



Submission to Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) House Standing Committee on Education and Employment

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Jessica Mobbs, a Bachelor of Arts student at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) as well as the Chair of the Board of Arc@UNSW, the student organisation formed following the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-Front Student Union Fees) Act 2005. Together with my fellow Board Director, Luke Parkitny, the Honorary Treasurer, we submit for your consideration the views of Arc@UNSW on the proposed Higher Education Amendment (Student Services and Amenities) Bill.

Arc@UNSW Ltd is the student organisation at the University of NSW. It is a voluntary membership organisation funded by its commercial activities and only in part by the University. We are the only student-led and student-run organisation at UNSW that provides services to the student community of UNSW. We provide and facilitate vital aspects of campus life for students with the express aim of enriching the student experience and promoting future career and personal goals. This includes social activities, clubs and societies through the Student Development Committee, training, mentoring and Australian renowned volunteer programs, career development programs, legal advice and advocacy, the Student Representative Council, the Postgraduate Council, and various student publications.

Arc@UNSW welcomes the re-introduction of the Higher Education Amendment (Student Services and Amenities) Bill in 2010. The introduction of Voluntary Student Unionism through the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-Front Student Union Fees) Act 2005 resulted in the loss of necessary resources that delivered vital student services and support.

The bill's two aspects, the introduction of services and amenities charges for Higher Education Providers (HEPs) and the new benchmarks for provision of non-academic student support services including representation and advocacy, will bring considerable benefits to the student environments of HEPs. The SSAF and advocacy/representation requirements will allow funds which are currently diverted by universities into essential services to be re-directed into teaching and research. The SSAF and advocacy requirements will ensure a sufficient level of service is re-introduced to Australian tertiary campuses, and that the teaching activities of universities are not diminished by the need for cross-subsidies.

SSAF will allow critical services to be re-introduced at campuses where they were abolished (particularly rural campuses) and restored to adequate levels on other campuses. These services are essential at tertiary institutions, in particular for commencing students who are in a transition period from the end of secondary schooling

and often find tertiary institutions extremely complex and unfamiliar. Unlike schools and smaller learning institutions, universities have extensive bureaucratic and administrative processes which students often find difficult to navigate. They are also communities of extremely broad demographics and their members have complex needs. As the student organisation we are already in a unique position to understand the needs of students and directly cater for those needs.

Better resources for welfare services such as disability support, psychological services and employment/career advice are not merely essential for the well-being of students to assist them with study and personal matters. They also have significant social benefits, helping to develop students personally and professionally so that upon graduation they are more effective members of the workforce and of the community.

Australian employers have noted that new graduates are frequently lacking in key skills required in workforce in spite of having a university education. The services which were lost or reduced under VSU are actually services which can play a substantial part in developing essential, non-academic skills and equip graduating students for the workforce. For example, at UNSW, counselling services provide life-skill coaching such as organisational skills, planning and conflict management, and the Careers service provides resume-writing advice, career advice, interview skills and a number of other essential job-seeking services. We, as the student organisation develop workforce preparation skills with students through programs such as professional student internships, program leadership, and volunteering and student representation.

Minister Peter Garret's Second Reading speech for this bill, dated 29 September 2010, stated: "Universities that choose to levy a fee will be expected to consult with students on the nature of the services and amenities and enhanced advocacy that the fee would support". The Minister's statement is a paraphrase of the wording in the Amenities, Advocacy and Representation Guidelines. Neither the bill nor the guidelines currently specify how the student body is to be consulted on the nature of services and amenities, nor how the obligation to consult will be satisfied. This is inadequate as a clear directive about how student organisations should be consulted, and consequently leaves open the possibility that they will not be appropriately consulted. This would be to the detriment of the student community at any university.

Arc@UNSW suggests that consultation with the student body would be most practically and efficiently achieved directly through the student organisation that represents those students rather than via the more distanced student-university relationship. The proposal by the Greens Senators to direct SSAF funds to student associations (who directly provide the majority of SSAF-related services) guarantees that students decide how their own money is spent.

We stand in agreement with the Greens Senators regarding the issue of the SSAF. Namely, the control and administration of funds raised by the SSAF should be directly

and expressly provided to the student organisations. Student-led organisations are the most qualified and suitably equipped to access and act upon the views of students. It is essential that there is substantial input by students into the allocation of the fees they pay.

On behalf of the students of the University of New South Wales, and Arc@UNSW, we strongly recommend that the committee consider the importance of extensive student involvement in decisions about how SSAF funds are allocated, and suggest that the views of the Greens senators represent the best way to achieve this aim.

Yours sincerely,

Jessica Mobbs
Chair of Arc@UNSW Ltd

Luke Parkitny
Honorary Treasurer

T: 9385 7724 F: 9385 7701 M: 0414385639
PO Box 173, Kingsford, NSW 2032

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