

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 UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

SUBMISSION TO

SENATE EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS
AND EDUCATION LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORT AMENDMENT (ABOLITION OF COMPULSORY UP-FRONT UNION
FEES) BILL 2005

A. BACKGROUND

The Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Upfront Student Union Fees) Bill 2005 was introduced into the House of Representatives in March. In essence, the legislation requires three things – i.e. that higher education providers are prohibited:

- from requiring a person to become a member of a student organisation
- from imposing compulsory fees for such an organisation, and
- from requiring students to pay a charge for an “amenity, facility or service that is not of an academic nature.”

The University of Melbourne’s practices in relation to student union membership and administration of the Amenities and Services fee were substantially revised at the time of the introduction of the Victorian version of Voluntary Student Unionism by the Kennett Government in the mid-1990s.

The University currently provides for students upon enrolment/re-enrolment to opt-out of student organisation membership. Such membership is not tied to the imposition of any compulsory charges.

B. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNIVERSITY

1. If passed in its current form, the Bill would prohibit any future compulsory charging of the Amenities and Services Fees (ASF). At the University of Melbourne in 2005 the ASF for a full time student at a principal campus was \$392 and the projected income available for distribution in 2005 is \$12.7 million. In the first year of this legislation, ASF income may fall by more than 80%.
2. Clearly, the financial implications for the University are serious given that the majority of funds collected are spent on providing services and support which are a core part of student life at the University. Details of the main services provided by Melbourne University Student Union Limited, University of Melbourne Postgraduate Association (UMPA), Interim Student Representation Committee (ISRC) and Melbourne University Sport are set out at Appendix A.
3. The student organisations and the services they provide are deeply enmeshed within the overall structures and services of the University. The services funded in whole or in part by the ASF are central to the University’s capacity to offer the Melbourne Experience. They contribute directly to
 - attracting and recruiting prospective students;
 - facilitating access for particular groups;
 - supporting retention and academic success of enrolled students; and
 - to the quality of the education and extra-curricula experience that the University offers.
4. The vast majority of activities funded from the Amenities and Services Fees are of a non-political nature and are a core part of student life at the University. It will be important that, to as great an extent as practicable, these services are maintained.

5. While some service changes which may result in improved efficiency are feasible, it is clear that preservation of all core functions would require a substantial contribution from the University's recurrent budget.
6. Based on experiences in Western Australia, where legislation similar to that now proposed was in place during the 1990s, the introduction of voluntary fees for membership of student organisations can be expected to seriously erode the capacity of UMPA, the proposed UMSUL and MUOSS to be effective contributors to the life of the University.

C. OPTIONS

The University is in the process of determining how to protect the core services and activities currently supported by the Amenities and Services Fund, including childcare, student insurance and effective student representation. Future funding arrangements are likely to comprise a range of actions including:

- introduction of voluntary membership fees payable by those students choosing to join an association of students;
- introduction of service/amenity specific charges to students on a differential basis for non-members;
- reduction of costs through more efficient delivery of services and consolidation of supply arrangements;
- reduction of costs through cessation of non-core activities;
- use of financial reserves of associations; and
- university support, which will divert funding away from core learning and teaching programs to maintain obligatory amenities and services eg services for international students mandated by the Educational Services (Overseas Students) Act, or regarded as essential to the Melbourne "student experience".

However, it is inevitable that some services will cease, and that some jobs will be lost. The University cannot afford to provide all existing services without levying charges on all students.

**Appendix A:
Summary of Services Provided by Student Associations**

	Melbourne University Student Union Ltd.	Interim Student Representation Committee	Uni of Melbourne Postgraduate Association	Melbourne University Sport
Academic Dress	X			
Advocacy, Academic Advice and Counselling	X	X	X	
Art Galleries	X		X	
Art Studio and Resources	X			
Bar and Bistros	X		X	
Binding Services	X		X	
Bookshops, On-campus shops and retail outlets	X			X
Campus Media/ Student Newspapers	X	X	X	
Campus Sports				X
Catering and Food Service	X		X	
Child Care	Pending			
Cinemas and Theatres	X			
Computer Facilities	X		X	
Concerts	X	X	X	
Conference and Meeting Rooms	X		X	X
Dental Services	X			
Discount Ticketing	X		X	
Employment Service	X			
Facility upkeep and maintenance	X		X	X
Function Spaces	X		X	X
Information and Enquiry Service	X	X	X	
Interest Clubs and Societies	X	X	X	
International Student Clubs and Societies	X	X		
International Student Services and Advice	X		X	
Laundry	X			
Legal Services	X			
Leisure and Social Activities	X	X	X	X
Mature Age Student Services	X			
Membership of student organisation(s)	X	X	X	
Photocopy Service	X		X	
Recreational Libraries	X			
Representation on university bodies	X	X	X	X
Short Courses	X		X	X
Shower, Change and Locker Facilities	X		X	X
Sporting Clubs and Societies				X
Sporting Competitions - University Games				X
Sporting Facilities eg Gymnasiums, Tennis courts				X
Student Lounges	X	X	X	
Student specific Discount Card	X			
Student Theatre	X			
Travel Service	X			
Trips and Tours	X	X	X	X
University Diary	X		X	
Welfare Services	X	X	X	