

University of Wollongong Undergraduate Students' Association

4th Executive Meeting
11:15AM Tuesday, 12th March 2008
Room – Executive Office

Meeting Minutes

Present

Chris Pettett (President) – Chairperson
Brendan Cook (Secretary)
Adam Rozadilla (Treasurer)
Patrick Kennedy Bates (Education)
Jess Di Blasio (Welfare)
Adam Knobel (General Representative)

Observers

Jun Lin Koh (International Students), Catherine Garner, Nick Rouen

Meeting opened at 11:15

Motion 1

B. Cook/A. Knoble

That Attachment A be endorsed by the WUSA Executive for submission to the Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) review into The Impact of Voluntary Student Unionism on Services, Amenities and Representation for Australian University Students.

CARRIED unanimously

It was also resolved that the next Council Meeting would be held on the 20th of March, or the 1st of April, pending the availability of Council Members.

Meeting adjourned 11:30

Attachment A



**VSU Discussion Paper
Response from the
Wollongong Undergraduate Student's Association
University of Wollongong**

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Mr Chris Pettett**

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This response to the Review of Student Associations has been submitted on behalf of the Wollongong Undergraduate Students Association (WUSA):

The Wollongong Undergraduate Students' Association (WUSA) is a democratic, autonomous, student-run organisation that exists to represent the rights of students on campus and in broader society. WUSA operates as the peak representative body of the undergraduate student population of the University of Wollongong.

WUSA plays a crucial role in representing the needs of students to the university, which is of particular importance to regional campuses where student issues are magnified by factors such as geographic isolation, population size, unemployment and the availability of support services. These issues impact on a number of student equity groups, including women, queer, indigenous and international students, who experience the difficulties and hardships of regional isolation to heightened degrees. WUSA is one of the only organisations that operate student collectives and groups aimed at supporting and empowering these students.

In addition to providing equity representation and support, WUSA also offers services to students who maybe under some kind of financial strain, including short-term emergency loans, Centrelink assistance, and subsidised textbooks. WUSA also provides welfare services such as student advocacy services.

The welfare services offered by WUSA are vital to the student experience and the University of Wollongong campus community. Increasingly, however, WUSA is unable to support the services it once offered as a result of necessary cuts to the Association's budget.

The services that existed before VSU included a paid media unit that produced the student magazine Tertangala, a second hand bookstore, an independent advocacy officer, emergency short-term loans, free weekly barbecues, in addition to clubs, societies, and collectives. These services have either been significantly cut, or reduced to a smaller operational capacity less able to provide for student needs.

The student media unit that produces the campus publication was once staffed by four paid employees but is now run by volunteers. In terms of clubs and societies, the corporate arm of the university has taken control of most student programmes including cultural, religious, academic, and personal interest clubs.

Funding has been greatly reduced under this system, sharply affecting the level of community on campuses and the range of experiences offered. Without any change to the current policy of VSU, these services will not exist within two years as WUSA struggles to fund them with the savings its currently has.

At the onset of VSU in 2006, WUSA underwent a period of downsizing staff from the six employed at the time. This included the loss of WUSA's General Manager. WUSA now has four staff, including an advocacy officer. As a result, the President of WUSA has been forced to take on the responsibilities of the General Manager. Even under these circumstances, the University refuses to contribute to WUSA's administrative costs and WUSA has been forced to use long-term savings to fund staff costs.

Savings retained by past councils under the previous Universal Student Unionism system currently funds WUSA. The University of Wollongong requires that WUSA undertake rigorous auditing, and all costs of administering the Association's finances are funded from the aforementioned savings, which are WUSA's sole source of monetary income. This heavy auditing process is an immense strain on the associations remaining funds, especially when the university refuses to offer any kind of tied funding agreement, not unlike those offered at other universities such as the University of Sydney, University of Newcastle and University of Technology Sydney. Unlike other universities WUSA doesn't manage any commercial ventures such as cafes, bars or stores. This means that the WUSA has no income or assets to aid efforts to build financial sustainability from within the association.

The only income available to WUSA currently is sourced from membership fees, however given the Associations' limited funding WUSA's ability to properly market and advertise Association membership, which in turn limits any potential money making capabilities. WUSA recognises the potential for income to be generated in the form of a grant or commercial deals and arrangements with businesses in the wider community, however these external influences call into question WUSA's autonomy and independence.

As yet, WUSA has received no funding from the university this year. The university has refused to fund basic administrative costs such as printing, electricity and staff salaries and will only offer funding to WUSA on a project-by-project basis. The financial situation outlined above is obviously unsustainable and doesn't allow a long-term future for WUSA unless current government policies on VSU are drastically altered.

The University of Wollongong has two independent student representative associations, WUSA and the Wollongong University Postgraduate Association (WUPA), which represents post-graduate students at the University of Wollongong.

WUSA representatives are directly elected by all students each year to stand up for students' rights on campus and in the wider community. WUSA also provides open collectives and forums whereby all students have the opportunity to get involved in campaigns to further student rights.

Post-VSU, none of these representative or organisational aims has been altered. However, given the financial position WUSA has been left in the capacity to continue this work has been constrained and cannot continue unless the government repeals the VSU legislation or makes adequate amendments.

WUSA also offers an independent advocacy service that is now only available due to the University funding the position. Even though this is something that WUSA and the student body appreciates, we are aware of a conflict of interest in having the University fund an independent Advocacy Officer. It would be beneficial if such a position were to be funded by students through some form of student representation levy, making the position truly independent.

The Government should and must make adequate student representation and advocacy a funding priority. The services provided by students associations are essential parts of the student experience, especially in regional and remote areas. Without student associations like WUSA, students are put at a significant disadvantage being forced to stretch themselves between work, study and personal obligations as well as creating a balance between their financial, emotional and academic obligations.

In line of with the demands being made by the National Union of Students WUSA calls for the introduction of a deferred student support and services levy which would be payable by students at the completion of their degree and the commencement of their HECs repayments. In addition to the demands being made by NUS, WUSA demand that the funding be directed towards autonomous student controlled student organisations. This is necessary in order to ensure that a representative voice for students can continue to exist on all campuses, irrespective of their ability to create their own financial capital or exist as corporate structures.

In WUSA's view a healthy and vibrant university is one in which a strong and independent Students' Association is present to represent the needs of students. It is the students who make up the universities and not their staff.