



Response to Universities Accord Interim Report

Thank you for enabling us to make a formal submission on the Interim Report of the Universities Accord

At Swinburne, the suppression of student rights and a culture of university control and secrecy instead of collaboration and support is real.

Our submission depicts a series of structural and cultural challenges gripping our university, at profound cost to the student experience and the sector as a whole.

Whilst some of our submission reflects the excesses of Swinburne's exceptionalism, our university reflects a live case study on how a lack of executive accountability and unilateral university control erodes checks and balances thereby contributing to a poorer student life and experience.

Mark my words - we're cognisant of the financial retaliation to our SSAF funding that we face with this submission. You remain our final hope that through regulation we can achieve collaboration, accountability and enduring cultural reform.

So entrenched is the anathema to student rights and autonomy at Swinburne that you can find it prescribed in the University's own Governance Framework.

Swinburne makes clear on student representation that it'll listen to students but "*the University and its responsible bodies and officers continue to be responsible for the decisions*".^[1]

Our submission underscores the consequences of this absolute power. A submission where a university that lacks executive accountability with unchecked power can suppress student rights and autonomy.

Student associations and guilds across the nation are recognised drivers of the student experience. Some are enshrined in law but almost all are empowered by universities who recognise they are essential to a healthy functioning tertiary sector.

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[1] Swinburne's Governance Framework, Section 8 'Student Representation', <https://www.swinburne.edu.au/about/policies-regulations/governance#8-student-representation>

SUMMARY

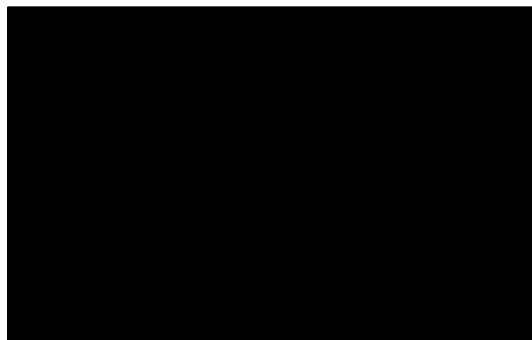
The Accord's interim report gives us hope that the value placed by eminent experts on the role and function of student-led service organisations can be strengthened through reform to bring the remaining universities, like ours, which have not kept up with delivering a sector leading student experience, into line.

Over 90% of Australian universities invest in empowering student-led service organisations to design and co-deliver the student experience alongside professional staff, with appropriate governance arrangements.

Swinburne isn't one of them. It should be. We need your help to make it happen.

As a sector, we're only as weak as the weakest link in the chain.

We welcome any opportunity to present in detail to the Panel on our research and recommendations herein.



Kishaun Aloysius
President
Swinburne Student Union (SSU)

ABOUT

The Swinburne Student Union was formed in 1983 as an incorporated association to provide student services and student rights support at Swinburne University. The SSU's major objective is to protect and defend the principles of students to be part of an autonomous and self-governing organisation of students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations following the release of the Interim Report deal with proposed measures of success to achieve the Accord recommendations in key areas, including:

3.2.3 Institutions have a duty of care to students

The Minister amends the *Student Services, Amenities, Representation and Advocacy Guidelines* to prohibit a higher education provider from operating advocacy services either directly, or through a controlled entity, to protect the integrity and independency of the service from perceived or actual conflicts of interest.

3.2.3.3 The international student experience

The Minister strengthens regulatory standards in connection with Weighted Average Mark (**WAMs**) or Grade Point Average (**GPA**) based scholarships that are able to be issued by a higher education provider to international students.

The Minister mandates that a higher education provider cannot set a GPA/WAM requirement that would be higher to maintain access to a scholarship than the entry level to obtain a scholarship.

3.2.4 Enhancing and empowering the student voice

Establish a Higher Education Student Ombudsman to empower students to hold institutions to account if they are dissatisfied and where student rights are suppressed, as seen in our submission.

Improving student wellbeing and accountability

The Minister amends the *Student Services, Amenities, Representation and Advocacy Guidelines* to require that at least 50% of the Student Services and Amenities Fee (**SSAF**) collected by a higher education provider with an EFTSL greater than 15,000 is allocated to student unions/ guilds/associations to ensure the support and representation of students.

2 The Minister amends existing laws in connection with SSAF to prohibit a higher education provider from directly owning a student services organisation where they are used to administer SSAF funding.

In exceptional circumstances where a university operates with such an organisation, it must be validated every five years through a democratic and deliberative process amongst students and its board comprised of a majority of elected students.

3 The Minister directs his department to develop guidance for higher education providers on best practice design of student union/association/guild models where a higher education provider collecting SSAF lacks capability or foresight to devise baseline governance instruments.

4 Guidance should focus on successful pre-existing student service models within the sector. The first being company limited by guarantee models comprised of majority student-led blended boards as seen at UNSW and University of Sydney.^[2]The second being incorporated association models. Both model types make up almost all of student service organisations across universities in Australia.

5 The Minister works with National Cabinet to obtain agreement from the states and territories to adopt minimum SSAF principles and enshrining state-based laws as seen in the *Universities Legislation Amendment Act 2016* for student services and representation.

1 Improving the operations of governing bodies

The introduction of mandatory Question Time on Agendas of University Council/Senate to provide for direct transparency and accountability inside higher education providers of the governing board of the institution.

2 The Minister directs his department to set out minimum standards for University Council/Senate Board reporting and accountability, noting best practice governance and transparency seen at the University Councils of The University of Melbourne and Deakin Universities.^[3]

3 That Vice Chancellors of higher education providers are required to attend parliamentary hearings to report on performance, providing an avenue of accountability independent from the institution.

4 Higher education providers are prohibited from enshrining powers under governance frameworks and or the equivalent primary governing framework that prohibit or prevent students from holding decision-making power in connection with student representation.

[2] University of Sydney Union Board', <https://usu.edu.au/student-board/> & UNSW ARC Board, <https://www.arc.unsw.edu.au/about/arc-board>

[3] Deakin University University Council, '<https://www.deakin.edu.au/about-deakin/leadership-and-governance/university-council>' and University of Melbourne University Council, '<https://about.unimelb.edu.au/strategy/governance/peak-bodies-structures/university-council>'.

A DUTY OF CARE TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WHO HAD NOWHERE ELSE TO GO

*“THE REVIEW IS EXAMINING THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN PROVIDING INFORMATION TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS, SO THEY ARE INFORMED OF THEIR RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS UNDER AUSTRALIAN LAW, **AND WHETHER THIS REQUIRES SIGNIFICANT ENHANCEMENT**”*

- PAGE 134, ACCORD INTERIM REPORT

The Swinburne ‘International Excellence’ Scholarship

Swinburne’s International Excellence scholarship scheme has been under increasing scrutiny since August 2022 for inhumane and cruel decisions by the university to terminate scholarships after an international student arrives onshore to commence studies.

The scholarship, automatically offered to eligible students as part of a course offer, has been found to contain distinction and high distinction ‘gotcha’ clauses that gives Swinburne the right to revoke them after a single semester of study at the university.

This clause has been known to be exercised on students with WAMs of between 68% and 69.75% thereby demonstrating no leniency to the use of the clause. Over a dozen different contract types are said to exist with some students have WAM clauses and others having one, for the same degrees.

This is despite the entry requirement for a scholarship being a 60% WAM, or a credit average.

Caught out in an attempt to upend the international student experience

In July 2022, the Swinburne Student Union uncovered serious governance issues around the integrity of decisions to terminate scholarships of international students after students reported receiving no assistance from the advocacy service owned and operated by Swinburne’s controlled student services company, [REDACTED]. It is notable that the website detailing information spruiking the ‘independent’ service is on a Swinburne.edu.au page.

In August 2022 after the Student Union wrote to Swinburne demanding answers about the misapplication of its own regulations, a written admission from the Deputy Vice Chancellor for the service area was released stating:



Thank you so much for bringing this to our attention. I can confirm that the University has made an error in its interpretation of unsatisfactory process for some of the International Excellence Scholarship students, which has no doubt caused distress for many students. [5]

--- Deputy Vice Chancellor of Education, Experience and Employability, August 2022 ---

[4] Swinburne Student Life Advocacy Services - '<https://www.swinburne.edu.au/life-at-swinburne/student-support-services/independent-advocacy-for-students/>

[5] Attachment 1 - Correspondence to the SSU on scholarships by the Swinburne DVC EEE

The conflict of interest saga

Swinburne's advocacy service, funded through the Student Services and Amenities Fee (**SSAF**), is owned and operated by the university through a subsidiary company.

The Director of the company during 2022 was a university executive on secondment into the role of the Swinburne subsidiary. This undoubtedly creates an employee-employer relationship that is subject to perceived or actual conflict and where such a person is left in an invidious position in their duties to their employer versus their personal obligations to speak out. More broadly, we contend that student rights were left completely and utterly compromised because of the ownership structure of the service at Swinburne.

Such a cosy arrangement is unheard of in the tertiary sector. Imagine a world where we permitted the tobacco industry to provide health advice to persons with lung conditions. Or gave the coal industry control over climate change policy.

Students deserve to know that a student rights service that is supposed to provide them with independent advice and act in their interests was beyond reproach.

The dominance of the university interest over student rights

The revocation of scholarships in connection with a WAM clause condition that doesn't appear to all of the same type of scholarship is still continuing. To date, we understand that not a single university appeal hearing has ever been convened for an international student in connection with the scheme. This is despite the fact we've received hundreds of complaints about no one considering their cases or providing them with a clear and formal appeal pathway to be heard (see survey results).

Five university appeals were recently lodged on behalf of the Student Union for affected students in connection with this scheme based on an academic related clause being exercised. All were dismissed on the basis that the decision to terminate a scholarship was lodged on behalf of the Student Union for affected students in connection with this scheme based on an academic related clause being exercised. All were dismissed on the basis that the decision to terminate a scholarship was *"not a reviewable decision, therefore, no application to appeal the decision of a review officer can be lodged"*.

At the date of this submission, we're still trying to understand how it is that a decision to terminate a scholarship is not *'a reviewable decision'* under the Review and Appeals Regulations of the University. Either way, a convoluted, or indeed no appeal rights at all, for an international student involving a scholarship revocation by a university is unacceptable..

We submit that the Panel must provide for significant enhancement of protections for international students to ensure that the international student experience is not able to be compromised by a university scheme that appears to be profit rather than student driven.

In one piece of correspondence to a student explaining the decision, the university review officer said:

“Over the last two years, Swinburne has not actively verified whether scholarship holders have met the terms and conditions of their scholarships. With the return to on-campus, study we have begun to monitor these terms and conditions again and have sought to ensure that all students are advised of this”. [6]

--- Swinburne Review Officer, August 2022 ---

What is important in this letter is proof that the university waited for students to arrive onshore after COVID before terminating their scholarships based on a WAM gotcha clause. It is reasonable to deduce from this correspondence alone that there was a clear advantage to the university over the student in exercising such a power.

The Panel must give regard to regulatory standards that prevent integrity and conflicts surrounding student services that are tasked with providing a balance the administrative decision-making of a university and support for a students' right to due process and natural justice.

Are we really supposed to believe that the student rights service that was meant to support these students wasn't able to pick up the basic error relied upon to make the decision?

Or, perhaps we are to draw a conclusion that the Swinburne owned company, [REDACTED], would never go as far as to challenge the merits of a decision by its owner that stood to lose millions in revenue.

Swinburne exceptionalism in the gotcha WAM clause

The SSU has obtained copies of international scholarship terms and conditions from Macquarie University, Deakin, LaTrobe, Edith Cowan and RMIT Universities.

In each of the terms and conditions, the imposition of a minimum WAM of a high distinction or distinction average for 'excellence' scholarships was not present.

The disparity of conditions across universities thereby leading to irreparable and irreversible damage to the international student experience is why we're calling for regulatory standards around scholarships for international students to be tightened.

[6] Attachment 2, 'Correspondence from Review Officer providing reasons for decision in connection with a scholarship decision'

Confusion over student rights and the role of student services

Our survey found that students were reporting not receiving sufficient or any support whatsoever from the “independent” advocacy service in connection with scholarship terminations.

Students reported being bounced from service to service including the advocacy/student rights service where they couldn’t get an appointment after receiving the generic debt notice advising they stood to lose a scholarship worth thousands with days to find the money and just 10 days to lodge a request for review with medical or bereavement evidence.

In the case of a student in their first year of study, they were prohibited from applying for a fee extension due to international regulations expecting a student to have enough funds for the first year of study. This is, of course, premised on a scholarship that was pulled out from under them.

“It was really awful. Ended up getting depressed over it as well. I tried contacting them but they were being unreasonable. They were literally forcing me to pay”.

“I tried to reach advocacy services but they are not giving any tips properly. They are contacting me via email”.

excerpts from student respondents

Independent survey of students

A survey of over 250 Swinburne students found:^[7]

- Students with WAMs as high as 69.5% were being informed that their scholarships were being terminated due to a 70% WAM clause.
- International students were never afforded a face-to-face interactions or any prior engagement by a review officer. They were given just “10 days” to lodge a right of review (despite university regulation providing them up to 21 working days).^[8]
- Students reported needing to take out loans from “loan sharks” to foot the difference as a result of the termination.
- Students who lodged a right of review that did not include medical reasons were immediately rejected and informed that they had no further grounds of appeal.
- Students were directed to Swinburne’s advocacy service where they were, on the materials we’ve seen, informed there was nothing they could do for them. We’ve viewed email responses that resembled standardised responses and not individualised advice.
- Serious financial harm and stress to scholarship holders
- 17 respondents confirmed they sought mental health support after the abrupt decision to cut their scholarship.

[7] Attachment 3, ‘Review into Advocacy Services at Swinburne survey’

[8] Swinburne’s Review and Appeals Regulations 2012, ‘<https://www.swinburne.edu.au/about/policies-regulations/reviews-appeals>’

THE CASE OF MANY IN CONNECTION WITH SWINBURNE'S INTERNATIONAL EXCELLENCE SCHOLARSHIP SCHEME

Semester two 2023

An international student would receive a decision notice via email on the first week of Semester two advising that their International Excellence Scholarship was terminated.^[9]

We've provided a copy of the standardised template used for all students. No internal or external appeal rights were ever provided to the students impacted (other than a request for a review on narrow grounds - see email template issued). Many reported trying to then get an appointment for student rights support with the Swinburne Advocacy Service but were unable to get an appointment for over a week due to excess demand.

Within days of a decision, students were being asked to find thousands of dollars in additional fees or risk deportation for non-compliance with Department of Home Affairs requirements.

TIMELINE



"There was no ability to get an appointment for advocacy before they told me fees were due. Everyone told me they couldn't help me".

--Swinburne international student who asked for our help--

[9] Attachment 4 - Template notice issued to students in connection with the scholarship scheme

GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE STUDENT AND AMENITIES FEE (SSAF)

“THE REVIEW IS EXAMINING WHAT MORE COULD BE DONE TO SUPPORT HOW THE SSAF IS DIRECTED, INCLUDING TO STUDENTS.

“PROVIDING A GREATER PERCENTAGE OF THE STUDENT SERVICES AND AMENITIES FEE TO STUDENT UNIONS TO ENSURE THE SUPPORT AND REPRESENTATION OF STUDENTS”.

- PAGE 133 + 138, ACCORD INTERIM REPORT

A split student services model at Swinburne

Swinburne’s split student services model is comprised of the Swinburne Student Union (**SSU**) and Swinburne Student Life (**SSAA**).

Due to Swinburne’s Governance Framework banning students from the design and delivery of student services, student services that are normally the domain of student-led associations are indirectly operated by the university including legal, advocacy, and clubs and societies.

Nearly 90% of the SSAF collected by Swinburne goes to directly to either the university or its controlled entity.^[10] This has led to the corporatisation of student services as a direct consequence of student involvement being structurally separated.

Swinburne University & controlled entity (SSAA)	Student-led organisation (SSU)
\$5,254,500 or 87.9%	\$720,500 or 12.1%

Swinburne has the largest university controlled SSAF funded entity in the country.

The Board that governs the Swinburne subsidiary is comprised of four university executives appointed by the Vice Chancellor (with a casting vote) and four elected students, with the power of the entity deliberately in favour of the University. By design, it prevents students from exercising decisions over designing and delivering student services despite relying on SSAF for its operations.

The company receives the bulk of SSAF for student organisations. Critically, the company overseeing student services fails to produce any public agenda or minutes about its decisions. Students are not just disempowered, they are not even informed by where their money is going and what it is being spent on.

[10] Swinburne’s 2023 SSAF Allocation Process’, <https://www.swinburne.edu.au/courses/fees/student-services-amenities-fee/2023-allocation/>

The case for mandatory minimum SSAF to student organisations enshrined in law and regulation

A great student experience should not be limited to the university you choose to study at. The percentage of SSAF distribution to student organisations swings wildly with no logical or practical basis other than historical.

Swinburne is the 12th largest Australian university by EFTSL. Yet, it fails to properly fund an independent student-led service organisation by comparison to like universities. It instead pockets the SSAF for its own controlled entity and university services. Western Sydney is the only university worse off in this category.

A minimum mandatory SSAF distribution of 50% to student organisations at universities with EFTSL greater 15,000 strikes the right balance between student autonomy and university confidence in delivering a great student experience.

The Minister can look to pursue this either through regulation, or, through enshrined state based legislative reform as seen in WA's *Universities Legislation Amendment Act 2016*.^[11]

	University	State	EFTSL	% of SSAF towards student-led service organisation
1	Monash University	VIC	67,753	40.0%
2	University of Melbourne	VIC	54,411	52.4%
3	RMIT University	VIC	47,976	27.3%
4	University of New South Wales	NSW	47,085	36.8%
5	University of Queensland	QLD	42,340	45.0%
6	Deakin University	VIC	38,118	49.1%
7	Queensland University of Technology	QLD	36,512	20.2%
8	Western Sydney University	NSW	36,120	6.9%
9	University of Sydney	NSW	35,798	61.8%
10	Griffith University	QLD	35,555	31.6%
11	Curtin University	WA	34,610	50.0%
12	Swinburne University of Technology	VIC	34,539	12.1%

[11] Universities Legislation Amendment Act 2016, 'https://www.legislation.wa.gov.au/legislation/statutes.nsf/law_a147128.html'

THE STUDENT ORGANISATIONS ON A PAGE

In research produced for Swinburne as part of our initiative to call for a single student-led association at Swinburne, we devised an image depicting student organisations across the sector on a single page.

The image clearly and overwhelmingly demonstrates 90% of universities support student-led student service organisations to administer SSAF as part of a building a better student experience.

We implore the Accord Panel to give proper regard to the benefit of harmonisation across the sector for the small number of universities who retain unilateral control of student services yet charge SSAF.



This list is based on tertiary student service organisations registered with ACNC as at 31 December 2022

IMPROVING THE OPERATIONS OF GOVERNING BODIES

Student empowerment over student suppression through governance instruments

The SSU endorses the University of Sydney's Union (**USU**) model as best practice in empowering student-led associations to co-design and deliver student services in a partnership with the respective university institution.^[12]

The USU model's use of a Reserve Power presents the University Senate with god-like administrative powers to intervene in the management and operations at any moment, subject to strict and proper tests of evidence.^[12]

We encourage the Panel to consider the value of this model in the context of departmental guidance to inform a mandatory 50% distribution of SSAF to all student organisations who adopt clear standardised governance arrangements.

We contend that the following governance arrangements are applicable:

- Reserve power as identified with the USU model
- Service level agreement between the university and provider that defines the services each deliver.
- University Council inputs around acquittal and continuous improvement
- Democratic elections of student members

The SSU also endorses a blended Board of management comprised of staff and students within a student service organisation. The composition must be an absolute student majority in terms of composition. University appointments will inevitably, by virtue of their appointment, vote on bloc. That is why a student majority becomes necessary to ensure all interests are considered and ultimately all interests are represented.

This is particularly so in the case of the UNSW ARC and USU models - leading student union/service organisations in Australia.

Expecting a University Council to give up control without regulatory interventions is nigh on impossible. The SSU has sought to engage for nearly two years in designing a model reflecting the USU and UNSW ARC model - a partnership of university and students, working together in the common interest.

The SSU are currently engaged in a public awareness campaign, 'Our Swinburne' to generate student engagement and university management change around the need for a Swinburne equivalent to the models raised afore.^[13]

[12] University of Sydney Union Constitution, '<https://usu.edu.au/article/where-can-i-find-the-usu-constitution>'

[13] Our Swinburne campaign, '<https://ourswinburne.org.au/>'

IMPROVING THE OPERATIONS OF GOVERNING BODIES

The deliberate design to split student representation and divide the student voice

Swinburne's contempt for an independent student-led service organisation is no clearer in its decision to form a Student Representative Council (**SRC**) inside its controlled entity to divide and dilute the student voice when compared to the elected officebearers of the SSU.^[14]

The University's use of SSAF to fund 'Swinburne's primary student representation and consultation body' to divide and conquer across two student bodies speaks to the further need for regulatory standards to let students decide the best model they want to represent them.

Despite proclaiming it is a representative body, the SRC actually has no decision-making power. It misleads students into believing that such a group has the same functions like student-led organisations across the nation.

It is merely a committee that reports to a Director within the Swinburne company it operates out of (SSL) and is at the whim of its management on the issues that are taken up. This type of model is another way Swinburne has sought to suppress and disempower the student voice. It deliberately empowers, through its terms and references of university committees, that the student representation is derived from the SRC.

This has unintended consequences. The dilution and division of the student voice across two student representative bodies to compete for access to university management on advocacy and student rights issues is like setting a cat amongst pigeons. But most importantly, it undermines the student experience.

We welcome the very recent decision to reform Swinburne's SRC. However, let this be a perfect point in time to highlight how university culture can have profound impacts on the student experience and the student voice and why regulation is sometimes required.

Swinburne knew that the Student Representative Council is a sham. It is designed to disempower the student union whilst pretending publicly it is a 'student representative body'.

We have no control over our own decisions. Staff won't even let us use our surplus budget to run a student ball or a town hall forum because we wanted to do it jointly with the student union. It is like the university has always wanted this conflict so students cannot unite beyond student rights issues we care about".

-- Tess Robb, Swinburne Student Representative Council Chair, 2023

[14] Swinburne's Student Representative Council, <https://www.swinburne.edu.au/life-at-swinburne/clubs-societies-student-organisations/student-representative-council/>

EXECUTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

The University Council

Swinburne's University Council requires a person to email the Governance and Assurance Unit just to get a copy of its meeting dates. Decisions are not made public. Minutes not published. This level of secrecy would be unacceptable in an ASX listed company. It certainly is for a public institution that is the 12th biggest university by EFTSL in the nation.

Zero public transparency around delegations and responsibilities delegated by the Council to Vice Chancellor or subordinates

The most extraordinary part of Swinburne's secrecy is its lack of disclosure of financial and decision-making delegations. This includes delegations by the Council to the Vice Chancellor or to staff. Put simply - no one outside of the Council bubble has any way of knowing who has the power to make decisions, what the decisions are and who is making them.

In the case of our SSAF funding, The University Council vests the power to the Vice Chancellor to decide unilaterally on how it is distributed and in reviewing its performance. This effectively means we are at the mercy of a single person and their ideological predisposition. A conservative VC is more inclined to oppose student service organisations due to the hassle they cause them. Progressive ones respect the role they play in a thriving university.

It shouldn't be this way. This is a damning indictment on the governance of a billion-dollar university. It talks to why our wide ranging concerns that regulatory standards to enshrining checks and balances that enable merit based discussion and debate

The University of Melbourne and Deakin Universities, by stark contrast, make this information available. Given it is unlikely that such a document is altered frequently, we contend that the Panel should mandate disclosure by all universities.^[15]

Failure to publish schedules, minutes or matters for decision

The secrecy isn't just limited to the powers and how they are exercised. The fact that a major university doesn't publish public minutes of meetings on decisions, provide transparency on matters for discussion or publish schedules in connection with the Council and sub-committees is deeply troubling.

We recommend that the Panel examines Deakin University's approach to governance as best practice and how they enable constituent units like their student union to be part of the discussion and build a better university experience.^[16]

[15] University of Melbourne Vice Chancellor Delegations Schedule, https://about.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0032/19787/Summary-VC-Delegations-Schedule.pdf

[16] Deakin University Standing Delegations, https://www.deakin.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/240781/Standing-Delegations-2021.pdf

STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

Introduction of 'Question Time' at University Council and parliamentary hearings

Question Time provides for a mechanism for questions to be asked of the governing board of an institution by staff and students.

Take a decision by our Vice Chancellor, who is paid nearly double the salary of the Prime Minister, to support the use of student money on the installation of a personal ensuite in her office. The only reason anyone knew about it outside of the Council bubble was because the National Tertiary Education Union (**NTEU**) accidentally discovered construction signage displaying 'VC ensuite'.

This decision, covered in a veil of secrecy, should be subject to fit and proper scrutiny and accountability. Was it value for money? How much did it cost? Did the University Council approve this spending given the nature of it? Too few will ever really know.

Fear of retaliation when executive power is monopolised

The risk for a student-led association like ours to speak to truth to power is clear. A university is meant to be the place where a contest of ideas is empowered and the pursuit of continuous improvement on performance is the primary goal.

Those guiding principles can never be realised when university management could, at any moment, cut our funding or evict us from the building we operate out of. This is why mandatory funding for SSAF for student-led organisations is necessary.

There must be a mechanism of university executive accountability and we are glad to see the Interim Report makes this a priority. Our recommendations to use the role of the legislature, in a clear separation of powers as we see with departments of government, via mandatory parliamentary hearings is the simplest and easiest form of accountability that can be achieved.

Composition of the University Council

We support the review by the Accord into the composition of the University Council itself. We note that universities across Australia except for Victoria provide for two student members, an undergraduate and postgraduate student member, to be directly elected by their peers as voting members of the Council.

We recommend that the Accord seeks to expand the participation of student members on the University Council in Victorian Universities by an additional member.



| SWINBURNE STUDENT UNION |
UNIVERSITIES ACCORD INTERIM REPORT SUBMISSION