

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
Legislation Committee

Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005

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Studies Institutions

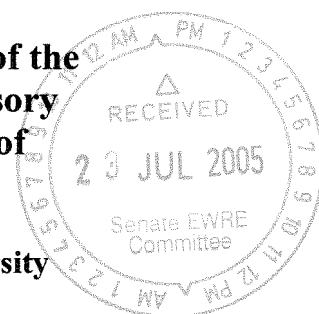
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Submission to Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee Inquiry into the provisions of the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005 made on behalf of the Council of Heads of Australian University Theatre Studies Institutions.



Submission made on behalf of the Council of Heads of Australian University Theatre Studies Institutions by Professor Adrian Kiernander, Chair of CHAUTSI.

The abolition of a compulsory fee to fund on-campus services to students at Australia's universities would have many effects detrimental to campus life and the quality and scope of the education that Australian students receive. These have been canvassed extensively in the public debate around the proposal for Voluntary Student Unionism.

The Council of Heads of Australian University Theatre Studies Institutions (CHAUTSI) submits that one particularly pernicious consequence of this decision would be to impoverish the opportunities that university campus life provides for creative exploration and expression. This kind of activity, in many cases funded by student associations or their equivalent, have the following benefits which would be destroyed if the opportunities for student theatre and music making were lost.

1. Students in their late teens and early 20s are still discovering their own abilities, especially in the area of personal creativity. Typically, students involved in performance activities discover and develop talents and skills which they were unaware of. The increase in confidence and self-esteem which results from this success flows on to greater motivation and achievement in their other studies and in later life, whether they continue to engage in performance or not.
2. The opportunities to engage in student-controlled theatre which on-campus life provides are valuable in developing a range of vital career skills. The most obvious are public speaking, presentation, and oral communication skills, but they also include teamwork (which is increasingly in demand in the workplace), organisation and management, budgeting and financial control, and marketing and publicity.
3. The intense collaboration which typically develops within student theatre organisations builds on-campus social capital. University students, when fully involved in campus life, develop strong contacts and deep friendships which create networks of support and intellectual stimulation, extending the process of learning beyond the lecture theatre and tutorial room. These relationships of course often last far beyond university.
4. The enrichment to campus life which this student creativity generates affects not only those who take a direct role but also those who attend as audiences. Student theatre is usually relatively affordable making it easier to attend; it stimulates intellectual discussion on social and artistic issues, and it can help establish a pattern of theatre-going which lasts a lifetime.

5. Student theatre organisations, those which will be weakened or destroyed by the proposed legislation, have been a major pathway into the theatre profession for many successful theatre practitioners—actors, playwrights and especially directors. Student drama has augmented the opportunities provided by dedicated actor-training institutions, and, in many cases, university theatre experience has provided a valuable preparation for specialised training at NIDA, VCA, WAAPA and so on. A large number of Australia's most successful theatre and film practitioners—the best known including Geoffrey Rush, John Bell, Richard Wherrett, Barrie Kosky, Cate Blanchett, Hanne Rayson, Joanna Murray-Smith, Neil Armfield, Michael Gow and Simon Phillips—received valuable formative theatre experience while students at university.

The passage of the Voluntary Student Unionism legislation will seriously diminish the opportunities available to Australian students in the future to explore and develop their own creativity, and will impoverish Australian society, both in comparison with the more favourable situation which has applied here in the past and by comparison with many other similar countries.

Adrian Kiernander
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