



LA TROBE UNIVERSITY **STUDENT UNION**

OUR MONEY, OUR WAY:

The Student Perspective
on Allocation of the
Student Services and
Amenities Fee (SSAF)

2025



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From our Exec

Executive Summary



As President and General Secretary of La Trobe Student Union, we've spoken with many students who feel disconnected from how their Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) is used. This report and survey are designed to change that. By directly gathering feedback from over 800 students, we have a clear picture of what students know, how they feel, and what they want from SSAF spending.

With the Australian Universities Accord Bill (2024) now law and mandating that 40% of SSAF must go directly to student unions and associations, it is more important than ever that our spending priorities reflect the real needs and values of our student community.

As ever, La Trobe Student Union stands ready to work with La Trobe University and other groups to realise the best use of our SSAF.

In Solidarity,

Parth Jadav
PRESIDENT

Amelia Sevier
GENERAL SECRETARY

This report adds to students' voices on how our SSAF funds are allocated. It reveals key gaps in awareness amongst students. It highlights dissatisfaction with current spending at La Trobe University, and strong student preferences for certain services.

The report makes recommendations on how students' Services and Amenities Fees should be spent based on the experiences and needs of students themselves.

Recommendations prioritise social connection, wellbeing, academic support, and daily essentials – areas not always aligned with how La Trobe University has distributed students' Services and Amenities fees.



01

Key Findings

Students Lack Awareness and Input on SSAF

Awareness of SSAF and past consultation with students appear to be limited at La Trobe.

Only 13% of students indicated that they understand what SSAF is spent on and how those decisions are made. A much larger group, 41%, admitted that they don't really know a lot about SSAF, while only 24% recalled ever being asked for input about how SSAF should be allocated. 56% of students stated they have never been asked about SSAF.

These findings highlight a significant awareness and engagement gap. While students contribute to SSAF as a mandatory component of university life at La Trobe, most are unaware of how that money is spent or how they might participate in shaping those decisions.

59%

of students had little or no knowledge of how SSAF is allocated

24%

of students don't recall ever being asked for input

13%

of students understand what SSAF is spent on

“I don't really know a lot about SSAF.”

– 41% of students surveyed

Key Findings

02

Students Prioritise Basic Needs and Practical Support

Free food and hygiene items were ranked as the top priority by students, as well as appearing in the top three for 38% of students, and in the top five for 54% of students.

The LTSU food bank 'Feed La Trobe' at Melbourne (Bundoora) campus of La Trobe University continues to support 23,000 students, yet SSAF allocated to it was only \$1.37 per student in 2024 and \$1.42 currently allocated for 2025.

Students consistently request accommodation assistance, financial aid, and emergency relief.

#1

free food and personal hygiene ranked the priority by students

\$1.37

allocated from SSAF per student at Melbourne (Bundoora) for food relief in 2024

Key Findings

03

Students Want More Community and On-Campus Life

Student life and events featured prominently in free-text responses and top five rankings. With over 700 students commenting on their SSAF preferences, calls for festivals, open mic nights, and more club-related support were frequent. This indicates a strong and unmet desire for connection, campus culture, and opportunities to belong. 94% of respondents study at the Melbourne (Bundoora) campus, yet many reported a lack of connection or activity – especially in qualitative feedback.

54% of respondents were international students, who often rely more heavily on campus-based social structures.

Many of these students cited loneliness and isolation.

“La Trobe needs more fun events – something to bring us together outside of just class and assessments.”

Key Findings

04

Mental Health Is a Major Concern

Students want more counselling staff, faster access, and culturally competent services.

Mental health services were the second most frequently ranked top priority and featured in the top five for 57% of students. Many free text responses for students to give their views, highlighted long wait times, inadequate access, and the emotional toll of study and isolation.

Students made clear they want accessible, well-funded mental health care that doesn't require weeks of waiting. For example, one student said "SSAF funds [should be allocated] towards free or heavily subsidised access to mental health services, including therapy sessions, group counselling, and mental wellness seminars."

“Mental health support and therapy sessions [are] needed, especially for international students who often feel isolated.”

Key Findings

05

“[We need] networking events with alumni and industry partners.”

Career Support Needs Attention

Career and employment services appeared in the top three for 37% and top five for over 52% of all respondents – a clear indicator that career readiness is front-of-mind for many. Students consistently called for practical services such as job expos, internship assistance, resume and interview workshops, and industry networking opportunities.

International students, in particular, highlighted the challenge of gaining Australian work experience and navigating complex employment systems.

Despite the presence of a 2025 SSAF allocation line titled “Student career and employability support”, students reported little visibility or access to these offerings. This suggests a need not only for adequate resourcing but also for clearer promotion, tailored delivery, and stronger alignment with student-defined needs.

Key Findings

06

International Students Need Tailored Services

Over 54% of respondents identified as international students.

International students need specialised support at La Trobe. International students' values include visa and legal support, friendship, help navigating life in Australia, and tailored orientation programs.

They voiced specific concerns around visa support, financial stress, discrimination, and the need for culturally inclusive events. They consistently emphasised a desire for community, orientation support, and services that reflect their unique circumstances. Tailoring SSAF services to this cohort will directly improve outcomes and equity.

54%

International cohort respondents

\$5.59

per international student for engagement at Melbourne (Bundoora)



07

Key Findings

Students Care About Practical and Day-to-Day Services

Many day-to-day issues that seem overlooked by La Trobe University have a significant impact on students' learning and wellbeing.

Top-ranked practical priorities included:

- Transport and parking subsidies were a consistent priority with it ranking in the top 5 priorities for over 45% of students, and appearing in many student's free text responses about what ideas they had for SSAF and what could be improved.
- Facilities upgrades – frequently mentioned in open-text responses, students highlighted the poor state of student facilities such as student accommodation, lounges, bathrooms, kitchens and study areas.

There was a clear message: SSAF should focus on services that reduce stress and increase students' ability to thrive day-to-day.

Additional Findings

- Childcare received very few rankings, which may reflect the demographics of the student body (mostly under age 30) but is critical for parenting students. Targeted engagement and SSAF allocation to such students may improve equitable access.
- Orientation programs, while essential for transition, were less commonly prioritised among the top five.



Top 5 Most Preferred Services

Ranked #1 Most Often



1

Free Food
and Personal
Care Items



2

Health
Services



3

Career and
Employment
Services



4

Academic
Support



5

Transport
and Parking
Subsidies

*Available options to rank: Health services (like counselling, medical, mental health support), Academic support (like tutoring and study skills workshops), Career and employment services (like job fairs, interview and resume help), Clubs and societies (hobbies and interests), Sport and recreational services (like team sports), Legal and financial services (like legal advice, financial counselling), Orientation and transition programs (like joining the university), Student events and social activities (like parties, balls, BBQs), Independent support and advice for students dealing with university processes, Transport and parking subsidies (like travel cards and parking vouchers), Free food and personal care items (like food bank, giveaways), Childcare (like looking after young children).

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on direct student feedback and should guide how the 40% student-controlled SSAF funding (under the 2024 Accord) and the remaining 60% (administered by the University) are allocated:

1

Invest in Basic Needs

Establish a dedicated food relief budget line in SSAF allocations, disaggregated from advocacy or miscellaneous student support.

Expand SSAF-supported housing and emergency relief services, especially for students at financial risk.

2

Prioritise Wellbeing

Maintain and grow investment in mental health services, ensuring timely access and cultural sensitivity.

Fund the recruitment of additional counsellors and create wellbeing programs for high-pressure periods (e.g. exam weeks).

3

Support Social Connection and Student Life

While overall engagement and inclusion funding increased in 2025, there is limited clarity on how much engagement budget supports actual grassroots student programs. Survey responses and free-text feedback called strongly for more opportunities to connect – including suggestions for open mic nights, community dinners, and casual events. The university should reinvest in student-led programs to ensure students shape their own community life.

4

Career and Employability

Increase SSAF allocations to career readiness and employment services such as job expos, networking events, and resume help, as well as expand and target the notifications of these services to students.

5

Address Practical and Underrepresented Needs

Provide support for transport and parking for students.

Introduce targeted SSAF allocations for childcare, which remains unfunded despite being critical for equity.

Ensure accessibility improvements for students with disabilities and neurodivergent needs.

6

Improve Governance and Transparency

Implement a proactive multi-channel SSAF communications strategy to raise awareness, especially through face-to-face engagement.

Establish a standing SSAF advisory committee with elected student representatives.

Publish simplified SSAF budget breakdowns on a quarterly basis and actively promote to students.

Guarantee direct access to anonymised SSAF survey data for student organisations and decision-makers.

Use demographic data to ensure funding is equitable across international, regional, mature-aged, and part-time students.



Methodology

La Trobe Student Union (LTSU) conducted a survey to gather student views on how their Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) should be spent. The goal was to understand current student needs and preferences in tandem with legislative changes that allows more student-led and student-run control over SSAF allocation beginning 1 January 2025.

A total of 839 students completed the survey between October and November 2024.

The majority of survey respondents were international students (54%), with domestic students comprising 46% of responses. The overwhelming majority of participants were based at the Bundoora campus (94%).

In terms of study levels, 59% of respondents were undergraduates, 33% were postgraduates, and the remainder included research students and others. Most students surveyed, were studying full-time – 89%, and 88% were aged under 30.

These demographics indicate that the survey reflects the views of younger, full-time, Bundoora-based students, with a significant international student presence.

Student Suggestions

The free-text responses provided by students further illuminate their priorities and concerns. 79% of respondents offered information (over 700 individual responses), which highlighted strong views in how students' fees are spent.

Unprompted, students here frequently requested stronger support for basic needs, including access to free food, accommodation assistance, and financial aid. Mental health services and general wellbeing were also key themes, with numerous calls for improved access to counselling and reduced wait times.

Students placed strong emphasis on career readiness, asking for more job fairs, resume help, and employability support. There was also a notable interest in enhancing student life through clubs, events, and better communal spaces. International students voiced specific needs such as visa support, orientation programs, and culturally sensitive services. Practical improvements, including affordable parking and upgraded facilities, were also mentioned.

Comparison with La Trobe University SSAF Spending (2024–2025)

Context

The findings in this report are based on the student survey conducted by the La Trobe Student Union (LTSU) in late 2024, prior to the finalisation of the University’s 2025 SSAF allocations. It was also prior to the university defunding the student union’s independent Advocacy Service in December 2024. As such, this report provides a valuable student-led benchmark for assessing how well current funding decisions align with student needs and expectations.

2024

(selected items):

- \$2.43M**
Student Mental Health and Wellbeing
- \$1.79M**
Library and Academic Support
- \$1.04M**
Student Union*
representing over 22,000 students
- \$521k**
La Trobe Student Association
representing less than 4,000 students
- \$671k**
Clubs and Societies
- \$233k**
Student Engagement
- \$830k**
La Trobe Sport
- \$135k**
Legal Advice & Financial Counselling
- \$644k**
Student Partnership

2025

(selected items):

- \$2.47M**
Student Mental Health and Wellbeing
- \$1.84M**
Library and Academic Support
- \$681k**
Student Union*
representing over 22,000 students
- \$573k**
La Trobe Student Association
representing less than 4,000 students
- \$860k**
Clubs and Societies
- \$918k**
Student Engagement
- \$950k**
Sport and Recreation
- \$?** *(No dedicated item in 2025)*
Legal Advice & Financial Counselling
- \$256k**
Student Life (Partnerships, Transition & Events)

* La Trobe University terminated the three-year funding agreement with the student union in December 2024 and removed the student union’s independent advocacy service. A one year funding agreement was enforced on the student union in December 2024.

Key Analysis

There is clear alignment between student priorities and SSAF allocations in some key areas. In 2025, \$2.47 million was allocated to student mental health and wellbeing, following \$2.43 million in 2024 - reflecting the second most common #1-ranked priority among students. Academic support also remains a major investment, with \$1.84 million committed in 2025 to library and learning services, following \$1.79 million the previous year. Together, these represent a continued focus on critical areas of need.

However, student priorities around food security appear to be increasingly under emphasised. While food relief was the most commonly ranked #1 priority in the SSAF survey, both the 2024 and 2025 budgets grouped food under broader Student Union and Student Association funding lines - with no dedicated line item. In 2025, \$639,984 was allocated for approximately 23,000 students at Bundoora, and \$573,328 for around 5,500 students across the other campuses. In contrast, mental health and sport each receive more than triple that amount. Career and employment services appeared in the top five for a third of students, but received only \$284,525, while transport and parking, a top-five priority for a similar proportion, is entirely absent from the 2025 budget after receiving just \$80,000 (for International Travel Concessions) in 2024.

Notably, services related to international student support, childcare, or culturally tailored services are not clearly itemised in either year's budget, despite being repeatedly raised in student feedback. This lack of transparency limits the ability to assess whether the SSAF is being distributed in line with equity and inclusion priorities.

Structural Observations

The 2025 SSAF allocations appear to reflect internal university priorities and structural realignments (e.g. centralisation of student advising and engagement), rather than student consultation. No university-led SSAF consultation report has been published at the time of writing.

As such, this LTSU survey remains the most transparent and comprehensive source of student views on SSAF spending. It highlights several areas of misalignment, particularly:

- Reduced funding to student-led services and representation, despite the introduction of the Universities Accord's 40% minimum allocation requirement.
- Increased centralisation of funding in programs where students report lower awareness or satisfaction.

Recommendations for Improvement

- Future SSAF allocation processes must incorporate real-time student input before decisions are made – not after.
- Spending decisions should be clearly linked to student-identified priorities and tracked transparently via public reporting.

The University should consider creating dedicated budget lines for food relief, transport, and international student support – each of which was clearly prioritised in the student feedback.

Conclusion

This survey and report confirm that La Trobe University students want their SSAF to fund tangible, high-impact services such as food relief, mental health support, academic assistance, and career development.

It also reveals significant knowledge gaps and limited opportunities for student input. To align future SSAF funding with both student needs and federal reforms, La Trobe University should ensure that funding decisions are more visible, transparent, student led, and student driven.

This will require genuine collaboration with established student organisations, public reporting of outcomes, and a participatory planning framework that reflects student voice at every stage.

Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF)

On 11 October 2011, the Australian Parliament passed legislation allowing higher education providers under the Higher Education Support Act 2003 to charge a fee for student services and amenities of a non-academic nature. The fee is called the students services and amenities fee or SSAF. The fee may be spent by providers such as universities on items such as sporting and recreational activities, employment and career advice, childcare, financial advice and food services.

The SSAF is governed by the Higher Education Support Act 2003, the Higher Education Support (Administration) Guidelines 2022 (Administration Guidelines) and the Higher Education Support (Student Services, Amenities, Representation and Advocacy) Guidelines 2022 (SSARA Guidelines). The Administration Guidelines sets out the administrative arrangements for the SSAF, including publishing requirements, while the SSARA Guidelines sets out requirements for providing students with information about, and access to, services and the representation and advocacy of the interests of students.

Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) minimum allocation requirements

From 1 January 2025, providers that charge a SSAF are required to allocate a minimum of 40 per cent of their SSAF revenue for the calendar year to one or more student-led organisation.

A student-led organisation is an organisation operated by students at a university, college, or other educational institution, whose governing body is made up of most students and/or alumni (from the preceding 3 years), who have been democratically elected by the current student population of the provider.

If a provider cannot allocate a minimum of 40 per cent of SSAF revenue to student-led organisations and maintain other key services to the expected level, it will be required to seek approval from the Department of Education for an agreed transition arrangement via the transition plan template. Providers will need to apply to the department and provide evidence to support their application.

The total length of transition arrangements proposed under the Bill is three years. After this time, providers must comply with the legislative requirements.

For the remaining 60 percent of SSAF revenue, current legislative and Department requirements remain unchanged. Annual reporting will continue to be required from providers to provide evidence that students are regularly consulted about SSAF funding allocations for this 60 percent.

Who We Are

We are led by students, for students.

We are here for students during their time at La Trobe Bundoora.

We will make sure students feel part of a community. We will support students to stand up and speak out for what they believe in.

There's strength in numbers!

La Trobe University Student Union (LTSU) is the largest student or staff peak representative body at La Trobe University. Our representation is led by and for students and incorporates the International Students Collective and MASO (Mature Age Students Organisation).

Established in 1967, the purpose of the LTSU is to advance the education of the students at La Trobe University by:

- enhancing the learning experience of students while at the University;
- promoting the interests and welfare of students;
- representing students within and outside the University;
- co-ordinating and supporting the activities of students; and
- providing amenities and services for students, other members of the University community and the public.

We would love to have you as part of our community, so sign up to be a member at www.latrobesu.org.au/memberships.





Run by Students, For Students

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