

STUDENT CONSULTATION REPORT
July 2021

**Student Services and
Amenities Fee (SSAF)**

ENQUIRIES
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Executive Summary

This report outlines how La Trobe University expended the 2020 Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF). It provides a summary of how the funds were spent in accordance with the Higher Education Support Act and forms a component of the University's annual certification of such.

In 2011, La Trobe University (LTU) introduced the Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF). Since then, LTU has undertaken extensive, annual consultation with students to identify key priority areas for expenditure in the delivery of services and amenities for our students.

The foundation of our consultation includes an ongoing partnership with our student associations and their elected representatives. Each association participates in a range of forums and contributes to discussions around the allocation of SSAF and priorities for future years. Alongside this partnership, the broader student body is consulted via annual survey instruments. The survey results inform and complement the ongoing conversation between student representatives and the University. In 2021, the University will expand this consultation by hosting a number of workshops with student leaders from our Student Partnerships Program.

2020 was a unique year for the entire tertiary education sector as we responded to the impact of COVID-19. In March, the University decided to refund all semester one SSAF contributions to put money directly into the pockets of our students. In semester two, the University reduced the SSAF by 50% to further provide financial support to our students.

The reduction of collected SSAF charges by 75% across the year has put pressures on the University. However, through financial savings elsewhere, we have sought to protect vital student services that have seen increased demand over the course of the pandemic. Student health and wellbeing, student advising, and our student associations have all been shielded from the full impact of this reduction.

In October 2020, student leaders and the University consulted on a series of priorities for SSAF supported activities in 2021. Mirroring those services that were protected during the pandemic, key priorities for 2021 included funding student associations, student advising and student health & wellbeing services. We also consulted on a number of initiatives to strengthen ongoing monitoring of the demand on SSAF funded services and raise the profile of SSAF across our campuses.

Background

Introduced in 2011, the Australian Parliament passed legislation enabling universities and other higher education providers to charge a fee for student services and amenities of a non-academic nature. The Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) can only be used to fund services and amenities that are outlined by the Australian government.

Funds from SSAF help to improve the student experience at La Trobe. You may use all, some, or none of the services and amenities that the fee provides. Since the introduction of SSAF, funding has enabled a significant number of improvements to services, facilities and amenities used by students across all Victorian LTU campuses. The legislation outlines the requirements for the University to consult with students, including democratically elected student representatives, on how revenue from the fee is allocated and spent:

“Higher Education Providers (HEP’s) must establish and maintain a clearly defined and effective process by which students enrolled at the HEP are consulted that is reviewed and approved annually by the governing body of that HEP after being made available to the students enrolled at the HEP for comment”.

La Trobe University is committed to ensuring the consultation with students is genuine, and that the student voice is considered when determining how revenue raised from the compulsory SSAF is spent. As a key part of the consultation process, LTU holds a range of forums, which consists of University representatives and student representatives nominated by our student organisations. In 2020, this consisted of the Bendigo Student Association (BSA), Wodonga Student Association (WSA) and La Trobe Student Union (LTSU) including; Mildura Student Association (MSA), Shepparton Student Association (SSA) and International Students Association (ISA)

Chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students), these forums act as an advisory body for all items concerning SSAF.

Financial Overview

In 2019, the University forecast that it would receive \$8,499,148 from SSAF in 2020. This would be used to support a range of allowable services to enhance the student experience. As previously mentioned, the University refunded the semester one SSAF and reduced the semester two SSAF by 50%. As a result, a final amount \$2,808,000 was collected in SSAF over the course of 2020.

The initial SSAF 2020 allocation:

Activity	Funding
Student Associations	\$4,214,148
Learning support via the Learning Hub, Maths Hub, careers services, student partnerships and orientation, academic advising	\$1,290,000
Student Retention activities	\$250,000
Student Health & Wellbeing	\$1,303,000
LTU Sport	\$1,280,000
Glider Bus	\$69,000
Student Concessions	\$95,000
Total	\$8,499,148

Following the 75% reduction in collected SSAF, the University found savings of \$3,012,000 to underwrite continued funding of the above services at a lower level (see page 7 for final SSAF allocations).

SSAF supported services

Student Associations

A significant amount of SSAF funding was allocated to the representative bodies that provide advocacy and support for students across LTU's multiple campuses. Our student associations offered essential support to students as we responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. This included food parcels, emergency financial aid and connecting students with broader networks of support.

The pandemic inhibited the ability of each association to fund and support student clubs and societies in the normal manner. The transition to virtual services as Victoria moved into various states of emergency and disaster enabled our associations to explore new ways of connecting with students.

In 2020, \$2,062,000 of funding (SSAF and operating) was made available to our associations to support their vital activities. Despite a 75% reduction in the SSAF collected, the University underwrote this funding from other sources. It was for each of these organisations to then determine how this was allocated across their suite of SSAF allowable services.

The University continued to support our associations with in-kind support via the allocation of temporary space for their activities and access to IT and HR systems.

The Bendigo Student Association and Wodonga Student Association ceased to exist in late 2020. Any outstanding SSAF monies from the BSA and WSA were transferred to the University.

Student Support

The remainder of 2020 SSAF helped fund a variety of important support services across the University that are accessed by many thousands of students across our campuses. The table below provides details of services at least to the level of remaining funding. The University underwrote the success of these programs above and beyond the 25% of SSAF collected.

The University's Succeed at La Trobe Program provides proactive outreach support to cohorts of students as they transition into higher education. Interventions from this team is informed by predictive analytics that have demonstrated an uplift in the success of our students and supported them as they progress through their degree. Increasing the number of students who complete their degrees whilst realising their potential, is the driving ambition of this program.

The University recognises the vital support that our Student Health and Wellbeing Division provide to students in distress during their time at LTU. This division includes a team of qualified counsellors who provide expert mental health support; a range of advisors who offer developmental support to students with disabilities so they can excel in their studies; the University's suite of proactive and preventative wellbeing programs; and, our Safer Community service that guards against discrimination and inappropriate behaviour on our campuses.

SSAF contributes to the suite of Student Partnerships activities that La Trobe offers our students. This includes student leadership opportunities, our student mentoring program, Excellence Academy and our CoLabs initiative. The Student Partnerships team is central to placing the student experience at the heart of what our colleagues do and helps inform how the University thinks about its service offering and academic experience.

Learning Hubs are based across all of our regional campuses and Bundoora, and provide students with a place to develop and extend their academic skills. These Hubs offer support to students in nearly all of our degree courses and every level. They provide help with assessments and study, with guidance provided by Peer Learning Advisors (employed students in later stages of their degree) and expert staff. Our teams also provide English language support, maths support, science support, and advice to strengthen academic writing skills. The

Learning Hub also provides Studiosity - a 24-hour, on-demand, online service – that gives students the opportunity to connect in real time with subject specialists.

The University places a premium on affording students the opportunity to develop their employability skills whilst they study at La Trobe. Our Career Ready Advantage Program enables students to access high quality careers advice, engage in practical activities that build skills and networks, and support students to build their career portfolio. SSAF is an important component in supporting this employability and work integrated learning activity.

A small amount of SSAF is used to support student welfare and support functions in our accommodation services. We have seen in 2020 an increase in the demand for this service as these students adjust to the implications of the Victorian State of Emergency/Disaster.

In collaboration with the Victorian Government, the University continued to offer support for international student concessions for MyKi travel cards. This helps reduce the cost of travel for our international students so they can continue to access campus and travel to their jobs.

Sport Services

The Student Services and Amenities Fee makes a significant contribution to the opportunities of all La Trobe students to engage in sporting activities during their time with us. The SSAF supports our student clubs, intervarsity sport, facility access, sport at our regional campuses and a broad discount to membership fees for students.

Community Healthcare

The University also provides rent relief for the La Trobe Community Healthcare Centre to enable the provision of general practice services for students on campus.

Title	Description and objectives	Progress achieved	Expenditure (\$)
<p>Learning Hub, including Studiosity</p> <p>☒ helping students develop skills for study, by means other than undertaking courses of study in which they are enrolled;</p>	<p>1. What was done?</p> <p>Academic Skills Advisors taught academic skills workshops; delivered one-on-one consultations and created on-demand online learning resources, including video presentations on topics such as Time Management, Online Learning, Writing Essays & Reports and Using Sources.</p> <p>STUDIOSITY: Online Writing Feedback and Connect Live Study Support</p> <p>2. Why?</p> <p>To provide accessible learning support, to increase success, retention and completion for all students, including regional and online students, equity groups, international students and HDR candidates.</p> <p>3. For which groups?</p> <p>Of the 3144 domestic students attending Consultations and/or using Studiosity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low SES: 703 students (22.4%) - Regional/Remote: 1089 (34.6%) - Students with reported disability: 395 (12.6%) - Indigenous: 36 (1.1%) - NESB: 269 (8.6%) - Low SES Regional/Remote: 401 (12.7%) - Low SES Indigenous: 7 (0.2%) - Low SES Disability: 0 (0%) 	<p>Workshops – 238, with 4970 student attendees</p> <p>938 consultations, with 556 unique students</p> <p>3435 unique students, with 11,267 Studiosity interactions</p> <p>Consultations: Student feedback was obtained in weeks 6 & 11 of Semester 1 & 2 (N=106): 100% were satisfied/very satisfied with the learning experience, gained more/a lot more confidence and were moderately likely/very likely to recommend the service to other students. Sample comments: highly recommend this style of help to everyone starting University at Latrobe Bendigo; Will definitely be recommending my peers to use the Learning Hub; tremendous help to my studies; made it all a lot less daunting; feel confident to practice and improve on my own</p> <p>Workshops: Participant feedback on One Step Ahead (OSA) workshop was obtained pre- and post- workshop (N=388):</p> <p>Participants' understanding of academic writing expectations increased from 44% (pre-OSA) to 95% post-OSA; their confidence in beginning university increased from 50% pre-OSA to 80% post-OSA.</p>	<p>SSAF - \$551,373</p>

	<p>NOTE – Workshop attendee equity data not available for 2020</p> <p>4. Where?</p> <p>Online via Zoom</p>	<p>Studiosity: Somewhat/extremely satisfied: 94% (Writing feedback); 77% (Connect Live)</p>	
Title	Description and objectives	Progress achieved	Expenditure (\$)
<p>Title: La Trobe Sport SSAF</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> supporting a sporting or other recreational activity by students;</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> supporting the administration of a club most of whose members are students;</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> promoting the health or welfare of students;</p>	<p>1. What was done?</p> <p>Direct payments to 25 affiliated sport clubs comprising mainly of students.</p> <p>Seasonal facility hire so that affiliated sport clubs can participate in sport and active recreation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Darebin KP Hardiman Reserve • Queenscliff Harbour Boat Mooring • Heidelberg Badminton Club • Cutting Edge Cricket • Kingsbury Tennis Club • Yarra Bend Park • Melbourne Rowing Club • Fleet vehicle access for recreational activity based clubs. <p>These spaces and services provide La Trobe Sport Clubs that are predominately students places to participate in sport and recreation.</p> <p>Sport Officer salary to assist in delivery of programs and active recreation.</p> <p>2020 Student programs services by this position include, Intersarsity Competitions, University Nationals (Bundoora and Bendigo), City vs Country (Bundoora and Bendigo, Residential Student Sport Program. Mass Participation Events (Melbourne Marathon, ONJ Wellness Walk & Research Run)</p> <p>Student discounts, gym memberships, court hire, field hire.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25% student discount on commercial rate for all field and court hire. • 25% student discount on all gym memberships. 	<p>Covid impacted the ability of some clubs to operate successfully and some student programs to go ahead.</p> <p>All clubs and programs have recommenced successfully in 2021 with comparable or increased student numbers to pre-covid.</p>	<p>SSAF - \$200,000</p>

	<p>2. Why? <i>Students who participate in LTU affiliated Sport clubs achieve better university results and completion rates. 2018 and 2019 results for students associated with La Trobe Sports Clubs and University Nationals teams had a WAM of approximately 3 points higher, and a completion rate of 2.4% higher.</i></p> <p><i>Contribute to student experience Allow La Trobe Sport & affiliated clubs to offer significantly reduced membership fees and discounted hire rates to cater for everybody.</i></p> <p><i>Provide additional places where sport and recreation is consumed.</i></p> <p>3. For which groups?</p> <p><i>All students – approx. 1500 student members of 25 sporting clubs.</i></p> <p><i>Approx 1500 gym members (post lockdown)</i></p> <p>4. Where? <i>90% Bundoora Campus 10% Bendigo Campus.</i></p>		
Title	Description and objectives	Progress achieved	Expenditure (\$)
<p>International Student Travel Concession Pass</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>helping meet the specific needs of overseas students relating to their welfare, accommodation and employment.</i></p>	<p>1. What was done? <i>In 2015 the Victorian Government introduced discounted public transport travel for eligible international students. This trial scheme is funded in partnership with participating education institutions. The iUSEpass subsequently reduces annual public transport costs for eligible students at participating institutions by up to 50 per cent.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• Manager of ISS to purchase I USE pass codes from the Public Transport Victoria.</i> <i>• Codes to be provided to students upon request.</i> <i>• All unused codes can be refunded.</i> 	<p><i>\$45,000 worth of MyKi travel concessions were disbursed to international students throughout 2020. This is markedly reduced compared to previous years due to the closure of international borders and the Victorian State of Disaster.</i></p>	<p><i>SSAF - \$45,000</i></p>

	<p>2. Why?</p> <p><i>iUse passes provide international students with discounted travel on Victoria’s public transport system for Zones 1+2 or Zone 2.</i></p> <p>3. For which groups and where?</p> <p><i>International students who meets the eligible criteria in Victoria.</i></p>		
Title	Description and objectives	Progress achieved	Expenditure (\$)
<p>Student Health & Wellbeing</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> promoting the health or welfare of students;</p>	<p>What was done?</p> <p><i>The SAFF allocation to Student Health and Wellbeing Division has be utilised across a number of the teams including Counselling, Wellbeing Connect and Respect, Prevention and Culture, to provide preventative, proactive and reactive support and service to students enrolled at La Trobe University.</i></p> <p>Why?</p> <p><i>The purpose of all activity across the Student Health and Wellbeing Division is to provide services and support to student to address any mental health, emotional, social and wellbeing issues that are impacting on their capacity to remain engage in their studies. Additionally, the services are design around building capacity and self-efficacy to increase independence.</i></p> <p>For which groups and where?</p> <p><i>Services are provided to all students across all campuses.</i></p>	<p><i>2141 students accessed the Counselling Service</i></p> <p><i>7600 student contacts/occasions of service for counselling</i></p> <p><i>819 students supported by the Wellbeing Connect Team</i></p> <p><i>414 sessions for the Men’s Wellbeing Program.</i></p> <p><i>34 students attend Queer Chat program throughout 2020.</i></p>	<p>SSAF - \$511,667</p>

Title	Description and objectives	Progress achieved	Expenditure (\$)
<p>Student Retention Activities – Succeed at La Trobe</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> giving students information to help them in their orientation</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> helping students develop skills for study, by means other than undertaking courses of study in which they are enrolled;</p>	<p>What was done?</p> <p>The Succeed at La Trobe team undertook proactive outreach to students deemed at risk to support their orientation into university-study and provide details of the range of support services available to them.</p> <p>As part of our COVID-19 Pandemic Response, Succeed at La Trobe, as part of a broader institutional effort, sought to contact every enrolled student at the University.</p> <p>Why?</p> <p>Proactive outreach has been demonstrated to support student identified by predictive analytics with their success, retention and completion of studies.</p> <p>For which groups and where?</p> <p>Services initially targeted at those identified at highest risk, but the broader university effort sought to contact every enrolled student at every campus.</p>	<p>More than 42,000 students were contacted.</p> <p>University retention rate increased</p>	<p>SSAF - \$100,000</p>

Consultation Framework

La Trobe' SSAF Consultation Framework scaffolds the University's engagement with students around the expenditure of the SSAF.

Review:

- *Priorities for SSAF expenditure in the proceeding year are discussed in a range of forums.*
- *Recommend improvements to strengthen governance, consultation, engagement, and compliance.*
- *Outputs and delivery of SSAF funded projects.*

Consult (with):

- *Student Organisations; formally at least once per year (or more frequently if required)*
- *the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students)*
- *enrolled students to measure current awareness and satisfaction, and to identify key spending priorities, ensuring SSAF funding allocations are responsive to student needs*

Update:

- *Previous SSAF Student Consultation Survey methodologies based on review and consultation.*
- *SSAF website to increase overall accessibility and usability and to better inform and engage students on SSAF.*

Publish:

- *Annual Consultation Report and appendices online, encouraging additional feedback on key findings and recommendations.*
- *SSAF Financial Allocation Report and Budget online annually.*
- *Information on SSAF related developments and projects in various student facing channels to raise continuing awareness to encourage students to provide feedback and share their insights concerning SSAF.*

2020 SSAF Survey

The survey allows students to voice their engagement and satisfaction as they relate to services and facilities provided by the University. Through this process, students can have a genuine opportunity to express their priorities and provide suggestions on how improvements can be made.

Due to COVID-19 and subsequent restrictions on learning across 2020, the SSAF annual fee for students was reduced by 75%. Therefore, the survey was reduced to a smaller number of questions to focus on key services delivered.

Methodology

An online survey was undertaken to get feedback from all eligible students at LTU. Questions were developed in collaboration with University staff and student representatives to ensure that relevant areas of interest were being addressed.

As there was less time on campus and ability to utilise LTU services, the current questionnaire was significantly reduced to focus on key areas. Most of the questions and results from the 2020 survey are not directly comparable to previous years.

The survey included familiarity and understanding of SSAF and questions on usage and satisfaction of 13 categories of SSAF funding areas. These were primarily quantitative (i.e. scaled) questions. However, there were two open-ended questions to capture student's suggestions on improvements to SSAF and the student experience overall.

Due to the reduced annual fee and ability to access the services funded by SSAF, several changes were made to the methodology and distribution of the survey:

- *The survey was open for one week, 7 to 14 September 2020, instead two weeks like the year prior.*
- *No specific campus survey questions.*
- *Channels for distributing the survey were changed. This was also done to reduce student survey burden.*

An opt-in model for completion, rather than direct email invitation was adopted. The survey link was available and distributed via MyLaTrobe article, student landing page and the SSAF homepage. Awareness for the survey was also generated through MyLaTrobe Facebook social media post and My Latrobe app notifications.

Incentives were offered to encourage completion of the survey. By completing the survey, students went into a prize draw for the chance to win one of ten \$100 online gift cards.

Due to the change in survey distribution and increased student survey burden, the total surveys completed and corresponding response rate significantly declined in 2020. In total, 287 students began the survey and completed some element of the survey. Key response data is presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Key SSAF survey response data, 2017 to 2020

Element	2017	2018	2019	2020
Responses	4721	5478	3872	287
Overall response rate	15%	18%	13%	1%

Table 2. Number of respondents per campus, 2017 to 2020

Campus	2017	2018	2019	2020
Albury-Wodonga	135	161	106	4
Bendigo	1001	1112	803	34
Bundoora	3239	3818	2682	188
City	161	177	125	26
Mildura	97	114	84	4
Shepparton	88	96	72	9
Other	-	-	-	22
Grand Total	4721	5478	3872	287

Results

Awareness

In 2020, over a third (37.3%) of respondents indicated they had a ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’ understanding of the SSAF purpose.

There were less respondents (26.1%) who had a ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’ understanding of where SSAF funds are spent. There appears to be a consistent trend of better understanding around the role and purpose of SSAF, but further education and awareness are required for where the funds are spent.

Students at the larger campuses, Bundoora and Bendigo, had a better understanding of the SSAF purpose (41% and 38%, respectively). Second year students, as well as postgraduate students also had a better understanding of SSAF purpose and fund spending, relative to students earlier in their studies.

Service Usage

The main service used by students that is funded by SSAF are clubs and societies, see Figure 3. This was selected by over one in three respondents. This was followed by services provided to students including Career Ready and the Learning Hub. These were accessed by a quarter of respondents.

Health, wellbeing and sport services and support were also used by one in five respondents.

Accommodation support, legal advice and insurance were only utilised by a small proportion of students (<10%), however these services are typically as-required services.

When looking across demographic categories, most have used clubs and societies, Career Ready and Learning Hub the most. For those respondents outside the main campuses (Bendigo and Bundoora), clubs and societies are not as commonly accessed. Support by student representatives and advocacy services are much more important to regional campus students.

International and post-graduate students are more likely to access Career Ready services over clubs and societies. These students along with City Campus students were most likely to access financial counselling, compared with other demographic categories.

Satisfaction

All SSAF funded services and amenities had a mean score satisfaction of 3.50, or above. At a total level the services and amenities that respondents were most satisfied with were:

- *Learning Hub: learning support outside of a course of study (4.29)*
- *On campus food aid (4.24)*
- *Health and wellbeing activities for students (4.23)*
- *Clubs and societies (4.19)*
- *Sport and active recreation facilities and/or services (4.19)*

Satisfaction with clubs and societies was relatively high at large campuses, Bendigo and Bundoora, however it was underdelivering at City and smaller regional campuses. Respondents at the City campus were most satisfied with the on-campus food and health and wellbeing activities. Whilst respondents at the smaller regional campuses ('Other') were most satisfied with support services including; free legal advice, accommodation support and advocacy services.

Undergraduate students were most satisfied with clubs and societies and sport and recreation facilities. However, post-graduate students were most satisfied with the Learning Hub and the health and wellbeing activities.