

# UWA Student Guild 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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## **The Likely Effect of the Legislation on the UWA Student Guild**

As the UWA Student Guild has already experienced a period of voluntary contribution, the likely effect of the legislation is relatively simple to ascertain. That said, the effect of the current Bill will far exceed that which the recent Western Australian regime was able to inflict. In the previous experience, the Guild was able to sell or surrender assets including the UWA Sports Association and most of the Guild's office space to ensure its continued survival (this is explored in more detail later in the submission). This time around, the Guild has few assets to sell to ensure such survival. As a result, the long-term viability of the organisation is, at best, uncertain.

### **Membership**

Clearly, the primary impact of the Bill will be on the number of students who become members of the Guild. Presently, the Guild has around 15,000 members, about 98.5% of the student body. Under the voluntary contribution scheme between 1994 and 2002, membership peaked at about 30% of the student body. Assuming that the Guild will continue to receive the same amount per member (around \$79 for a full-time student in 2005), the Guild can expect, at best, a drop in membership fee income from \$1,000,000 to \$300,000. This represents close to a 50% reduction in the Guild's total operating income; taking it from around \$1,450,000 to \$750,000.

Unfortunately, the practical effect of halving the Guild's operating income means more than a 50% drop in service provision. This will occur because the Guild is bound, under state legislation, university statute and its own regulations, to comply with a variety of administrative requirements, including presenting independently audited annual financial records to the University Senate, holding democratic elections run by the independent Western Australian Electoral Commission, and having up-to-date monthly financial records and minutes of Guild Council and other committees available for any member to access. These administrative requirements are essential to ensuring that the Guild is a democratically accountable organisation,

but in order to fulfil them, significant overhead costs are incurred that cannot simply be ‘scaled back’. Thus, the bulk of budget cuts will have to be drawn from key services that the Guild provides. Services that are at risk are outlined below.

### **Why Won’t Students Join the Guild?**

A common question bandied about rhetorically by supporters of the Bill is; why won’t students join student guilds if they truly value the services that they provide? The answer is simple; the services that guilds provide are, for the most part, non-excludable. This means that students who choose not to pay a voluntary fee are often just as able to access the services that the Guild provides.

An example of this ‘free ride’ that non-members gained from the UWA Student Guild when voluntary contributions were in effect was the Illegal Fees Campaign run in 1998-2000 by the Guild Education Council. This campaign identified course costs that did not comply with the HESA Act and DEST Regulations. The campaign conducted a campus wide survey of fees being charged for items such as course readers and equipment and identified areas of concern. Through this campaign a committee to examine the fees being charged was established with the University Registrar’s Office and Academic Board to which all fees and charges needed to gain approval. All students benefited from this work, however, it was only those students who elected to pay their membership subscription, that contributed to its cost. This is a clear example of how the representation of student interests by Student Organisations cannot be supported by a ‘opt-in’ model of voluntary membership. Rather, all students benefit, and so all students should contribute.

Other examples of ‘free-rides’ that non-members were able to access include computer access at Guild internet cafes, market days in the Guild village, the 170+ stalls at Orientation Day, activities and cultural events on the university lawn, bands and performances in the Tavern and social events run by the seventy affiliated clubs and societies. In addition to this, non-members requiring financial assistance or advocacy with an academic appeal needed only join the Guild immediately before accessing the service, meaning it was there as a safety net despite the fact that most students did not contribute financially.

During the years of voluntary contribution, a much higher proportion of first-year students would join the Guild than those students in later years. A break down of membership figures during this time can be seen in Attachment A. This is clear evidence that, despite the fact that students value the services that the Guild provides, they soon identify that they do not need to be members in order to access the benefits.

The only services that the Guild provides where it is easy to discriminate between members and non-members are the range of discounts available at the Guild's catering, tavern and second-hand bookshop outlets. However, even these services are open to free-riding as non-members simply get friends who are members to make their purchases for them.

Thus, despite the fact that all UWA students benefit from the Guild, past experience shows that only around 30% of them can be expected to become members under a voluntary contribution system. This would result in an organisation that has to service more than three times the number of members it has, making a significant number of services unsustainable and threatening the long term sustainability of the organisation itself.

## **The Effect of the Bill on Core Guild Services**

If the Bill becomes law, the Guild will face insolvency within six years unless it makes significant cuts to the services it offers. The six years of service provision are only possible because the Guild, in anticipation of the Bill, has accumulated approximately \$3.8 million in its reserve pool. The Guild now faces the difficult decision of either spending the reserves to expand its function catering business (increasing its earning potential), or holding on to the investment and using the interest to pay operating costs. In either scenario, significant cuts will have to be made to the services that the Guild offers in order for the organisation to remain sustainable.

### **Representation**

Under s.28(3) of the University of Western Australia Act 1911 (WA), the Guild “shall be the recognised means of communication between students and the governing authority of the University”. This imposes a direct responsibility on the Guild to provide representation to all students of UWA, not just those who would pay a voluntary contribution.

Approximately 34% of Guild operating expenditure goes towards activities of a representative nature (\$501,000). These include the Guild President’s budget, funding for the Education Council (which runs representative campaigns on both intra-university and national issues), and funding for a range of Guild departments, which serve special interests within the University (Albany and Geraldton Students, International Students, Postgraduate Students, Student Parents, Women, Queer Students, Student Welfare, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students, the Environment).

In addition to this, the Guild provides funding to the ten student Faculty Societies. These affiliates of the Guild represent students at a more specific, course-by-course level, sitting on the Faculty Boards and Teaching and Learning Committees. The Guild funds the faculty societies under a comprehensive funding model. This takes

into account the number of students that the society must represent (ranging from a few hundred up to over three thousand) and the number of educational events that the society has run (including careers forums and course handbooks). Faculty Societies play a crucial role in the University structure, are built into its regulations and play a fundamental role in decision making processes. The funding that the Guild provides enables them to fulfil their core representative and educational functions.

Student representation at UWA has been able to achieve a large range of results over the years. These range from the negotiation and agreement with the University of the charter of student rights, the elimination of thousands of dollars worth of ancillary fees, the creation of a student parent's room on campus, the instillation of emergency 'safety posts' around the University, and the consideration of special interest groups' needs at all stages of Guild decision-making.

Under a system of voluntary contribution, severe cuts to representative budgets can be expected. This would arise out of the simple fact that, despite being a core Guild function, representation is not sustainable in a user-pays environment. As it is impossible to exclude non-members from the benefits of representation, there is no incentive for potential members to join on this basis. Thus, under a system of voluntary contribution, representation would be scaled back to minimal levels.

## **Welfare**

Some of the most important work that the Guild does occurs at a casework level; providing one-on-one support for students. This occurs within the Guild Student Centre, which employs two education officers, a financial support officer and a postgraduate and international student research officer. This represents about 15% of operating expenditure; around \$220,000. The services of the student centre include providing financial counselling for students with 'money issues', administering Guild loans and grants to students and providing representation and advice to students who are appealing a mark or academic decision (advocacy). The staff in the centre have professional graduate and postgraduate qualifications, and are well respected within the University community despite the 'watchdog' and 'student advocate' role that they fulfil. Having an independent body that will vouch for students in circumstances

that students will often find highly intimidating is absolutely essential in correcting the natural power-imbalance that exists between a student and the University administration. The Centre ensures that University policies that student representatives have successfully lobbied for are actually implemented across the campus. To this end, the service not only benefits the individual student, but prevents subsequent students from experiencing the same problem.

In order to ensure the sustainability of the advocacy and financial assistance services, the Guild would have to begin marketing it as a necessary ‘insurance policy’ that they may not have to use, but will find essential should the need arise. Such a campaign would probably only be met with modest results, given the carefree and secure-feeling demographic that most students at UWA fall within. The “it’ll never happen to me” attitude prevails, despite hundreds of students accessing the student centre each year.

To stop students from simply joining the Guild to access the service on the day that they need it, a ‘qualifying period’ will have to be explored, whereby students are only able to access the service if they have been a member for a certain period of time. While enabling the service’s continued existence, such a qualifying period would prevent many needy students from having access to a service that both students and the University regard as essential.

The only other option available to ensure the Centre’s continued viability is to introduce a total ‘user-pays’ system. This would lead to students being billed on an hourly basis for the service, which would lead to many owing hundreds or even thousands of dollars. This is clearly an undesirable outcome in instances where financial assistance is required, and would result in the advocacy service becoming a pseudo-legal representative system, with fees to match.

## **Activities**

A rich campus culture is vital to the student experience at UWA. Far from being an exclusive club, the UWA Guild serves to offer a wide range of activities and social events to make students’ time at UWA inclusive and enjoyable. Only 10% of Guild operating expenditure (around \$150,000) is spent on these activities, but the money



goes a long way. The Guild runs a number of events and social activities. These include the end-of-semester shows, numerous events in the Tavern and the annual Guild ball. In addition to this, the Guild, through the Public Affairs Council, runs a variety of cultural events including the highly visible ‘fringe festival’.

The Guild also provides funding to the seventy affiliated clubs and societies. These clubs run all manner of events, from the ‘Solid Gold’ club’s disco parties, to the Singapore Students’ Society’s Ball, to the French Club’s wine and cheese nights. All such clubs are built upon the voluntary work of hundreds of student volunteers. Guild funding and banking support gives these students the means to run the events that make UWA renowned for its excellent campus atmosphere. The result is a wide range of cost-effective events, run for students, by students.

Under a system of voluntary membership, non-members would have to be excluded, so much as is possible, from benefiting from the Guild’s support of campus life. This would result in high entry fees being charged to non-members, or exclusion altogether. This two-tiered system would alienate many students, and discourage them from participating in the events altogether.

Lower revenues will almost certainly mean less funding for the clubs and societies. This will make many of the smaller, cultural clubs financially unviable, and will severely reduce the breadth of events on campus. This will make the Guild a more exclusive and less encompassing organisation.

### **Other Services**

The Guild also provides a range of non-representative services. These include the on-campus provision of the student newspaper, Pelican, and the weekly ‘silver guilder’ newsletter. The Guild also provides a banking service for affiliated clubs and societies, a finance department which administers loans and grants for students, and a memberships office that sources off-campus discounts for students, distributes information out amongst the student body, and devises better service delivery for members.

Under a voluntary contribution scheme, the Guild memberships department will have to shift to a 'marketing' role, taking attention away from improving services provided to members and focusing on selling what services remain to potential members. Clearly, this is an outcome that results in waste and inferior levels of services being provided to students who deserve much better. Print runs of the student media will have to be cut, diminishing campus culture and lowering levels of information.

The Guild also runs the catering and tavern on campus. In a voluntary contribution environment, the Guild will be forced to derive as much income as is possible from these commercial outlets, rather than the current scheme where food is provided at near cost prices to members, and at quite low profits to non-members. Commercialising Guild catering will make it harder for non-member students to access affordable food on-campus, and will force students to become Guild members simply for the 'discount card'.

## **Summary**

The likely effects of the Bill on the UWA Guild are, at best, dire or, at worst, fatal. The organisation will be forced to adopt the Government's user pays mentality in order to survive. The result is that a variety of essential services will be discontinued (such as funding to representation), whilst others will become warped reflections of their original forms (pay by-the-hour academic advocacy and marketing departments selling students an inferior version of services that they had previously automatically received).

The Bill is a political attack on organisations that have been consistently critical of the Government's anti-student policies. The Government's efforts to silence its critics will ultimately fail, as the student movement relies on the tireless efforts of altruistic individuals who will become only more determined by this attempt to destroy them. The true victims of this attack will be ordinary students, who in 2006 will find their campuses have become boring and unsupportive environments. Political oppression may be the Government's objective with this Bill, but essential campus services will also collapse as 'collateral damage'. Paying hundreds or even thousands of dollars to have a chance of successfully appealing an unfair academic assessment is a clearly unreasonable position for a student to be in. However, many such situations are a necessary result of a user-pays, voluntary contribution regime.

## **The Impact of VSU in Western Australia**

### **Legislative History**

The UWA Student Guild was established under the University of Western Australia Act (1911). Until 1977 membership of Western Australian Student Guilds was a consequence of enrolment.

This form of membership, universal membership, is all inclusive. Students have the right to vote and be elected and involved with their organisation. All students were members, and in turn, the Guild looked after the rights of all students and acted as their representative across a spectrum of forums.

### **The Introduction of VSU to Western Australia**

VSU first appeared in Western Australia when a 1977 resolution of the UWA Liberal Club made the issue one of its central tenants.

When the (Charles) Court Government was returned in 1977 it amended the Acts of the Western Australian universities to introduce VSU. The amendment also prohibited the payment of affiliation fees to the Australian Union of Students. Instead of membership being collected by the Guilds as a condition of enrolment, the University could collect a compulsory “Amenities and Services Fee”, on the condition that the funds collected “be applied solely for the purposes of cultural, social, sporting or recreational activities” directly related to the University. The University could determine whether these funds could be given and in the case of UWA, the Administration chose to give the balance of all funds collected to the Guild. It was in the mould of this legislation that other states followed suit and by 1978, the ACT and Victoria had this form of VSU. The overall effect of the legislation was to limit the role of the Guild to that of a service provider, any political function was prohibited.

## **The Repeal of VSU in Western Australia**

The election of the Burke Government in 1983 saw the Tertiary Institutions Acts amended again. The nature of these alterations were:

- Students enrolling into University were to be given the option of conscientiously objecting to become members of their student organisation, with the objectors paying the equivalent subscription amount to a charity.
- Guild subscriptions were to be collected by the relevant Guild.
- Subscriptions were to be determined by the relevant Guild and subject to approval by the University Senate Council.

## **VSU Under the (Richard) Court Government**

The next move by those in favour of VSU was in 1991, with Norman Moore, (then opposition spokesperson for Youth Affairs) introducing a private members bill to the Legislative Chamber that sought to:

- Remove the requirement for a student to be a member of their Student Organisation.
- Remove the provision for conscientious objection.
- Make it unlawful to penalise anyone for not being a member of their student organisation.
- Changing the role of the Guild from that of being the representatives of the student body to a means of communication with the student body.
- Removal of the University Senate, or Council, as the statutory body controlling the student organisation's activities.

What would remain in the acts would see student organisations:

- Continue to exist
- Act as a means of communication between the University Administration and the student body.
- Be incorporated bodies.

The ascendancy of the (Richard) Court Government saw the Norman Moore re-introduce his private members bill in his capacity as Education Minister. It was the first piece of legislation enacted by the new Government when it was passed in December 1993.

Victoria followed Western Australia's move back to VSU with the 1994 Tertiary Education Amendment Act however, this legislation more closely reflected that seen under the (Charles) Court Government.

### **First Attempt to Implement Federal VSU**

As Federal Education Minister in 1999, Dr David Kemp sought to introduce Western Australian VSU on a national level. After it was clear that the bill would not pass when the National Party withdrew support the move was stopped.

### **Introduction of the Amenities and Services Fee**

The 2001 State Election sparked the beginning of lengthy discussions to draft legislation meeting the needs of all the stakeholders in Higher Education in Western Australia. The result of this was the Amenities and Services Fee legislation which was passed in 2002 and came into effect in 2003.

Under this legislation the fee is collected by University Administrations and can only be spent on services and amenities that benefit students. It recognises the integral role that Guilds play in the providing these and stipulates that a minimum of 51% of the fee collected will be directed towards Student Guilds. The expenditure of the fee is determined by a list of allowable areas of expenditure selected by each University's governing board. The Fee is set by this same body and it will receive the audited accounts for the Student Guild in order to ensure that there is financial propriety.

## The Effect of VSU on UWA

The experiences of Western Australian Student Guilds clearly show the detriment VSU has on student organisations. Contrary to the views espoused in the House of Representatives during the 1999 Federal VSU debate that “under VSU, (The UWA Student Guild) has grown into one of the biggest and most vibrant run organisations in the country”, the impact on its operations was significant and toxic.

The UWA Student Guild survived not because VSU allowed it to, but rather due to good fortune and a presumption that the situation would be a temporary one. Had the situation continued after 2001 it is likely the UWA Student Guild would have lasted no longer than 6 years. VSU severely hampered the Guild’s efforts to remain a quality student organisation and forced the closure of many services and the cutting of funding to surviving services to an unsustainable level.

### UWA Student Guild Losses under VSU

VSU significantly reduced the services offered by the UWA Student Guild to students. Perhaps more importantly, it reduced the Guild’s capability to provide services in the future. These losses included:

Operating Losses	
	Sexual Assault Referral Centre: student welfare service including a trained staff member
	28 Jobs including:
	Education officers providing counselling, academic appeals and financial advice
	Finance and Administrative support staff
	IT personnel
	Retail staff
	Childcare providers
	Sports centre management
	Funding to clubs and societies: a 45% reduction in funds resulted in a decreased

student experience
Representation Budget cut from \$135 000 to \$25 000: reducing the funding available for campaigns to improve the quality of education and campus conditions
Student welfare budget cut from \$70 000 to \$45 000
Severe cutting of the text book subsidy scheme
Computer lounge closed down: removing 24 hour access to free internet
Funding of property fell from \$320 000 to \$120 000: The Guild is now reliant on the University for handouts to develop any new infrastructure for services as well as finding it difficult to maintain current assets
24 hour/365 day personal accident insurance for students cancelled.

Long Term Losses	
	Guild Sports and Recreation Division: became a separate for profit organisation in order to pay a \$3.3 Million debt incurred prior to VSU. Students now have to pay for access to facilities
	Sale of Property including the South West Wing of the Guild Building
	Cash Reserves: were used to fund operations during this time period.

### **Staff Losses**

VSU led to an unacceptable level of staffing restructure proving detrimental to services provided to students. Unfortunately for staff this type of restructure will always be at the forefront of cost cutting for survival's sake. During this time Guild staff were overworked and expected to take on increasingly more work. Since the repeal of VSU, Western Australian Guilds have not yet built their staffing back up to pre-1996 levels.

### **Representation Losses**

The University of Western Australia has always viewed the Guild as the peak representative body of the Guild. While this view was not altered under VSU, the ability of student representatives to adequately perform their roles was completely



undercut. Most notably, there was no longer adequate resourcing to allow representatives to adequately perform their role.

When cutting budgets the easiest places to reduce or remove funding are campaign or representation lines. While this may seem a preferable option to making staff members redundant it drastically reduced the effect of representation and education and social campaigns. The reduction in funding to clubs and societies further decreased the ability of the Guild and its affiliated bodies and sub councils to effectively represent its students.

The Guild was unable to employ education research officers to undertake research and provide information and assistance to students in their representative capacity. This placed an extra burden on the education officers (employed to deal with student consultation and counselling) who endeavoured to undertake this workload in addition to their core function.

Interestingly, while the lack of funding was due to a reduction in the number of students contributing to the Guild, there was not a reduction in the number of students benefiting from this service. Unlike catering discounts or entry to concerts the core duties of the Guild are non-excludable.

A further issue to consider when addressing representation under VSU is the jeopardising of Guild beliefs when they are in conflict with a funding body, such as the University or Federal or State Governments. It is particularly difficult for an organisation to challenge the views of the very bodies keeping it financially afloat.

### **Welfare Losses**

The Guild prides itself on ensuring the welfare of all students at university is maintained. Under VSU this was not an achievable reality. The Guild could no longer sustain an information and consultation service, a sexual assault referral centre, childcare, personal accident insurance or sufficient text book subsidies.

The Guild also operates student welfare departments, including: The International Students Service, The Postgraduate Student Association, The Women's Department, The Mature Age and Part Time Students Department, The Environment Department, The Sexuality Information Department and The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Student Department. It is widely recognised that these groups are necessary to ensure the welfare of special interest groups yet they were rendered almost stagnant by the budget cuts resulting from VSU.

### **Activities and Sports Losses**

The most visibly and directly affected area of the Guild was student activities and campus culture. The University of Western Australia believes that students achieve the most out of their degree when they engage in activities outside of their lectures and tutorials. The UWA Student Guild plays an integral role in the shaping of the student experience and the "other" education gained at University. In conjunction with interaction and entertainment on campus the Guild facilitates student involvement with projects benefiting the broader community such as PROSH and Uni Camp For Kids. Unsurprisingly VSU meant a subsequent reduction in the resources and funding available to such projects.

VSU took campus culture away from universities. As well as the cutting of film screenings, funding to clubs and societies, lunch time entertainment, the activities officer's hours, the multicultural aspects of campuses were also weakened by the inability of Western Australian Guilds to fund such activities.

Many of the aforementioned losses were only temporary; however the relinquishment of the Sports and Recreation Division has had a lasting effect on the Guild's services. The UWA Student Guild no longer administers the Sports Association or any sporting clubs on campus and students now pay near commercial rates for access to facilities paid for by student fees.

## **Other Losses**

Due to the understaffing of services, those provided by the UWA Student Guild saw a marked decrease in quality and availability, or were cancelled altogether. As a result of the long term damage caused by VSU it was no longer viable to subsidise the Guild's Copy Centre and Retail Outlet. The sale of these two services had a two-pronged effect: their conversion from a service to a business and the inability to turn them into profit generating entities capable of subsidising services in future years.

## **Factors contributing to the Survival of the UWA Student Guild**

### **Federal Government SOS Funding**

Much is made of Western Australian Student Guild budgets pre-1996. It is clearly a myth to suggest that these are indicative of moneys available to Guilds in a VSU environment. Student organisations in Western Australia were insulated from the effects of VSU through the SOS (Student Organisation Scheme) Funding from the Keating Federal Government. This funding was taken out of the Federal grant to the state and given directly to the University, to be passed onto the respective student organisations. It ended in 1996 with the defeat of the Keating government.

It effectively replaced the fees collected by Guilds during Universal Membership. As a result of this funding the full impact of VSU did not hit Western Australian Guilds until 1996.

### **Support of the Administration at the University of Western Australia**

Like other Western Australian Guilds, the UWA Student Guild was financially bolstered by the University administration. When it became clear that SOS funding was to end with the defeat of the Keating Government the University and the Guild became engaged in discussion to ensure the Guild's long term viability.

The UWA Student Guild and the UWA Administration formed the Guild Advisory Council, which restructured Guild operations, including the removal of Guild Sports to form the UWA Sports and Recreation Association, and a guarantee to underwrite some of the Guild's services that the University considered essential.

The restructure may have resulted in forced redundancies and the removal of many services considered essential by the Guild, it did act as a buffer to immediate financial collapse. The good will of the University cannot be discounted as a major reason for the survival of the UWA Student Guild and as mentioned earlier this is far from an ideal situation.

### **Independent Income Streams**

The survival of the UWA Student Guild during the (Richard) Court VSU was not a testament to its success but a result of many years of compulsory fees which allowed the Guild to develop the infrastructure and capital required to sustain itself in this short period. As a comparatively older organisation the Guild had time to develop independent income streams. These include: catering operations, rental income from Guild property and interest generated by investments.

It should be noted however, that the income from these other means are much smaller than the income from student membership subscriptions. The Guild used these investments to ensure its operational viability throughout VSU, but in doing so depleted its ability to plan for the future.

### **The User Pays Approach: A Flawed Concept**

The Western Australian example shows it is impossible to implement a user pays approach in regard to student organisation membership. During VSU, surveys were conducted to ascertain why only 30% of students join their Guilds. Far from believing Guilds were not essential, students held the view that they could access the benefits of the Guild without having to pay for it. They felt that the Guild serviced all students,

and just as people who benefit from taxes would not pay voluntarily, neither did students.

## **The Amenities and Services Fee at UWA**

The introduction of the Amenities and Services Fee in Western Australia has provided the UWA Student Guild with consistent funding for the last three years. This funding by no means addresses the losses sustained under VSU, many of which are irreparable in any short period of time.

The funds received have allowed for an expansion of activities for students, representational services, and welfare services that the Guild provides. However, the Guild is still overcoming the long-term effects of VSU and financial limitations remain rife within the organisation.

### **Accountability to the University**

It is important to note that under this Legislation University governing bodies have control over the level of the fee and its distribution (provided at least 51% of the fee goes to the Guild. At UWA the level of funding negotiated was a 70-30 split of the funds collected between The UWA Student Guild and the UWA Sports and Recreation Association respectively.

Each year the UWA Student Guild must provide the University Senate with financial accounts to justify its spending. While the Victorian Model of Compulsory Non-Academic Fees stipulates against spending in particular areas, the Western Australian Legislation leaves this decision up to Universities. While this has not yet been a problem at the University of Western Australia it is an undesirable situation in so far as a University may technically prohibit the spending of fees on campaigns on decisions made by the University.

### **Accountability to Students**

Guilds are democratic organisations, run by students elected on an annual basis. The ultimate test of the Guilds and their direction is the annual election process. VSU itself has been tested this way.

Students at UWA have experienced the Guild under both VSU and the Amenities and Services Fee. Since the implementation of the fee, VSU based or abolition of the Amenities and Service Fee based tickets have run, with limited success. In the 2004 UWA Student Guild Election only one Guild Councillor from this ticket was elected, attracting only 25 primary votes and 6.9% of the total vote at the end of counting. This lack of support is indicative of the feeling of students; if they supported VSU they would support its proponents at the ballot box.

### **Conscientious Objection and Extreme Financial Hardship**

Under the Legislation any student may opt out of Guild membership should they choose to do so. They are still required to pay the fee prescribed by the University and as above, it is the University's decision as to where the money is allocated.

In cases of extreme financial hardship students may apply for a grant from the UWA Student Guild to cover the cost of their fee.

### **Legislative Compromise**

While this form of Universal Membership provides for income to Student Guilds, it fails to address many issues central to the student movement. For example, Student Guilds do not set the fee themselves. Prior to (Richard) Court VSU, Guilds set the fee, which was then ratified by the University Senate, and audited accounts were still presented for inspection; a much more workable approach. The current situation sits in contrast with the tenet of "Student Control of Student Affairs". This is further curtailed by the ability of the University to set areas of expenditure.

This model is clearly a compromise between the Universities, Student Guilds and the State Government. It was hoped that the checks, balances and ability to opt out of membership would allow it to survive under a Liberal Government. The assertion that students should not be forced to be members of their Student Organisation is satisfied by an opt out clause and the possibility of misuse of funds is made unfeasible by the financial requirements of University auditing.

## **Concluding Statements**

Student Guilds are organisations run by students, for students. They represent student's views to the University, the Government and the wider community. In addition to this role, Student Guilds are responsible for the provision of services, welfare and activity to the student body.

The wider community often benefits from the infrastructure that Student Guilds provide to meet these roles, be it the use of facilities or exposure to the views expressed on wider social issues. For many community members the activities of Student Guilds are their primary links to their local tertiary institutions.

The Bill proposed by the Federal Government will severely impinge upon the successful execution of even the core responsibilities and duties of student organisations. It is essential that the committee take note that the major stakeholders in public higher education have publicly and vehemently announced their opposition to this proposed legislation. State Governments, the AVCC, Chancellors, The National Union of Students, Student Organisations, Sports Associations and Community Organisations have all made their positions clear.

It is the evidence herein that The UWA Student Guild recommends that the Bill before the committee not be passed by the Federal Parliament. The experience of Western Australian Student Guilds shows that VSU is not a workable option and does not benefit the tertiary students of Australia.

The UWA Student Guild is able to assist further should clarification, information or verbal evidence be required by the Senate Committee



## Attachment A

<b>Guild Membership Figures Under VSU</b>	
1996	2307
1997	2570
1998	2945
1999	3901
2000	4293
2001	4568
2002	4888

<b>Guild Members vs EFTSU</b>			
	Members	EFTSU	
1996	2307	11807	20%
1997	2570	12154	21%
1998	2945	12053	24%
1999	3901	12349	32%
2000	4293	12390	35%
2001	4568	12846	36%
2002	4888	12959	38%

<b>Guild Members vs Total Number of Students</b>			
	Members	Students	
1996	2307	13653	16.9%
1997	2570	14114	18.2%
1998	2945	14100	20.9%
1999	3901	14536	26.8%
2000	4293	14687	29.2%
2001	4568	15166	30.1%
2002	4888	15529	31.5%

<b>Guild Members by Enrolment Type</b>		
	UWA	Guild
Full Time	78%	95%
Postgraduate	22%	4-5%
International	12-15%	6%

<b>Guild Membership By Year</b>							
Year	Members	1	2	3	4	5	Post grad
1998	2945	54.2%	22.0%	12.7%	6.1%	0.0%	4.9%
2002	4888	38.4%	25.6%	20.5%	6.2%	4.8%	4.5%

## Attachment B

<b>Summary of Likely Effects</b>	
	Guild membership falling from over 98% to 30% (at best)
	Guild operating income falling from \$1,450,000 to \$750,000 (at best)
	All student representation expenditure (a duty under state legislation) slashed due to its inherently non-excludable nature
	Qualifying periods introduced for access to essential academic advocacy and financial assistance, or such services made available on an entirely user-pays basis (out of most students' price range)
	High entry-prices to non-members for Guild social events, discouraging most from attending
	Drastic cuts to club funding, forcing many small, cultural, clubs to stop operating and impinging on all other clubs' abilities to run student-priced events
	Memberships Department forced to take on a Marketing role, selling students a now inferior product
	Catering on campus heavily commercialised
	Threat to the long term viability of the Guild