

## **WRITTEN SUBMISSION on the Education Amendment Bill No. 4**

To the Education and Science Select Committee

### **Introduction**

This submission is made on behalf of the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA). NZUSA is a federation of students' associations with members from Universities, Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics across the country. NZUSA has been representing the collective interests of tertiary students since 1929.

We wish to make an oral submission to the Committee.

Our current members are:

- Albany Students' Association (ASA)
- Association of Students @ UCOL (AS@U)
- Auckland University Students' Association (AUSA)
- Lincoln University Students' Association (LUSA)
- Massey University Students' Association (MUSA)
- Massey University Extramural Students' Society (EXMSS)
- Massey At Wellington Students' Association (MAWSA)
- Otago Polytechnic Students' Association (OPSA)
- Otago University Students' Association (OUSA)
- Students Association at Waikato Institute of Technology (SAWIT)
- Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA)
- Weltec Students' Association (WSA)
- Waiariki Institute of Technology Students' Association (WITSA)
- Waikato Students' Union (WSU)

NZUSA supports most of the provisions of the Bill. We welcome the opportunity to comment on three aspects of the Bill but we wish to focus our comments on the provisions in the Bill regarding 'student services levies.'

### **Student Services Levies**

#### **Background**

1. Student services, additional to core learning and teaching services, are a vital part of the tertiary environment. These services can and should improve the educational experiences and outcomes of all students. It is appropriate that institutions and students have a degree of autonomy in deciding what services should be provided at a given institution.
2. Students must compulsorily pay the students services levy, which funds services for them. NZUSA submits that students should therefore have a right to directly influence the levy. Moreover, we hold that this is the best way to ensure the levy is kept under control and used to fund services that student's value.

#### **The importance of transparency, accountability and student control**

3. NZUSA is very supportive of the aims of improving transparency, ensuring greater involvement of students in decision making and improving the accountability of tertiary education providers to the student body.
4. We note many concerns about the current lack of transparency and accountability around student services levies at some institutions.

5. We have developed four principles that we believe should reflect how the Government regulates student services levies:
  - a. The purpose of the student services levy is to provide students with services that they value, that enhance their educational outcomes and experiences, but that are not part of the core teaching and learning services.
  - b. Students and their representatives must have a direct and strong influence on any decisions relating to how much they are levied and for what services. Without this, we have **taxation without representation**.
  - c. The allocation of the student services levy must be fully transparent to all students and their representatives.
  - d. The student services levy should be based on regular independent research, developed with students, that sets out the services and experiences that student's value.
6. We submit that by far the most efficient and fairest way to ensure the accountability of student services is to empower students and their representatives with the means to do this themselves. The likely impact of the Education (Freedom of Association) Amendment Bill on independent student representation and institutional budgets will hamper the effectiveness of this Bill. We believe Parliament should withdraw its support for this Bill.
7. We have concerns about how an individual Minister may use the discretion granted by this Bill and believe these should be considered carefully by the Committee. A more moderated approach, similar to the approach taken to tertiary institutional funding (where the Minister sets the broad direction, and implementation and directions are undertaken by the TEC) may be more appropriate.

### Examples of student oversight

8. There are existing examples of good practices:
  - i. Victoria University of Wellington and the Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association established in 2010 a joint committee for the oversight of the levy and the services it funds. This has ensured that students have oversight of the levy they pay. The students' association has ensured that independent research is conducted and that services are regularly reviewed.
  - ii. Massey University provides another useful example of a positive student-institution relationship. In 2009 student representatives partnered with Massey University in creating and approving a set of principles that future fee rises will be governed by. These include:
    - i. Being aligned with Massey's strategic plan. (The Road to 2020.)
    - ii. Working within Government policy
    - iii. Market positioning
    - iv. Recognition of a difference in delivery costs and future benefits of differing courses
    - v. Consideration of the impact on student affordability
    - vi. Demonstrating value for learners
9. However, there are also examples of poor practice. At some institutions, students are not even entitled to know where their levy is spent and requests to the institution for such

information usually provide unsatisfactory levels of information. The students' association is not entitled even to the simplest consultation on the levy. Unfortunately, situations such as these show a clear need for some change.

10. The evidence shows that the best way to ensure accountability is to empower students and their representatives to have influence over the levies. Accountability means much more than knowing the dollar value that is allocated to each service – students should form a part of the governance of these services.
11. It is apparent that student representation is the most efficient means of achieving the objectives outlined for this Bill. The decisions that need to be made require detailed information about the services funded. The Government cannot provide the degree of scrutiny and nuance required – nor can the whole student body when it is “consulted” at large, although that is an essential part of the process
12. We believe a specific monitoring framework for this policy would be desirable. At the very least, the TEC could compile institution’s levies and show them together, such as on a webpage on their website.
13. NZUSA is open to working with the Ministry of Education as it develops a framework for monitoring this policy.

#### **Private Training Establishments (PTEs)**

14. Whilst this is not our area of expertise, NZUSA supports strengthening the regulation of PTEs to protect students. NZUSA notes that students at PTEs usually do not have access to any form of independent student representation in the form of students' associations. Students are therefore often very vulnerable and can be treated exceptionally unfairly.

#### **Education New Zealand**

15. NZUSA supports the establishment of Education New Zealand as an essential aspect of the sector. We have concerns about the welfare of international students and the quality of the services and education they receive in New Zealand. There is an urgent need for leadership. The formation of this new Agency is a useful opportunity to ensure and strengthen provisions to enforce the Code of Compliance for Pastoral Care for International Students are adequate, to ensure that institutions are taking proper responsibility for the welfare of students and are providing accurate information to prospective students.

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