

NUS National Welfare Report – James Mentor **Delivered to the Meeting of the NUS National Executive on 4/4/09**

Since the last meeting of National Executive I have been busy visiting campuses, meeting campus representatives and primarily campaigning for income support reform. This included attending o-weeks during February and the main National day of Action on March 25 in Canberra.

O-Week

O-week appeared to be highly successful around the country. From the campus representatives I have spoken to it appears that membership of affiliated organizations has generally increased, and activities have been well attended.

ACT

Both UC and ANU had well attended o-week activities, and, as mentioned in the statement above, also had a strong increase in membership sales. I also took the opportunity while in Canberra to meet with OBs from both ANUSA and UCSA, as well as with the NUS ACT State Branch President, Geoffrey Wakeford.

WA

I was able to be in WA for a few days, allowing me to visit Curtin, UWA and ECU. I attended a Student Council meeting at Curtin with Dave Barrow and assisted with the Student Guild's Welfare Stall at UWA o-day. At each of these campuses I also took the opportunity to meet with representatives from their respective student guilds. I also met with NUS WA State Branch President, Luke Villiers.

Queensland

I was in Queensland for a shorter period than expected as I had to leave early to represent NUS on the ATO Personal Tax Advisory Committee, I had the opportunity to assist with the NUS stall at Griffith University, meet with the NUS National Small and Regional Officer, Chaiy Donati, and meet NUS Queensland State Branch President, Josh Young.

National Day(s) of Action

Berwick

On the 18th of March I attended the 'campus' National Day of Action at Monash Berwick. Like many, this remained relatively low key when compared to the following week. However, it did allow me to speak with students on the issue of income support while free food was distributed to those in attendance. While at Monash Berwick I was also able to speak with MUBS President Nick McLennan and the Welfare Officer on issues affecting the campus union as well as initiatives being undertaken by NUS in the area of student welfare.

UC

The National Day of Action itself was held on the 25th of March. On this date I was in the ACT to assist with the actions being held there. While there was not a central action as such, there were activities at both UC and ANU that I attended. At

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UC, fresh fruit was distributed to highlight the effect of student poverty on the health of students and to encourage students and supporters at that campus to sign the income support petition. This was then followed by a barbeque. The response to this was fantastic, with the fruit running out in a short period of time (Kurt and I got additional supplies from Woolies), and approximately 700 people signing the petition on this campus alone on the day.

ANU

At ANU, the day started with a mock wedding outside Parliament House to highlight students getting married due to student poverty. Following this there was a speak-out at Union Court which included prominent speakers and a barbeque, along with a petition for students to sign on income support. Again, this was highly successful, with 1000 students quoted as having attended “the biggest rally on campus since the introduction of VSU”. The number of students believed to have signed the ANUSA petition on income support is also believed to be in the vicinity of 700. Following this, I attended an ACT Education Policy Committee meeting/debate on student income support. I spoke in favour of the need to reform support, to make the system more equitable in its distribution of payments.

I think the way the NDA was conducted in the ACT provides a model for future ‘actions’. It was successful in its engagement with students, with large numbers attending events, signing petitions and discussing welfare issues. The events in the ACT were also covered thoroughly by the media (WIN News, live ABC2 coverage of the mock wedding in the morning, Sham speaking on talkback and ‘hit music’ radio, and a prominent article and photo in the Canberra Times on the following day).

ATO Personal Tax Advisory Group meeting

I attended the ATO Personal Tax Advisory Committee meeting in Canberra on the 26th of February. On this body, the Welfare Officer represents NUS, while other community groups also have representation. At this meeting a range of issues, many confidential in nature, were discussed. These included, but were not limited to, the areas of superannuation, tax education and collection. A second meeting for the year is likely to be held around June (date still TBC).

Centrelink

I have been asked by the Centrelink to attend the National Student Services partnership Group meeting on behalf of NUS. This is taking place on May 28. I intend to be in Canberra on this date to represent NUS, particularly given the campaign currently being run on student income support.

Case Studies

I have been attempting to gather case studies to assist NUS (and its affiliates) in lobbying and media efforts. While I have received several case studies, we still require many more in the leadup to the budget.

Student Delegations

NUS will be coordinating delegations of students to meet with Federal MPs to lobby on student welfare issues. This will be taking place over the next month in the lead up to the budget as we seek to achieve reform in this area.

National Sleepout

This will be taking place on the 23rd of April to highlight the issue of student poverty. More details will be released closer to the date.

UNSW Welfare Week

This week I have been in Sydney to address the UNSW Welfare Week. I met with Matt, the Welfare Officer at UNSW, and addressed a meeting on NUS and the organisations Welfare Office. I spoke on what we are currently doing, what we are intending to do and what we intend to achieve in the area of student welfare and income support. While in Sydney I have also taken the chance to meet with representatives from the University of Sydney (Mat Gilliland) and UTS to discuss issues relating to the Welfare Office.

Campus visits

At the start of the year I made it clear that I wanted to visit as many campuses as possible, to engage with students and campus representatives, ensuring that NUS as an organization remains relevant to those that it represents. The campuses I have visited to date are:

- Monash Berwick
- Monash Caulfield
- Melbourne University (Parkville)
- The Victorian College of the Arts (VCA)
- Monash Clayton
- ANU
- The University of Canberra
- Griffith University
- The University of Queensland
- Edith Cowen University (ECU)
- Curtin University
- The University of Western Australia
- University of New South Wales
- University of Sydney
- UTS

I intend on continuing to meet with representatives at a campus level to maintain the communication and continue to improve the relationship between NUS and its affiliates as we strive to increase opportunities in education and improve the welfare of students.