



Ms Sue Cawcutt
Research Director
Education, Tourism and Small Business Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane, Qld 4000

11th March, 2016

**The University of Queensland Union Submission to the Education,
Tourism and Small Business Committee**

Organisation: University of Queensland Union
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Dear Ms Sue Cawcutt,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry into smoking and tobacco use at universities, technical and further education facilities, and registered training organisations. I would be happy to make myself available to further engage with the committee on this Inquiry on behalf of the UQ Union.

Objectives of the UQ Union

The UQ Union represents the student body of the University of Queensland and is the largest Student Union in Australia. All current UQ students (50,000+) are members of the UQ Union and membership is free. The UQ Union is governed by and from the UQ student body through the annual student elections. The UQ Union administers over 200 clubs and societies across several campuses; provides advocacy, welfare and support for students of the University; and also manages various business outlets on campus with around 280 staff.

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Background

Current arrangements applied at the University of Queensland to limit smoking

The current regulations of the University of Queensland applying to smoking and tobacco use are detailed in *The University of Queensland's Alcohol, Tobacco Smoking and other Drugs Policy*,¹ and are discussed in the University's separate submission to this inquiry.

While the current arrangements of the University of Queensland reflect the *Tobacco and other Products Act 1998*, it is the position of the UQ Union that the current measures in place are insufficient to meet best practice policy recommendations to promote healthy behaviour for students and staff. Nor does the UQ Union believe that the current policies achieve the central values of the University of Queensland in its pursuit of excellence; seeking to apply the highest standards to benefit its community.

The impact of smoking on staff, students and campus users

There is a significant body of research investigating the effect of smoke-free campus policies on the behaviours and attitudes of university students towards smoking and their exposure to second-hand smoking.²⁻⁴ Evidenced-based best practice recommendations have been applied from this body of literature, both in Australia and internationally, with the central objective of a smoke-free campus policy achieved through smoking bans in conjunction with smoking cessation programs.

Capacity for improved laws and regulations to reduce smoking further at education facilities, and registered training organisations

Already in Australia, many universities have implemented their own smoke-free campus policy through a campus-wide tobacco ban or with provision of limited designated smoking areas. As of 2016, the University of Queensland is the only Group of 8 university in Australia which has not implemented these measures; the current UQ policy prohibits staff, students and visitors to university campus to smoke in any buildings or vehicles and within 5 metres of building entrances.¹

In the specific case of the St Lucia Campus of the University of Queensland, this failure to restrict smoking in public spaces is of particular concern. The St Lucia Campus contains hundreds of buildings across over a 110 hectare campus. Due to the sprawling nature and sheer size of the campus, many of the major thoroughfares are

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more than 5 metres from buildings and hence, people are exposed to the possibility of second-hand smoking. Considering that the St Lucia campus is attended by over 45,000 students, staff and visitors during the semester, the risk of health damage through second-hand smoking is further compounded by the density and high flow of pedestrian traffic around the campus.


The UQ Union believes that if smoke-free campus policies were further developed by the Government, universities and other educational facilities who have not yet implemented strong measures would be forced to work harder towards making their grounds a healthier place. It is recommended that the committee investigates extending the boundary from educational facilities to something along the lines of "10m from a building entrance and not in the direct path of a major thoroughfare." We do, however, urge the committee to consider the obvious safety implications of requiring students to leave the campus entirely if they wish to smoke. Similarly, consideration should be given towards students who live in campus accommodation and their ability to smoke in a safe place, if they choose to.

Recommendations

Considering the current evidence available, the UQ Union suggests that there is capacity for improved regulation to reduce smoking at these institutions. The UQ Union supports the implementation of stronger smoke-free policies in keeping with best practice at the majority of Australia's leading tertiary education institutions. We request that the committee does, however, keep in mind the paramount importance of any ramifications on safety these policies may have. We recommend a primary focus on the requirement of educational facilities to identify and communicate defined smoking zones.

Yours Sincerely,

Michael Lucas
President


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