

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

**SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
2008-09 SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING**

Outcome 3

DEEWR Question No. EW774_09

Senator Hanson-Young provided in writing:

Question

Voluntary Student Unionism

- i) The National Union of Students and a number of universities have put forward alternative solutions to the current system of VSU, including proposals based on a combination of shared funding arrangements between students, universities and government.
- ii) When can students expect to see long-term sustainable solutions, to address the impact VSU has had on campus culture?

Answer

On 3 November 2008, Minister Ellis announced the Government's response to the impact of voluntary student unionism.

Details of the Government's plan to rebuild student support services at Australia's universities and other higher education providers are outlined in the Minister's Press Release which is attached.

Press Release

3 November 2008

Rebuilding Student Support Services in our Universities

The Minister for Youth, Kate Ellis, today announced that the Australian Government will support universities and students to undo the damage done to university services under the former Liberal government.

Under the previous Government close to \$170 million was ripped out of university funding resulting in the decline and in some instances complete closure of vital health, counselling, employment, child care, and welfare support services.

As promised at the last election, the Australian Government has developed a balanced, practical solution to rebuild important student support services and amenities.

For the first time universities will be required to meet national benchmarks relating to access to student support services and fulfil new representation and advocacy protocols.

The new national access to services benchmarks and representation protocols will be a requirement of Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding from 2010.

The Government will consult with students and the university sector on the development of these benchmarks and protocols to ensure basic services and representation on campus are secured for the long term.

From 1 July 2009, universities will also be allowed to set a compulsory fee, capped at a maximum of \$250 with indexation each year, to help rebuild student amenities and student services over and above those required by the benchmarks.

To help students manage the fee the Australian Government will provide access to a HECS style loan under the Higher Education Loan Program (HELP). SA-HELP will allow eligible students to defer the payment of the fee if they choose.

Minister Ellis conducted extensive consultations across the country that revealed that services have been hit hard by the previous Government - and it's students who are paying the price.

Driven by ideological obsession, the previous Liberal government went too far and students have been paying the price ever since the implementation of VSU in 2006.

Minister Ellis stressed that this was not a return to compulsory student unionism and the provision which prohibits a university from requiring a student to be a member of a student organisation will remain.

This is about taking national leadership by setting a new national benchmark for access to student support services and setting new national protocols for independent representation and advocacy in Universities.

The Government is committed to world class universities as they play a crucial role in Australia's education future.

The Rudd Government will continue to work in partnership with universities and students and is taking responsible action to ensure quality and sustainable student services and representation into the future.

A summary of submissions is available at:

www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/policy_issues_reviews/key_issues/VSU/#Summary_Report