



Submission to the 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*

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The quality of the student experience at the University of Newcastle is supported by the provision of a range of services delivered by student bodies or organisations. The introduction of legislation to make student unionism voluntary (VSU) will severely diminish the capacity of these organisations to operate and deny students access to a range of critical services. Further, the jobs of more than 300 staff employed in delivering these services will be threatened.
- 1.2 As has been noted by the Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee in its document *Student Organisations: A Policy Paper*, "many essential services and facilities that are provided for students which are both an important element in the social and cultural life of universities and a part of the education process" are provided by student organisations. This is the experience at the University of Newcastle, where the student bodies and their services have been an integral part of university life for many years.

2.0 Student Organisations at the University of Newcastle

- 2.1 The University considers that representative student bodies work most effectively where membership is universal. The University benefits from having representative members of the student bodies serving on its decision making bodies and committees. The University does, however, recognise that not all students will want to be members so, whilst students of the University of Newcastle are not required to become members of a student organisation, they are required, as a condition of enrolment, to pay a General Service Charge which is administered by the University on behalf of the five student bodies. The Student Bodies being:

- **Newcastle University Students' Association (NUSA)** – This association provides a range of services specifically for undergraduate students primarily at the Callaghan Campus.
- **Newcastle University Postgraduate Students' Association (NUPSA)** – provides services for postgraduate students of the University.
- **Newcastle University Sport (NUSport)** provides sporting facilities and support for students, staff and the community. It currently also provides personal accident insurance for students.
- **University of Newcastle Union (UNU)** – provides a range of services and facilities including food outlets, stationery, second handbooks etc.
- **Campus Central** - serves the needs of the University and TAFE staff and students on the Ourimbah Campus.

2.2 The General Service Charge is collected by the University and distributed to the student bodies according to a University Council approved formula. The total amount collected is in excess of \$6.5 million annually.

2.3 In 2005, the Council approved the following charges that are levied and an approved percentage distributed to each student body as set out below.

Student Organisation	\$s per Full Time Student	% Distribution	\$s per Part Time Student
UNU	\$91.50	50.27	\$64.00
NUSA/NUPSA	\$29.00	15.93	\$20.00
NUSport	\$61.50	33.79	\$43.00
Total GSC for 2005 Per Term	\$182	100%	\$127
Campus Central*	\$182	100%	\$127

* Campus Central receives 100% of the GSC for students enrolled at that campus.

3.0 Summary of Key Services and Amenities Provided by Student Bodies

Service	Campus Central	UNU	NUSA	NUPSA	NUSport
Student Representation			✓	✓	
Academic Advice & Advocacy			✓	✓	
Binding, Printing, Copying	✓	✓	✓		
Catering – Food & Bars	✓	✓			✓
Sporting Facilities and clubs	✓				✓
Computer Facilities	✓	✓			
Leisure & Social Activities	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Maintenance - Buildings	✓	✓			✓
Academic Dress	✓	✓			

A detailed list of services provided by the student bodies can be found in Attachment 1.

- 3.1 The student bodies also specifically cater to the needs of international students and assist the University in its internationalisation strategy by funding special services, multicultural events, clubs and societies of particular relevance to international students.
- 3.2 It is estimated that less than 5% of monies distributed to the student bodies is spent on political activity or representation. The majority of funds are directed to services and amenities.
- 3.3 The student bodies have historically made, and continue to make, significant contributions to the fabric and operations of the University, directing funds to leasehold improvements, facilities maintenance and buildings.

4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1 The General Service Charge contributes approximately \$6.5 million annually to the provision of social, sporting and cultural services and amenities to students at the University of Newcastle. The experience of Western Australian institutions of the introduction of VSU is that, if not compelled to do so, only a small minority (fewer than 10%) of students opt to pay for the services provided by student organisations. Most students would take this action to avoid additional expense, very likely failing to realise how this will impact on the range and level of services that have historically been made to students during their studies through the GSC payment.
- 4.2 The planning that has been undertaken by the student bodies and the University in anticipation of the introduction of VSU anticipates that the consequent loss of income will result in a significant reduction in services available to the student community. In its current financial circumstances the University has very little capacity to redirect funds from other sources to offset the anticipated loss of services for our students. The consequences therefore will be a serious diminution in the quality of student life and contribution to the local community.
- 4.3 Without access to the services that such fees can provide, the richness, quality and diversity of student life at the University of Newcastle will be seriously compromised. The student body and wider community will lose the employment and business opportunities provided by the student organisations and their tenants. Maintenance of buildings and sporting facilities will also suffer.
- 4.4 The University highly values the contributions of its student bodies to campus life for visitors, staff and students and it is our desire to see them flourish into the future through access to ongoing fee income such as would be provided by a universal, compulsory services and amenities fee.

5.0 Recommendation

- 5.1 The University of Newcastle is opposed to the *Abolition of Compulsory Up-Front Student Union Fees Bill 2005* in its current form.
- 5.2 The University strongly endorses a compromise position such as that proposed by the AVCC which would allow universities to charge a compulsory fee to support services and amenities of the following types:
 - Sporting facilities and clubs
 - Health and dental services
 - Computing, photocopying and library services
 - Welfare services and childcare facilities
 - Non-political student societies
 - International student services
 - Student representation