service is administered by the Welfare department of the SRC, however involvement from all areas of the SRC keep the Breakfast Club running.

1.222 Online second-hand bookshop – In 2001 the SRC's second-hand bookshop was forced to close due to financial constraints. For almost a year there was no second-hand book service located on campus. This resulted in a heavy financial burden upon students who had no option but to buy all textbooks new. In 2002 the SRC decided to open an online version of this service. The new online system allows students to buy, sell or browse for university and non-university texts.

The bookshop is run entirely through the web and it is administrated by the SRC administrative assistant. The cost of maintenance is kept extraordinarily low by the very nature of the service where the bookshop acts simply as a forum for the supplies and buyers of second-hand handbooks to contact each other.

The online second-hand bookshop also facilitates borrowing from the SRC's own library. For a number of years, each department of the SRC has amassed a number of books on their areas of expertise, and students have been free to

borrow these books to help their schooling. The online bookstore allows for a more organised and functional borrowing system to operate.

1.223 Miscellaneous Services

The SRC offers a number of services to students, often born out of a fundamental need on campus. These services are administrated by the SRC administrative assistant and incur low cost.

- Book Binding
- Faxing
- Age subscriptions
- Photocopying
- Driving Lessons

The SRC also provides some services free of charge including the use of

- Badge-makers
- Digital Video Recorder
- Digital Camera
- Photocopying for Clubs
- Activist materials