Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee
the council of Australia’s university presidents
(A.C.N. 008 502 930)

STUDENT ORGANISATIONS

POLICY PAPER

1 The issue of nomenclature in relation to student organisations in Australian universities is important. The organised student body of a university is not similar to an industrial trade union and, therefore, the term "student union" can be misleading. The student body is more correctly described as a "student association" or a "student guild".

2 In every university there are essential services and facilities that are provided for students which are both an important element in the social and cultural life of universities and a part of the education process. Such services are often provided by student organisations, some of which have existed for many years, and are considered to be an integral part of university life.

3 Universities strongly support the view that fees charged for the provision of services for students are an obligation of enrolment, whether they are provided by student organisations or in other ways by the University. It is the prerogative of universities to determine conditions of enrolment.

4 Where student organisations provide an extensive range of services which the universities recognise as essential, their financial viability is fundamental. Services include the provision of food outlets, buildings, meeting rooms, toilets, stationery and second-hand book services, child care, legal services, health and employment services, assistance with accommodation and welfare services. As the student body changes, services directed to part-time and external students have become more important. Student organisations also encourage a broad range of activities by funding diverse groups reflecting student interests. Participation in these activities is educational in the broadest of senses, encouraging students to develop their social skills. Provision of these services is traditionally undertaken and funded by the student body, which is the direct beneficiary.

5 Student organisations accept banks, travel agencies, pharmacists, hairdressers, newsagents, clothes stores and others as tenants. These are areas in which the organisations cannot provide the same standard of service to the student community as the tenant can, and the income received subsidises other services.

6 It is essential that the student organisations continue to contribute to the ethos of the universities in this way. To do so, however, they must have adequate funds at their disposal.

7 The AVCC believes that representative student organisations work best when membership is universal, and therefore supports universal membership. All universities benefit from the existence of representative student bodies whose members can serve on academic bodies and university committees of various
kinds. Universities recognise, nonetheless, that some students may not wish to be members of a student organisation.

8 The AVCC believes that it is in the interests of both universities and their students that the process related to exemption from membership of student organisations are clearly defined, including the grounds on which exemption will be considered and provided to students in written form, preferably in the university handbook. To be granted exemption, students should be expected to make a case in writing which is acceptable to the university.

9 Universities strongly support the view that fees charged for the provision of student services are an obligation of enrolment and must be paid, regardless of whether these fees are paid directly to the university or through a student organisation.

10 The responsibility for student services in the majority of universities, and therefore the entitlement to the associated fees, is vested in the student organisation. In cases where a student has obtained exemption from membership of a student organisation, the student should still be required to pay to a nominated source a sum of money equivalent to the membership fee levied by the student organisation so that there shall not be any financial incentive for the student to opt out of membership of the student organisation and so that a comparable range of services may be provided.