



Enriching the student experience  
since 1874

**The University of Sydney Union**  
**Submission to Discussion Paper – Review of Higher Education**  
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## **Preface**

The following paper is a submission to the discussion paper for the Review of Higher Education and outlines the principles and ideas that the University of Sydney Union (USU) would like the government to consider.

## **Background of USU**

The University of Sydney Union is the primary provider of the student experience at the University of Sydney. The main services of USU are:

- a) Clubs and Societies
- b) Entertainment on Campus
- c) Competitions and Awards
- d) Debating
- e) Support Networks and Volunteering
- f) Student Media
- g) Property Services and Provision of Student Space
- h) Catering

For further details, kindly refer to 'Submission to Discussion Paper - The impact of Voluntary Student Unionism on Services, Amenities and Representation for Australian University Students' prepared in March 2008 by Rose Khalilizadeh, President of the University of Sydney Union in '07 – '08 [seen at <http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/EED707F8-4322-422D-914E-5069A09FBEDE/21114/UniversityofSydneyUnion.pdf> ]

## **Introduction**

While the discussion has nine core areas, given the nature of the USU, there are two main aspects that we consider are important for this discussion from our point of view – Student Experience (Serving the needs of the Market) and Governance & Regulation.

### **Student Experience (Serving the needs of the market)**

The paper clearly outlines the academic aspect of the student experience and questions the teaching and learning objectives of such an experience. However, from USU's point of view, such an outlook needs to broaden and the Government needs to recognise the need for the Australian Education System to acknowledge the role that extra-curricular or co-curricular activities play in such an environment.

Top employers in the current market are looking for graduates with a well-rounded education and experience. A lot of this involves finding out what students do outside the class room, their level of involvement, and their competence.

Secondly, such student experience run by students also serves the purpose of encouraging participation and equipping students with skills for their entry into the workforce.

We must not forget the importance that training provides in this process. This training and experience is usually highly valued by employers in the current market.

At the same time the role that 'student control of student affairs' plays is critical to supporting the environment and helps student organisations stay relevant to their constituency. It also allows for checks and balances in terms of the organisation's role in an institution's community, if put in place in a wise manner while respecting such an organisation's independence.

Hence, from our point of view, there are three points of consideration:

- Recognition of the role that student organisations (for the students, by the students) play in the education system
- Recognition of the attributes gained by students and the experience overall
- Recognition of Universities which help such student experience which extends beyond the class room

The aforementioned recognition can be through regulations (mentioned below), and support (financial or physical) from the Government for these organisations and the Universities (or tertiary institutions) that support them. Such recognition will not only foster the culture of Universities embracing their student organisations, but also help the market gain students with requisite attributes to help the economy at large.

### **Governance & Regulation**

Again, from USU's point of view, the governance and regulation relating to Universities and their student organisations needs to extend beyond 19-37 of the Higher Education Support Act and its subsequent clauses relating to the Voluntary Student Unionism Amendment. This is so as to provide appropriate recognition of the role of student organisations such as seen in Part II, Education Act 1994, United Kingdom [seen at [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts1994/ukpga\\_19940030\\_en\\_3#pt2](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts1994/ukpga_19940030_en_3#pt2) ].

Of course, the above mentioned recognition from the United Kingdom has its own limitations. It is too specific for the way these organisations carry out their affairs and does not necessarily take into account the variation in different structures at different Tertiary Institutions. That is where we believe that the student organisations of this country should be consulted in the process before a move such as this is made.

At the same time, there is the issue of micro-management. In principle, we would prefer that such recognition (regulation changes or support) restricts the Minister or Department of Education from micromanaging these organisations or their relationships with their respective Universities. This also includes the issue of structure of the relevant organisations, and the fees they can charge, among other aspects.

There are different ways that student organisations can be held accountable, especially in partnership with their University. The University of Sydney is a good example in terms of the financial support provided. However, we believe that the Government's role is in the bigger picture support that will help guide the direction of these organisations in the Higher Education System.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, while the idea of this review is excellent and has the potential to take the country a long way, USU believes that there should be an overall perspective that needs to be taken in to account. Such a perspective should not only involve consultation with students, but also with their organisations that recognise their importance in the Higher Education sector. The student experience is extremely crucial in the development of those characteristics which increase a person's employability. It is vital that industry, Government and the Universities recognize this.