

# **NEXT STEPS RANKINGS**

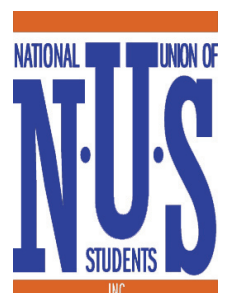
## **University Student Representation and Student Support**

**PRODUCED BY STUDENTS FOR STUDENTS**

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NEXT STEPS: UNIVERSITY RANKINGS 2007  
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## Introduction

After the passage of Voluntary Student Unionism, students at some universities are being left to represent themselves with little or no resources. Support for student representation and advocacy is crucial to maintaining the rights of students at university.

As government policy continues to shape universities into income driven entities, the rights of students, especially paying students, are often eroded in the pursuit of increasing income. In this new environment, students must have a right to question and criticise the services they are being sold at ever increasing prices.

The rights of students, who are contributing more than ever to the cost of their education, include but are not limited to: the right to representation and independent advocacy, fair and transparent assessment processes, fair and available appeal processes, regular and open review of course quality with organised student input.

Well-resourced student representation allows for a consistent, effective and organised student voice and perspective within a university's planning and quality processes. Aside from accepting student voices, the treatment of student representation also demonstrates that university's regard for their own student cohorts and potential graduates.

These rankings aim to provide an indicator for students seeking to go to university about the quality and recognition of student representation at various universities across Australia. How well will concerns and issues, whether academic or non-academic be received by the Universities or presented by students?

It is noted that reducing government and public funding has been a key issue raised by university administrations that have been supportive in principle, but have been unable to provide any tangible support through resources.

Not all universities are included in the rankings. Some University student organisations are either not affiliates of the National Union of Students or insufficient information could be collated in order to justify the categorisation of particular universities. The recommendation, to students considering applying to those Universities not in the rankings, is to research the availability of independent student controlled representation and advocacy.

# Category 1

## Description

Universities in this category are extremely supportive of student representation and consult with students at every level. The culture of student involvement in decision-making permeates from governing board level through to student administration units.

Students who have academic and non-academic issues at the university are given a fair hearing with the right to independent, student-controlled and directed representation.

Student representation is well resourced with student submissions into University quality processes unchanged by VSU.

Campus student life is healthy and run and organised by the students of the university.

Students at the university are engaged and active in the governance of their student organisations. The culture of student participation and involvement in the student organisation is vibrant and democratic.

The university is respectful of student organisation autonomy and independence, and is also extremely supportive in reviewing and increasing the organisational support provided to student organisations as the peak representative body for students enrolled at the university.

Students wanting to attend these universities can be assured that there is a strong student voice for complaints and appeals with no issue off-bounds for student organisations from these universities. There is almost little to no chance that students won't get the quality they paid for at these universities.

## Notable movements

The movement of Monash Clayton and the University of New South Wales upwards into category 1 from last year is the result of restructures and mediations about support concluding early this year. The University of Sydney is the only University to remain in the top category with its consistent university-wide support for its student representative organisations.

The University of New South Wales established its new student organisation titled "ARC" with an independent Students' Representative Council.

Monash Clayton Students' Association has finalised its support agreement with the university and is not only retaining its historically strong student representative functions but is increasing its service provision to students with the re-opening of a bar on campus.

## Universities in Category 1

University of Sydney  
University of New South Wales  
Monash Clayton

## Category 2

### Description

Universities in this category are supportive of student representation and independent student controlled advocacy. There is a culture of student involvement in decision making within the university and student issues are given time and consideration.

Students who have academic and non-academic issues at the university are given a fair hearing with the right to independent, student-controlled and directed representation.

Student representation however, may not be well resourced and support for student representatives in developing and presenting organised submissions for university planning and quality is currently lacking.

Campus student life is healthy although student involvement in the development of on campus life is mixed.

Students at the university are engaged and active in the governance of their student organisations. The culture of student participation and involvement in the student organisation is vibrant and democratic.

The university is respectful of student organisation autonomy and independence but support is still inconclusive on some key issues such as student representation resources.

Students wanting to attend these universities should watch the monthly rankings for improvements in concrete support, but can rest easy that independent advocacy that is student directed exists, with the support of strong student representation that is currently still intact.

### Notable movements up

Notable movements include, University of Technology, Sydney, James Cook University, University of Tasmania and Newcastle University, where negotiations for support concluded late in 2006 or early in 2007.

The University of Technology, Sydney is emulating reviews conducted by universities in the top category by going through an independent review to determine further areas of support. Expected to continue movement upwards.

Newcastle University is also looking into further methods and areas where it can support its Students' Association.

James Cook University has conclusively supported its student organisation, but there is still inconclusive support for organised student involvement in quality and planning processes.

The University of Tasmania is still concluding its organisational re-structure of student organisations, but has provided substantial financial support to student programs. It remains to be seen whether the University will attempt to replace student control from the governance of the new student organisation with token representation.

### **Notable movements down**

Despite support for advocacy and representation being extremely high, the University of Queensland has undermined its student representation through the takeover of student organisation controlled buildings as a condition of funding. This unprecedented move casts doubt on the overall respect for student advocacy at the University of Queensland.

The Australian National University being the trailblazer in providing support for its student association has fallen behind by refusing to date, to fund clubs and societies effectively. With Clubs and Societies being the life-blood of most on campus student life, it is unclear why this has occurred at the Australian National University.

The University of Melbourne who was also a trailblazer in providing support for its student organisations has also moved down, primarily as a result of increasing disregard for student voices in the university's planning processes. The University of Melbourne continues to provide substantial resources and support to the student organisations, but the independence of the representative student organisation has been diminished publicly by senior figures within the University. These symptoms of cultural change within the University could possibly be an irregularity, developments leading up to the University's adoption of its annual budget will provide further insight into the University's regard for student representation and voices.

### **Universities in Category 2**

University of Melbourne  
University of Queensland  
Adelaide University  
Australian National University  
University of Technology, Sydney  
Queensland University of Technology  
Curtin University  
James Cook University  
Newcastle University  
University of Tasmania

## Category 3

Universities in this category are appearing supportive of student representation and independent student controlled advocacy, however support is as yet inconclusive.

Students who have academic and non-academic issues at the university are currently given a fair hearing with the right to representation, however some of these campuses do not have student-controlled advocacy as yet or future support for the student controlled advocacy is in doubt.

Student representation is not well resourced and support for student representatives in developing and presenting organised submissions for university planning and quality is non-existent.

Staff or non-students direct the campus student life. It is unclear what the difference is between on campus student life and that available from the local pub.

Students at the university are still currently engaged and active in the governance of their student organisations, however the culture of student participation and involvement in the student organisation is at risk of folding due to lack of resources.

Some of the universities are respectful of student organisation autonomy and independence but support is still inconclusive for student controlled and directed services and support.

Some of the universities are placing harsh restrictions and monitoring tightly the decisions made by student organisations and do not respect the autonomy of elected student representatives.

Students wanting to attend these Universities should watch the monthly rankings leading up to January to see if improvements are made in the level of concrete support given to student organisations. If issues arise at these universities, it will not be easy to reach a resolution.

### **Notable movements up**

The University of Canberra, under new leadership has begun to discuss the available options for support with the student organisation, which is a change of tone from the previous administration who refused to entertain any support for student organisations. It is anticipated that the University of Canberra will continue to move upwards into category two, however, negotiations have not concluded and support is still inconclusive.

Macquarie University has entered the ranking as the university attempts to re-establish the student organisation. It is expected to continue moving up, however students wanting to attend Macquarie should be wary that they may have to put in some work themselves if they want a functioning student organisation that can represent any issues they encounter effectively.

The University of New England has also entered the rankings at this level as the University is also attempting to re-establish an independent student organisation. It is expected to continue moving up, however undergraduate students wanting to attend the University of New England should be wary that they may have to put in some work themselves if they want a functioning undergraduate student organisation that can represent any issues they encounter effectively. The University's attitude to student representation is good, but student involvement is still lacking. Possibly due to a low on-campus student cohort. It should be noted that the support for post-graduates in contrast is satisfactory and has active student engagement and involvement.

Edith Cowan University is another addition to the rankings, which has committed resources to the student organisation for advocacy, however student representation is not currently regarded as important for the university and student concerns or issues are not currently fed into the university's planning and quality processes.

### **Notable movements down**

The movement of La Trobe University into category 3 from category 2 is a result of the previous Vice-Chancellor's inability to push negotiations forward towards a productive outcome, forcing independent student advocacy to the brink of insolvency. It is expected to return to higher categories given that discussion with the new Vice-Chancellor have been productive and La Trobe is emulating the reviews conducted by those universities in category 1.

Flinders University's shift downwards is a result of a de-prioritisation of student representation within the University. Support for organised student representation feeding into university planning and quality is non-existent and the promise of the Flinders Campus Community Services organisation has not come to fruition, resulting in a sterile services corporation. A student representative organisation is still existent and there is opportunity for the expansion of the representation provided to students.

### **Universities in Category 3**

University of Canberra  
Macquarie University  
University of New England  
La Trobe University  
University of Wollongong  
Charles Sturt Bathurst  
Flinders University  
University of South Australia  
Victoria University  
Edith Cowan University

## Category 4

### Description

Universities in this category either do not have student controlled representative organisations and are not looking to establish them or repudiate the importance of providing paying students a right to representation that is controlled by students.

Students wanting to attend these Universities should be wary. Student issues are unlikely to receive proper attention and support for student complaints is non-existent or likely to wind up if no support is provided to the student organisations.

### Notable movements into this category

The University of Western Sydney has moved into this category as a result of the University's inability to commit concretely to supporting student campus life and representation. Issues of financial accountability have been used to impinge on the independence and autonomy of the student organisation. It is likely that the University of Western Sydney could move out of this category, however active moves to place the student organisation in a difficult financial position present the possibility that the University will be void of strong student advocacy.

### Universities in Category 4

Swinburne University  
University of Western Sydney  
Griffith University  
Charles Darwin University

## Method

The rankings of universities has been based on five key indicators:

- i) Independent advocacy services and support
- ii) Recognition of student representative function of student organisations
- iii) Student driven campus culture
- iv) Student control over governance and expenditure
- v) Consultation, discussions and negotiations with student organisations regarding financial support

A survey was sent to student representatives at each university to complete.

The key indicators were also sent to Vice-Chancellor's of each university prior to the survey being sent out to campus student organisations.

Responses were put into four primary categories that broadly describe what students can expect when encountering problems or academic issues at the university.

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