



29 September 2011

Student Services Fees Submissions
Tertiary Education Policy
Ministry of Education
PO Box 1666
Wellington 6140

Submission on *Education (Compulsory Student Services Fees) Notice 2011*

1. This submission is made on behalf of the Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA) on the *Education (Compulsory Student Services Fees) Notice 2011*.
2. VUWSA recognises the importance of a holistic student experience to the academic success of students. Services provided for via a compulsory Student Services Levy (SSL) should help integrate students with their academic and career goals by promoting and supporting transition, retention and achievement within a safe and vibrant campus environment. They should not fund services that are part of the core academic provision of an institution. SSL should be based on the following principles:
 - All services should be subject to student scrutiny;
 - Students should have representative input into the allocation and governance of student services;
 - Students should have unfettered access to universal services; and
 - It must be clearly justified why the service should be funded universally.
3. VUWSA agrees with the Minister that some SSL are too high and there is insufficient transparency. However, for the last two years, Victoria University of Wellington and VUWSA have been successfully operating under a model that is very closely aligned to the Minister's desire for more student representation, transparency and accountability.
4. There have been instances of SSL being wrongly used to fund core academic services that should be funded by intuitions or by the Government – such as building maintenance, library services and ITS. This is unacceptable and highlights the need for greater transparency and accountability regarding SSL.
5. In 2010 the University signed a Memorandum of Understanding with VUWSA to ensure students would have a say in the SSL setting process and how the funding was allocated. Money collected through the SSL can only be used to fund the specified services that it

has been agreed will be covered. The SSL must therefore be reviewed annually and adjusted as necessary to ensure an appropriate level of service continues to be provided.

6. An Advisory Committee for the Student Services Levy (ACSSL) was established to give effect to this collaboration between the University and VUWSA on the strategic and financial oversight of the Levy and to make a recommendation to the Vice-Chancellor to take to the University Council on the amount of Levy for the following year.
7. The Committee uses information gained from this consultation to aid them in this work. This has been a very successful partnership and has seen a large culture change and approach to the setting of the SSL and what services it funds. This collaborative approach saw a 0% increase (excluding GST) for the 2011 SSL. VUWSA recommends that this approach be adopted by all institutions, as is both an effective, efficient and democratic framework for the allocation of SSL funding.
8. VUWSA commends moves in the Notice to enhance student oversight in this area; however VUWSA believe it should be stronger. Student representation is vital in ensuring institutions provide useful and relevant services based on informed contributions by students, for students. Surveys, while useful and have a place are an inadequate mechanism for genuine student consultation and do not enable an ongoing discussion or contribution in the way constructive and organised student representation can.
9. VUWSA is supportive of the current list of categories of student services in the Notice, but we believe that its scope is far too narrow and prescriptive. It leaves no room for students and institutions to decide for themselves what services are important. There are also a number of services missing and it is very concerning the current Notice will not enable such services to be funded in 2012. Not enough time has been given to institutions to accommodate the changes that will result from the Notice. In addition, the Government's support for the Education (Freedom of Association) Amendment Bill, which passed its third reading on 28 September, will put increased pressure on institutions and students to provide student services.
10. Instead, VUWSA urges the Minister to focus on process and principles, not arbitrary regulation as a way to achieve his desire to moderate the level of SSL and improve their transparency and accountability. Providing institutions with an exhaustive list of what services should be provided impinges on the independence and autonomy of institutions and its students to provide services that they need. Not every institution has the same responsibilities, or requires the same services. VUWSA recommends that a different, more flexible approach be taken to the delineation of student services in the Minister's Gazette Notices.
11. The following services are omitted from the Notice. Research has shown Victoria University students value them and want them provided:

- i. **Student Representation – Students' Associations, Representative Groups, Support for Faculty Delegates and Class Representatives**

The provision of independent student representation is essential to the overall student experience at Victoria. Student representation working in partnership with institutions ensures students are involved at all levels of decision making at Victoria. It also:

- Improves the academic outcomes and experiences of students. This, in turn, can include higher retention and success rates;
- Strengthens all levels of decision-making within the wider University ensuring that students are considered at each level and that final decisions are fair;
- Facilitates the development of quality student-centered learning based on the relationship between academics and students;

- Empowers students and encourage the development of leadership, communication and creative and critical thinking;
- Leads to more responsive and appropriate student services, which are delivered cost-effectively;
- Avoids unnecessary conflict between the student body and the University.

Representative Groups for minority students, such as Pasifika or Maori, are an essential part of supporting active participation and achievement for many students. Independent and autonomous representation is appropriate and effective in delivering high quality courses, qualifications and services, and is widely valued throughout the tertiary sector.

ii. Clubs and Societies and Activities

Organised cultural and sporting clubs and activities at Victoria University contribute significantly to the community, vitality and reputation of Victoria. There are close to 100 campus based groups ranging from cultural groups, science, language, sporting, religious, and arts. For example, the Victoria University Debating Society draws heavily on student service levy income. Over the years the society has received significant support from the Association and the University. This support has enabled it to complete internationally. Its successes have contributed to its own reputation, the reputation of the caliber of Victoria University Students, and also the reputation of the University as a whole. Without adequate funding, long established clubs such as 'DebSoc' will be undermined.

Clubs exist and function because they are supported by a universal system of club infrastructure that enables them access to support, grants, meeting spaces, annual Clubs Weeks, Club Development Officers, Blues Awards, and administrative support. For many students their involvement is a key networking opportunity that complements their academic experience and help create well-rounded graduates.

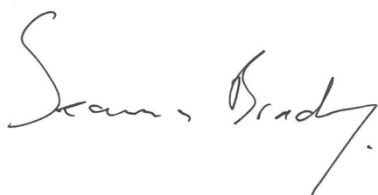
iii. Social and Academic Events including Orientation

Orientation into the University environment is extremely important. For many students, the university experience is a gear-shift in their social lives and in their interactions with wider adult communities. Orientations are crucial, firstly to orientate students with the university and the university experience, but also to provide them with an understanding of the culture and pastoral care of the university community. For example, the University 'Campus Coaches' programme is vital to this orientations process; as are social events promoting a well rounded and safe student experience. It is appropriate that students retain a degree of ownership over the provision of these services. Student governance will ensure that events and orientation activities remain appropriate and relevant.

- 12.** VUWSA considers that the current implementation date is inadequate and extremely unfair for the sector and students. Setting of the 2012 SSL has already been postponed - after considerable student consultation. Victoria is about to open enrolments for 2012 in just a few days time.
- 13.** Announcing changes to SSL for the 2012 academic year when these processes are so advanced is extremely unfair. VUWSA considers this to be an example of bad practice. As it stands, Victoria University is facing a \$3,000,000 (three million) financial impact. It undermines the Minister's desire to ensure strong consultation with students (there is only 11 days of classes left) and has caused Victoria and VUWSA considerable internal

disruption. There is a very real risk of many important and longstanding services being lost simply due to an inadequate notice period.

14. VUWSA strongly recommends that any new direction for SSL relates to the 2013 academic year, or be scrapped entirely and re-written.
15. VUWSA supports ensuring tertiary institutions are accountable and transparent in the fees they charge. We believe that SSL should be subject to strong student scrutiny and oversight, and that all students should pay for these services through a universally charged SSL at Victoria.
16. VUWSA is very concerned that this direction and the Ministers desire to dictate to students and institutions as to what services they can provide. Students and institutions are best placed to know what services are needed not the Minister.
17. These changes will have a significant impact on the operation of student services and the involvement that students will have in their funding allocation. It is imperative that the Ministry constructs enduring policy early which provides students with certainty and stability in light of the recent changes to their operating environment. VUWSA trusts that the Ministry will take our considerations on board, and have due regard to the concerns we have raised.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Seamus Brady". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter 'y'.

Seamus Brady

President

Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association