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Universities Australia optimistic about Government's plan to re-build student services

Universities Australia today expressed strong support for Minister for Youth, the Hon. Kate Ellis' announcement to re-build much needed student support services in Australia's universities.

"Universities have struggled for years to prop up essential student services through cross-subsidisation from other parts of already stretched university budgets, to redress the damage that resulted from the Coalition Government's disastrous Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) legislation," said Universities Australia Chief Executive, Dr Glenn Withers.

"Universities are facing an uncertain year, where many transition arrangements are in place or expected, and investment and international revenue sources are under challenge, so this announcement comes at a time when all Australian universities require greater certainty about how they plan expenditure for 2009. Knowing how student services and amenities can be funded will contribute to financial planning," Dr Withers said.

"Universities Australia supports the move to allow Australian universities to make the choice to levy students for a service and amenities fee, and at what level within the indexed cap, and will seek in consultation with the Government to ensure that universities have the flexibility to tailor those services and amenities to best match individual missions, and the needs of their particular student profile," Dr Withers said.

"Universities Australia welcomes the Government providing the option for students to defer the payment of a services and amenities levy to an income contingent loan arrangement, giving relief to students who already battle to support themselves during the course of a degree program. This was a key platform of our submission to Minister Ellis' review of VSU," Dr Withers said.

"We look forward to exploring with Government the nature of any representation and advocacy protocols. An effective student voice is important for good university management and, for several months now Universities Australia and the National Union of Students have been jointly working, along with the L.H. Martin Institute, on a skills development package to put to government for support to improve student representation and advocacy," Dr Withers said.

"Beyond student services, Universities Australia looks forward to new student income support initiatives and wider university funding improvements, which it hopes will result from the Bradley Review of Higher Education due to report in December," Dr Withers said.

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