



LA TROBE
UNIVERSITY

STUDENT UNION

OUR MONEY, OUR WAY:

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

2026



LA TROBE UNIVERSITY **STUDENT UNION**

Your Money, Your Way: The Student Perspective

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From our Exec

As the Executive of La Trobe Student Union, we speak every day with students who are feeling the pressure of rising living costs, expensive transport, study demands and an increasingly disconnected campus experience. Students pay the Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF), so their priorities must be at the centre of decisions about how it is spent.

Our Money, Our Way gives students that voice. More than 850 students took part in the 2026 survey. The results are clear: students want practical help with food, health, transport and employment, as well as events, clubs and places that make university feel like a community.

The survey also shows that most students still do not know how SSAF decisions are made and have never been asked what they think. Consultation cannot be a once-a-year exercise after budgets have effectively been decided. It must be meaningful, transparent and connected to funding decisions.

La Trobe Student Union is ready to work with La Trobe University and other student-led organisations to make sure SSAF is spent on the things students need and value most.

In solidarity,

Amelia Sevier, *President*

Anand Rajendra Musale, *General Secretary*

Maali Kerta-Rice, *Education Vice President*

Rushikesh Rane, *Post Graduate Officer*

Parth Jadav, *Welfare Vice President*

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of La Trobe Student Union's 2026 Our Money, Our Way survey, which asked students how they believe their Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) should be spent.

The results highlight students' priorities for SSAF funding, including strong support for practical assistance, health and wellbeing, employment and academic support, and opportunities for connection and participation in university life.

The survey also identifies continuing gaps in students' understanding of SSAF and in opportunities for students to have a say in how their fees are allocated.

The report makes recommendations based on the priorities and experiences identified by students, to help inform future SSAF funding decisions at La Trobe University.



Key Findings

Students Are Paying SSAF Without Understanding How It Is Spent

41% of respondents said they did not really know much about SSAF. A further 38% knew what SSAF was but did not know what it funded or how spending decisions were made. Only 8% understood both what SSAF was spent on and how decisions were made, while 13% knew generally what it funded and where to find more information.

Consultation was even weaker. 71% said they had never been asked their views on SSAF spending, 15% were unsure and only 13% said they had been asked.

These results show that the information and consultation gap identified in 2025 remains and has worsened on key measures. Students pay a compulsory fee, but most cannot see a clear connection between their payment, the services funded and the decisions made in their name.

01

41%

said they do not really know much about SSAF

71%

said they have never been asked how SSAF should be spent

8%

said they know both what SSAF funds and how decisions are made

“I think there should be more notice around SSAF and the need to pay it, as well as exactly what the money provided is going towards.”

Key Findings

02

Students Prioritise Basic Needs and Practical Support

Free food and personal care items had the broadest support of any option. 73% placed it in their top five – three in every four students surveyed. This is a substantial increase from 54% in the 2025 report.

The written responses reinforced the ranking. Students asked for free or affordable meals, fresh and culturally appropriate food, grocery support, period products, coffee and tea, and easier access to food relief. Some also asked for rent, placement and emergency assistance.

The result reflects the continuing cost-of-living pressure faced by students. SSAF should provide visible, reliable help with the essentials that allow students to attend university and keep studying.

73%

placed free food and personal care items in their top five.

Key Findings

03

Transport and Parking Are an Urgent Priority

Transport and parking support was selected by 58% of respondents. It was the most commonly ranked number-one priority: 22% of all students placed it first. Of the students who selected transport and parking, 65% ranked it first or second, the strongest ranking intensity of any major priority.

The issue was especially important to domestic students. 63% of domestic students included it in their top five, compared with 50% of international students. Among domestic students who selected it, 44% ranked it number one.

Written responses repeatedly called for free or cheaper parking, parking vouchers and cheaper public transport. These are not peripheral concerns. Transport costs affect whether students can get to class, placements, work and campus services.

“Free parking or significantly reduced parking costs for full-time students.”

Key Findings

04

Health and Wellbeing Remain a Major Concern

Health services were included in the top five by 61% of students, the second broadest level of support. 18% ranked health first and a further 17% ranked it second. Among students who selected health, 58% placed it first or second.

Students called for accessible mental health and wellbeing services, counselling, allied health support, wellness activities and shorter waits. Health is both a widely shared priority and one that students feel strongly about.

The University's substantial 2026 allocation to health and wellbeing is welcome, but students must be able to access the services when they need them and understand what the funding delivers.

“I wish we had access to more than 5 counselling sessions, I was going through a very difficult time last semester and used my five sessions, and I just can't afford to see anyone privately.”

Key Findings

05

Students Want Career and Employment Support That Leads Somewhere

Career and employment services were placed in the top five by 56% of respondents. They were particularly important to international students: 65% included careers in their top five, compared with 51% of domestic students.

Students asked for industry networking, employment expos, mentoring, internships, resume and interview support, Australian work experience and clearer links between courses and jobs. Students want practical pathways into employment, not simply general information.

“More industry-led networking events, professional mentoring programs with alumni, and hands-on career strategy workshops tailored for graduate students preparing to enter management roles.”

Key Findings

06

Students Want Campus Life, Belonging and Connection

Student events and social activities were selected by 57% of respondents and clubs and societies by 46%. Events were commonly ranked fourth or fifth, while clubs were most commonly ranked fifth. This suggests that students value connection strongly, even when immediate needs are ranked first.

Written suggestions called for more social events, cultural celebrations, parties, balls, clubs, music, theatre, volunteering, sport and the return of a campus bar. Several responses described a campus that lacks activity, identity and places for students to meet outside class.

SSAF should support a campus culture shaped by students and delivered through student-led organisations, clubs, elected representatives and volunteers.

“More social events throughout the semester to help students, particularly those who have struggled to make friends, feel more connected.”





07

Key Findings

Different Student Groups Have Different Priorities

The 2026 respondent group was 65% domestic and 35% international. The results show important differences that should inform targeted funding.

International students were more likely to select careers and employment: 65%, compared with 51% of domestic students. Domestic students were more likely to select transport and parking: 63%, compared with 50% of international students. Academic support was selected by similar proportions, but international students who selected it were much more likely to rank it first: 42%, compared with 26% of domestic students.

Lower whole-of-sample results for targeted services must also be interpreted carefully. Childcare was selected by 8%, independent advocacy by 25%, and legal and financial advice by 27%. These services may be essential to the smaller number of students who need them, even though they will not be selected by everyone. Equity requires both broad universal services and properly funded targeted support.

Top 5 Most Preferred Services

By broadest support - percentage placing the service in their top five:



1

73%
Free Food
and Personal
Care Items



2

61%
Health
Services



3

58%
Transport
and Parking
Support



4

57%
Student events
and Social
Activities



5

56%
Career and
Employment
Services

Ranked number one most often:



1

22%
Transport
and Parking
Support



2

18%
Health
Services



3

15%
Academic
Support



4

15%
Free food and
Personal Care
Items



5

12%
Career and
Employment
Services

Food and personal care had the widest support across students, while transport and parking was most often placed first. Together, the two measures show both breadth of support and the areas students feel most strongly about.



Recommendations

1

Invest in Basic Needs

Create a dedicated, publicly reported SSAF budget line for food relief and personal care rather than bundling it within broader organisational allocations. Expand access to fresh, healthy and culturally appropriate food; free meals; hygiene and period products; and emergency relief. Ensure online students, students on placement and students who cannot attend the food bank at set times can access support.

2

Make Health Support Timely and Accessible

Maintain strong investment in health, counselling and wellbeing, with clear measures for waiting times, service reach and student satisfaction. Fund additional counselling and allied-health capacity where demand requires it, provide culturally safe services, and increase wellbeing support during exams and other high-pressure periods.

3

Provide Real Transport and Parking Relief

Use SSAF to reduce the cost of attending university through parking subsidies or vouchers, public transport support and targeted assistance for students travelling to placements. Publish what the \$80,000 international travel concession allocation delivers and develop a broader transport response for domestic and international students.

4

Strengthen Career and Employment Outcomes

Increase practical employability support, including industry events, paid and unpaid placement support, internships, mentoring, resume and interview assistance, and opportunities to gain Australian work experience. Services should be visible, tailored to different cohorts and evaluated against student outcomes.

5

Rebuild Campus Life Through Student-Led Activity

Provide sustained funding for student-led events, clubs, societies, cultural activities, volunteering, creative programs and welcoming social spaces. Explore the return of a safe, accessible campus bar or equivalent student social venue. Funding should reach grassroots student activity and not be absorbed by central administration.

6

Protect Targeted and Independent Services Activity

Maintain adequate funding for independent student advocacy, legal and financial advice, childcare, disability access and culturally specific support. Whole-of-population rankings must not be used to remove services that are critical to smaller groups or to students experiencing serious problems.

7

Improve SSAF Governance and Transparency

Establish a standing SSAF advisory group with democratically elected student representatives, student led organisations and third parties such as a federal government representative. Consult early before allocations are decided; publish proposed and final budgets in plain language; identify which organisation delivers each service; report quarterly on expenditure and outcomes; and release anonymised consultation data. Funding decisions should state clearly how student feedback changed the allocation.

Methodology

La Trobe Student Union conducted the 2026 Our Money, Our Way survey to understand how students at Melbourne (Bundoora) and online want their Student Services and Amenities Fee spent. The survey used the same questions as the survey reported in 2025, allowing direct comparison of the principal results.

A total of 853 people responded to at least one question. Of the 851 who answered the eligibility question, 799 were current enrolled La Trobe University students, 40 were La Trobe College students and 12 were not La Trobe students. 95% identified Melbourne (Bundoora) as their campus and 2% studied online. Results in this report use the response base reported for each question rather than treating all 852 participants as having answered every question.

The awareness and consultation questions each received 750 responses. The top-five selection question received 719 responses and the ranking question received 703. Demographic questions were answered by 700 respondents. Of those, 65% were domestic and 35% international; 71% were undergraduate, 25% postgraduate and 3% research students; 92% studied full-time; and 91% were aged 18 to 30.

The survey also invited written suggestions. There were 158 responses proposing new services, activities or facilities and 104 further comments about SSAF. These responses were reviewed for recurring themes and illustrative quotations. Blank, 'no', 'not sure' and otherwise non-substantive answers were not treated as evidence of a theme.

The survey is a large consultation exercise but not a randomly selected sample of all La Trobe students. The findings should therefore be read as strong evidence of the priorities of participating students, not as a population estimate with a calculated margin of error.

Student Suggestions

Students' written responses added detail and urgency to the rankings. The strongest recurring requests concerned cheaper or free parking, affordable public transport, food and cost-of-living relief, employment support, social events, clubs and a campus bar.

Basic-needs suggestions included free breakfast or lunch, fresh fruit and vegetables, culturally and medically appropriate food, grocery vouchers, period products, free tea and coffee, emergency assistance, rent support and help for students undertaking mandatory placements.

Transport comments overwhelmingly sought free or substantially discounted campus parking. Others requested parking vouchers, cheaper public transport and better connections to campus and placements.

Campus-life suggestions included a revived campus bar, more parties and social events, cultural nights, live music, theatre, trivia, volunteering, sport, hobby clubs, better support for clubs and more welcoming places to meet. These responses show a desire for a campus that has life beyond classes and assessments.

Career and academic ideas included networking with employers and alumni, mentoring, career expos, internships, resume support, tutoring, printing credit, course-specific career information and support to gain relevant work experience.

Students also asked for cleaner and better-equipped communal spaces, improved toilets and kitchens, quiet or low-sensory rest areas, online-student services and clearer public information showing how SSAF is allocated and what it achieves.

SSAF Spend Comparison

Comparison with La Trobe University SSAF spending - selected items

2025

post-Census allocation

(selected items):

\$640k

La Trobe Student Union

La Trobe Student Union represent 23,000 students

\$573k

La Trobe Student Association

La Trobe Student Association represents 4,000 students

\$641k

Student Advocacy

Delivered by La Trobe Student Association

\$2.25M

Student Health and Wellbeing

\$285k

Employability

\$1.59M

Library & Learning Support

\$2.38M

Student Advising Programs

\$612k

Clubs & Societies

\$1.19M

Student Engagement & Inclusion

\$900k

La Trobe Sport

\$386k

Student Council

No figure published

International travel concessions

2025

Proposed revised 2026 allocation

(selected items):

\$1.16M

La Trobe Student Union

La Trobe Student Union represent 23,000 students

\$1.08M

La Trobe Student Association

La Trobe Student Association represents 4,000 students

\$800k

Student Advocacy

Delivered by La Trobe Student Association

\$1.75M

Student Health and Wellbeing

\$517k

Employability

\$930k

Library & Learning Support

\$1.73M

Student Advising Programs

\$180K

Clubs & Societies

\$1.07M

Student Engagement & Inclusion

\$913k

La Trobe Sport

\$173k

Student Council

\$80k

International travel concessions

The University's 2025 post-Census allocation also identified at least \$700,000 in additional funding for student-led organisations to request to enhance student activities. This was listed separately from the individual LTSU and LTSA allocations.

The 2026 published allocation states that the LTSU and LTSA funding includes Food Relief and partial Clubs support. As these services are bundled within broader organisational allocations, the amount directed to each individual service cannot be determined from the published figures alone.

Note: University category names and inclusions have changed between years, so not all figures are directly comparable.

Key Analysis

There is some alignment between student priorities and the proposed 2026 SSAF allocation. Employability funding increases from \$284,525 to \$516,529, reflecting strong student support for career and employment services. The published Health and Wellbeing allocation is lower in 2026, despite health services being the second most widely selected student priority.

Food and personal care was the strongest student priority, selected by 73% of students. Food relief is included within the LTSU and LTSA allocations, but is not identified as a separate amount, making it difficult to assess the level of funding specifically directed to this priority.

Transport and parking shows the clearest gap. 58% of students selected it, while the proposed allocation identifies \$80,000 for International travel concessions but no dedicated allocation for parking or broader transport support.

Students also placed strong value on events, clubs and campus life. The 2026 allocation includes \$180,000 for Clubs and Societies, broader Student Engagement and Inclusion funding, and partial clubs support within the LTSU and LTSA allocations. Because this funding is spread across several categories, the total amount directed to student clubs and campus activity is not clear from the published allocation.

Structural Observations

The 2026 allocation structure remains difficult for students to understand. Several large categories combine different services, while food relief and partial clubs support are embedded within student-organisation funding. Changes to category names and the separation of student advising from library and learning support also make year-to-year comparison difficult.

The University states that students can influence SSAF through its annual survey, Student Council, student-led organisations and other consultations. Yet 71% of respondents said they had never been asked how SSAF should be spent, and only 8% understood both spending and decision-making. The existence of consultation channels is not the same as students knowing about them, being able to participate, or seeing their views affect the final budget.

Future allocation statements should separate the amount spent on frontline delivery from administration and identify the provider, target group, outputs and outcomes for each funded service. Proposed allocations should be released early enough for students and their elected organisations to respond before decisions are final.

Recommendations for improvement:

- Consult students before budgets are set and publish how feedback changed decisions.
- Create separate, transparent lines for food relief, transport and direct clubs support.
- Publish comparable categories and actual expenditure across years.
- Report reach, waiting times, student satisfaction and outcomes, not only the amount allocated.
- Ensure the 40% student-led allocation is genuinely controlled by eligible student-led organisations and accompanied by fair, workable multi-year agreements.



Conclusion

The 2026 Our Money, Our Way survey gives a clear message: students want SSAF to reduce the practical pressures that make university harder. Food and personal care, health, transport, employment and academic support are central priorities. Students also want events, clubs and social spaces that make La Trobe feel like a community.

Students are not asking for a choice between essential support and a vibrant campus. They want both, with immediate needs funded first and student life built around genuine student leadership.

The survey also exposes a continuing democratic gap. Most students do not know how SSAF is spent, and seven in ten say they have never been asked what they think. Transparent budget lines, early consultation, public reporting and a meaningful role for elected student organisations are necessary if SSAF is to reflect the people who pay it.

The 2027 SSAF process should begin with this evidence and end with a public explanation of what changed as a result. Students' money should be spent on students' priorities - our money, our way.

Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF)

The Student Services and Amenities Fee is a compulsory fee that higher education providers may charge under the Higher Education Support Act 2003. It may be spent on non-academic services and amenities including food services, health and welfare, employment and career advice, sporting and recreational activities, childcare, financial advice, student representation and advocacy.

SSAF is governed by the Higher Education Support Act 2003 and supporting Administration and Student Services, Amenities, Representation and Advocacy guidelines. These rules cover allowable expenditure, information for students, access to services, consultation, representation and reporting.

From 1 January 2025, providers that charge SSAF must allocate at least 40% of annual SSAF revenue to one or more eligible student-led organisations. A student-led organisation is operated by students and has a governing body made up mainly of democratically elected current students and/or recent alumni, as defined by the legislation.

The remaining SSAF revenue continues to be subject to consultation and reporting requirements. Universities must not treat consultation as a formality: students need understandable information, a genuine opportunity to shape priorities and clear reporting on the services and outcomes their fee funds.

In 2026, full-time La Trobe students paid \$372 for the year (\$186 per semester), while the University's proposed revised SSAF allocation totalled \$10.4 million.





Who We Are

We are led by students, for students.

La Trobe University Student Union is the largest student or staff peak representative body at La Trobe University, representing more than 23,000 students. Our representation is led by and for students and incorporates the International Students Collective and MASO (Mature Age Students Organisation).

Established in 1967, LTSU exists to advance the education of La Trobe students by enhancing their learning experience; promoting their interests and welfare; representing students within and outside the University; coordinating and supporting student activities; and providing services and amenities.

We help students feel part of a community and support them to stand up and speak out for what they believe in. There is strength in numbers.

Join LTSU at www.latrobesu.org.au/membership

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