

VUWSA Report on the Proposed Changes to the Student Services Levy Charging Structure

To: ACSSL and Student Finance, to be passed on to University Council

Prepared and Collated By Michael Turnbull, VUWSA President

Background

The Advisory Committee on the Student Services Levy (ACSSL) had been presented a proposal by University Finance to switch to a new Student Service Levy (SSL) charging structure. This proposal included a per-point basis, with students living outside of the Wellington region being charged \$4 per point studied, and those living within the Wellington region being charged \$8 per point studied.

On Thursday 22nd July, VUWSA ran a consultation session on the proposed changes of the Student Services Levy at the Student Assembly. This Student Assembly consultation session was attended by a wide range of student representatives.

This followed a period of two weeks (5th – 16th July) during which there was a general student body consultation run by the University.

During the Student Assembly consultation session, VUWSA discussed with the Student Assembly their views on the potential changes, its impacts on their members and the wider student body, and the consultation itself. The SA felt that they did not have an adequate amount of information to make an educated decision on these matters. Following this session, on the morning of Friday 23rd July, an Advisory Committee to the Student Services Levy meeting was held. During this meeting VUWSA asked for additional time to run another consultation hui and survey to student representatives, and for additional information to be provided to be passed on to members.

VUWSA collated a consultation document based on further information provided by University Finance, then ran an additional in person hui to discuss these changes on the morning of the 27th.

We used this hui to gain general feedback from these student groups. Alongside this hui, a short google form survey was sent out to members of student assembly to provide additional information or their perspective if they weren't able to attend the consultation hui.

Below is the feedback from student representative groups consulted:

Student Assembly 22nd July

Student Assembly Consultation Hui Attendees:

- VUWSA
- Ngāi Taura
- Pasifika Students' Council
- UniQ
- Victoria university of Wellington Law Students' Society
- Rainbow Law Students' Association
- Pacific Island Commerce Students' Society
- Disabled Students' Association
- Thursdays in Black
- Victoria Tutors' Network

- Victoria Commerce Students Association
- Women's Collective
- Arts Society
- Victoria international Students' Association
- Post-Graduate Students' Association
- Victoria University of Wellington Feminist Law Students' Society

Lack of Information

The Student Assembly felt that there was a significant lack of information provided for the groups present to make an educated decision. Given the suggestion to charge students different levy amounts depending on the number of points they study, members of SA felt that there was insufficient data to justify this. Rep groups felt that more information about the service usage by students would have been necessary to make an informed decision.

Post-Graduates, International Students, and Different Campuses

Significant concerns were raised by post-graduate and international students around the proposed equity of these changes. They expressed that many student services were inaccessible and weren't targeted to their needs. As such, they argued that their groups did not use the student services enough to justify such a significant increase in their levy charges. In addition to further service usage information around these groups, the PGSA, Tutors Collective, and VISA, felt that these equity concerns would need to be fully addressed before they would support any decision.

Accountability of ACCSL Finances

Nearly all of the representative groups present expressed concern around the transparency and accessibility of ACCSL finances, processes, and structures. They felt that there needed to be a review of the way ACCSL presented their financial positions. Students would like to see annual incomes and expenditures, including the different categories this expenditure fell into. We feel this would go a long way in building trust between ACCSL and students.

Consultation Hui 27th July

Consultation Hui Attendees:

- Pacific Island Commerce Students' Society
- Pasifika Students' Council
- Arts Society
- Victoria Tutors' Network
- Post-graduate Students' Association
- Victoria International Students' Association
- Victoria University of Wellington Law Students' Society.

Victoria Tutors' Network

The Tutor's Network believes that a student services levy increase in cost for full time students (120 points) could disincentivise full time study. By charging students studying full-time on campus a significantly higher amount, they felt that this may disincentivise students from choosing to study on campus at Te Herenga Waka. In addition, it was felt that this would contribute to the unliveable cost of Wellington for students, by making those living in Wellington, who generally study full-time, pay more on top of the costs of living within the capital city.

Equity concerns around international students and post-graduates were a central theme of the Tutors Network feedback. Similar to V-ISA, they felt that post-graduate students and international students, who they believed accessed services less in proportion to undergraduates, would be unfairly hit by the hike in SSL cost. They noted that if these concerns were addressed in future proposals, they would support a change to a per/point basis.

Serious concerns with the consultation process were raised. It was felt that there had not been adequate consultation with the general student body, and that the time and information provided was not sufficient to allow student representative groups to make a fully educated decision on the matters. On the whole they did not support moving to the proposed SSL structure.

Post-graduate Students' Association

There were general concerns raised in line with those brought up by Tutors Network. However, they felt with adequate time, information, and consultation they could support changes.

Victoria university of Wellington law Students' Society (VUWLSS)

While VUWLSS largely leaned in favour of moving to the proposed system, they also held concerns over the consultation around the system. VUWLSS noted that, regardless of the outcome, they believe a reassessment of ACSSL finances and spending would be required.

Victoria University of Wellington – Victoria International Students' Association (V-ISA)

Student representatives from V-ISA feel they have been given a very clear mandate from the students' they represent to oppose this change. They felt that the increase would unfairly target international students, the majority of whom studied over 120 points, and whom they believed did not access services at the same rate as domestic students.

- V-ISA also provided additional written feedback, which has also been provided to ACSSL alongside this report.

Pasifika Students' Council

PSC first acknowledged the strong overlap between international and domestic students in the body they represent, and the importance that this change has to Pasifika students. While they agreed in principle with a change to a per/point basis charging system, they were frustrated by the pressure and timeframe imposed upon student representatives to decide without adequate levels of information and data on service usage.

PSC believed that many of the concerns raised would have been solved if there was more data and information provided on different service usage based on student type.

Arts Society

On the whole, the Arts Society leaned towards opposing the proposed change, and supported staying with the current system. They believed, similar to the Tutors Network that the proposed system could disincentivise study on campus by making on-campus study considerably more expensive.

Pacific Island Commerce Students' Association (PICSA)

PICSA agreed with the concerns raised by both PSC and VISA. They felt that there had not been sufficient time given, and that more opinions and suggestions on this matter before they felt

comfortable making a decision, particularly given the impacts this will have on both international and domestic students.

General feedback

There was general agreement that excessive pressure was being placed on representative groups to make a decision without adequate information. They also felt that it was unlikely we would be 'locked in' indefinitely in whatever system was decided on and that there would be opportunity to change this system in the future, given student appetite. They felt that, even if caps and restrictions were put in place by the TEC or Government, there would be ample opportunity to us to lobby on a national level to move to a different system, should that be in the interest of students.

An underlying theme, across all consultation avenues, was that the scope and time given for this consultation period was inadequate. This was in reference to the consultation run for the general student body as well as that run for Student Representative groups. It was felt that the 36 general consultation feedback submissions received was not a wide enough section of the student population to base any significant changes to charging figures off.

Consultation Survey 25th – 27th July

Groups surveyed:

Victoria Tutors' Network

Disabled Students' Association (DSA)

Rainbow Law Students' Society (RLSS)

Victoria Commerce Society (VicCom)

Do you support, in principle, a change to a per-points basis?

For:

- Tutors' Network
- DSA
- RLSS
- VicCom

Against

- None

Do you support changing to the proposed per-points levy charging system?

Yes

- DSA
- RLSS

No

- Tutors' Network
- VicCom

What are your thoughts/reservations on the proposed system?

Tutors Network: I think the per-points system disincentivises campus use, which I worry will result in the decline of campus-based facilities, impacting staff and thus impacting students that way.

DSA: We think its better than current system but don't necessarily support the change or feel as though there's enough evidence to suggest a definite correlation between points taken and services accessed.

RLSS: It would have been nice to see more data on the actual uses of all the services and whether this increases on a points-based process, but assuming it does this would be more equitable

VicCom: The main reservation is that switching to the increase of \$100+ in the levy for the majority of students, with not that much of an improvement to the Services provided. It will just add to the student loan which will take longer to pay off. I am all for it being more equitable for those who don't study at the campus full time, thus not engaging with the services. Im just not sure if it is justified in increasing full time students fees to achieve this. Everyone who Ive spoken to on this has expressed disapproval with the idea of having to pay another \$100+ on their University fees.

Do you believe you have been given adequate information to make an informed decision on the proposed student services levy?

Yes:

- VicCom

No:

- RLSS
- Tutors' Network
- DSA

If no, what further information would you like to be provided before deciding?

Tutors Network: Student services use by postgraduates proportionate to all postgraduates, same for undergrads so we can actually see the proportion of use and thus whether there is sufficient fairness to charge the levy of postgraduates the same way.

DSA: - more options and models for what the SSL charging system could look like - more data on services - just more in general..

RLSS: It would have been great to see some stats around whether an increase in points taken does increase uptake in services

If we do not move towards the per point system this year, do you believe you and the students you represent would be interested in considering this system at a later date?

Yes:

- Tutors' Network
- DSA
- VicCom
- RLSS

No:

- None

Recommendations

Upon receiving feedback from all groups, and providing a range of consultation avenues, VUWSA recommends the following:

- That ACSSL does not move forward with changing its charging process to the proposed per-point basis system.
- That further consultation on the SSL charging structure changes, and an adequate level of information to those consulted, is provided to student reps and the general student body.
- That VUWSA and VUW host another consultation period either later this year or early 2022 to bolster student engagement on the matter and ensure an adequate level of feedback before a decision is reached.
- That there is a significant review into ACSSL processes, including the level of proactive transparency provided around ACSSL finances, expenditure, and service usage rates.