

# **NUS National Welfare Report – James Mentor**

## **Delivered to the meeting of the NUS National Executive on 11/7/09**

Since the last meeting of the National Executive, NUS has seen the Rudd Government pass the 2009 Federal Budget. Student income support featured prominently, as did a significant increase in funding for the tertiary sector. The following measures relating to income support were announced in the Budget and are subject to the passage of legislation:

- aligning the Parental Income Test for Youth Allowance, ABSTUDY, and Assistance for Isolated Children with Family Tax Benefit
- reducing the Age of Independence for Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY from 25 years to 22 years
- removing elements of Workforce Independence criteria for Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY
- raising the personal income test threshold for students from the current \$236 to \$400 per fortnight
- extending student income support to all coursework masters programs
- providing a Student Start-Up Scholarship to all university students receiving student income support
- providing a relocation scholarship to Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY students who need to live away from home.

### **Centrelink NSSPG**

Both David Wilkins and I attended the Centrelink National Student Services Partnership Group meeting on June 3. At this meeting, the Federal Budget was outlined, and discussion took place as to how this will affect students. We both raised concerns surrounding some of the changes, in particular those to eligibility for youth allowance. In particular we highlighted students who had taken a 'gap year' in 2009 to earn the required amount to qualify for youth allowance in 2010, but who now are likely to miss out due to the early introduction of the changes in January next year.

### **ATO Personal Taxation Advisory Committee meeting on July 9**

I attended the PTAG meeting on July 9 in Canberra. Despite this being held during Education Conference, it was worth attending due to the relevant nature of personal tax issues for students. At this meeting the effect of the current financial crisis on students was raised. The next meeting of this body

### **Concession Card Coalition**

The Concession Card Coalition was formed in response to the current situation where international students and postgraduate students are unable to travel at concession rates on public transport in the state of Victoria. It is envisaged that this will allow for greater cooperation in an ongoing and concerted campaign for concession card reform in Victoria. During second semester, this will include a rally in Melbourne on August 12.

### **National Sleepout**

I attended the National Sleepout on April 23<sup>rd</sup> in Melbourne. This event also took place in all states as well as the ACT. While numbers were not large, there was some good media to come out of the event, such as in the ACT, where the Canberra Times ran an article/photo on the event.

### **NUS Education Conference**

NUS Education Conference was held this week (July 8-10) at the University of Sydney and UTS. Ideas were exchanged and policy debated. While I wasn't able to attend the conference on the Thursday (due to being at the ATO meeting) I was able to hold two workshops. The first was

reporting on the work I have done with the PTAG and the NSSPG, while the second was around the rights at work of students, including international students, and what can be done to ensure that their rights are protected. I outlined my intention to run an awareness campaign around the rights at work for international students, most likely in the major city centres.

### **Other**

Other activities have included attending a deregulation forum at Melbourne University; attending an ALP National Platform consultation meeting in Melbourne, and subsequently making a submission around education and welfare issues for students; and attending the NUS International Students Forum

I have begun planning for the second half of the year. Activities for the Welfare Department will be a mixture involving working on the central campaigns of NUS, such as those surrounding education funding and income support, and other initiatives surrounding student welfare issues.

### **Anti-Poverty Week**

National Anti-Poverty Week is a broad-based initiative designed to highlight the problem of poverty in Australia. Taking place from October 11-17 and involving a range of organizations, this is an opportunity for NUS and its campus affiliates to gain publicity, both in the media and amongst students, on issues of student poverty. I anticipate coordinating national, campus-based events on the Wednesday of this week (the 14<sup>th</sup>), likely to involve free breakfast and/or lunch for students.

### **Rights @ Work for International Students**

This is a campaign I am intending on running in the Melbourne CBD, and potentially in the city centres of other major centres, to provide information to international students regarding what their rights are in the workplace. Often international students work in low cost jobs, with poor conditions, in locations remote to where they live, and with little knowledge of what their work rights are.

### **Newcastle**

I will be joining other activists to campaign for the referendum at Newcastle University relating to their NUS affiliation. It is important that as many campuses as possible affiliate to ensure a strong national union, and this campus is no different.

### **Safety Committee for Melbourne's CBD**

I was recently asked to sit on this committee on behalf of NUS, to provide a voice for students, including international students. Hopefully this group will be able to develop a strategy to ensure a safer inner city for both students and the community as a whole. More details will be available shortly.