

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
Legislation Committee

Inquiry into the provisions of the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005

Submitter: Natalie Mast

Organisation: Research Intensive Consortium (RIC)

Address: M259, Political Science, UWA, 35 Stirling Hwy,
Crawley, WA 6009

Phone: (08) 6488 2097

Fax: N/A

Email: ngmast@cyllene.uwa.edu.au



This submission has been prepared by the Research Intensive Consortium (the RIC), a postgraduate lobby group representing postgraduates from Australian universities with a significant research focus.

The submission includes the following:

- 1) A statement on the membership of the RIC**
- 2) General comments on the demographics and needs of postgraduates from research intensive universities in Australia**
- 3) A statement on the demographics, needs and current services provided to postgraduates by a number of postgraduate associations aligned to the RIC**
- 4) A concluding statement on the need for the continuation of an amenities and services fee for postgraduate students.**

Statement on the membership of the RIC:

To better support the interests of Australian-based research degree candidates in this year of substantial Higher Education reform, the postgraduate representative bodies of Australia's research intensive universities created the Research Intensive Consortium (the RIC) in February 2005. The RIC is specifically designed to lobby for a federal level of awareness concerning the often overlooked needs of postgraduate research students.

In light of the absence of a co-ordinated response specifically catering to postgraduates from institutions that have a high percentage of research candidates, resource infrastructure and research money, the RIC was established, not to replace any existing industry bodies, but rather as a group representing a particular set of interests and concerned with the preservation of services to our constituents. A federal awareness of the community concerns and the social wellbeing of research students is among the primary concerns of the RIC.

The current member parties of the RIC, postgraduate associations from seven of the nation's elite institutions, draw, at a minimum, fifteen million dollars in Research Training Scheme funding and come from institutions that produce the majority of Australia's leading university-based research.

The members of this group thus far include the postgraduate associations of the Australian National University, the University of Adelaide, the University of Melbourne, Monash University, the University of Tasmania and the University of Western Australia.

Contact with the RIC can be attained through the postgraduate association most relevant to your state or territory:

Postgraduate Association	Contact	email	Phone
Australian National University	Brett Baker	President.PARSA@anu.edu.au	(02) 6125 4187
University of Adelaide	Felicity Rai	felicity.rai@adelaide.edu.au	(08) 8303 5898
University of Melbourne	Matthew Bellegem	president@umpa.unimelb.edu.au	(03) 8344 8657
Monash University	Bruce Thomson	Bruce.Thomson@Buseco.monash.edu.au	(03) 9905 8604
University of Tasmania	Andrew Saunders	saunders@postoffice.utas.edu.au	(03) 6226 7834
University of Western Australia	Natalie Mast	ngmast@cyllene.uwa.edu.au	(08) 6488 2097

General comments on the demographics and needs of postgraduates from research intensive universities in Australia

It has long been established within the higher education sector that the postgraduate community is a unique cohort within the student bodies of universities. Postgraduates are generally divided into two subsets: Research postgraduates and Coursework postgraduates. The requirements of both research and coursework postgraduates are significantly different to those of undergraduate students. Research students, defined as those who are funded by the Commonwealth's Research Training Scheme, are generally full-time students heavily involved in a research project; are often employed on a casual or part-time basis by their University to develop teaching experience, and, in the majority of cases, are on campus for forty-eight weeks of the year. In contrast, a high proportion of coursework students are professionals who are undertaking career development courses on a part-time basis. One of the significant differences between the postgraduate and undergraduate bodies at research intensive universities is the average age of the two cohorts. The individual postgraduate association's reports tabled within this document highlight the fact that the majority of the postgraduate population is over twenty-five years of age, with a large number of postgraduates, especially those enrolled in coursework, aged over thirty.

Due in part to their enrolment type, as well as to their age and general expectations as to the desired outcome from their postgraduate study, research and coursework postgraduates have specific needs in terms of services, representation and advocacy. These needs are currently met with the aid of annual fees. This submission highlights the ways in which postgraduate associations operating within research intensive universities meet the needs of postgraduate students, and it explains how the experience of postgraduates will be impacted upon if the collection of fees by universities to subsidise services were to be stopped.

The RIC feels that it is imperative that Australia's Research Intensive Universities retain their world-class standing. Both Australian and international postgraduate research students are attracted to universities with an excellent reputation for research, outstanding supervision and an active postgraduate community. The RIC has noted the active participation of international postgraduates amongst the postgraduate associations which form the consortium and is well aware of how influential these students can be in recommending Australian universities as institutions of excellence with vibrant scholarly communities. With the enrolment of new international postgraduate students in the United States in steep decline, the RIC suggests that Australia is currently in a unique position to attract many of these discerning students¹. The RIC believes that one of the most important considerations for study in Australia for international students is the advocacy which our postgraduate associations achieve on behalf of students. The sense of surety that such services offer to both research and coursework students be they Australian or from overseas, should not be underestimated. The RIC believes that, if the postgraduate associations were to be deprived of student fees, our universities would find it very difficult to compete for international student enrolments when compared to international universities which have a strong tradition of fee-funded associations and which highlight their strong community-based activities as a reason to enrol.

The RIC would like to stress that all of its affiliate postgraduate associations consider

¹ See <http://www.symmetrymagazine.org/cms/?pid=1000086>

themselves to be apolitical outside the higher education arena. The RIC condemns the use of student fees for political activities and advocates a system of fees similar to the current Victorian model, where the spending of student fees by student associations is limited to specific areas. The RIC recognises the diverse political views and organisational membership of postgraduates around the country and believes that student bodies should not be allowed to divert student fees to the political causes of the day. That said, the RIC understands that such action can be legislated against and still allow for the collection of fees to provide essential services to university students, be they postgraduates or undergraduates.



**Postgraduate and Research Students' Association
of The Australian National University
PARSA**

Introduction:

All postgraduates (viz. Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Masters and PhD students) at the Australian National University (ANU) automatically become members of the Postgraduate and Research Students' Association (PARSA) as part of their payment of General Service Fees (GSF), unless they opt not to. The Postgraduate Representative Council (PRC) of the Association, which consists of student representatives from the Research Schools, Faculties and Centres at ANU, as well as 15 general representatives from across campus, collectively represents postgraduate students on University committees to ensure effective postgraduate participation in decision-making at the University.

The primary focus of PARSA is the welfare of the postgraduate and research student community at ANU, particularly with respect to their studies. The Association offers its members advocacy on administrative, academic and personal issues and in dispute resolution. The Association employs a Legal Officer, in conjunction with the ANU Students' Association (ANUSA), who provides free, confidential legal advice. PARSA also conducts seminars on current issues for postgraduates and provides an informal setting for social interaction.

The following statistics have been compiled from the information made available by Statistical Services, ANU (<http://unistats.anu.edu.au/Students/>), for enrolments for the first semester 2004.

1. Number of postgraduates enrolled:

Whole numbers	4,582
EFTSU	3,104
Research	
PhD by research	1,749
Masters by research	105
Total	1,854
Coursework	
Higher Degree Coursework (includes professional doctoral students)	1,761
Graduate Diploma	851
Graduate Certificate	98
Other Postgraduate	18
Total	2,728
Onshore	Not available
Total number of domestic postgraduate students	3,080
Total number of international postgraduate students	1,502

2. Type of Postgraduates enrolled:

Average age	Not available
Enrolment status	
Full time	1,384
Part time	1,993
Gender (Not available separately for postgraduates, includes undergraduate enrolments as well)	
Male	5,377
Female	5,646

3. Services offered by the PGA/student union body:

Advocacy & Welfare

PARSA employs a part-time Student Consultant who provides advocacy to students and liaises with the University to assist students with administrative, academic and personal issues as well as dispute resolution.

Information programmes

The Association in conjunction with the Academic Skills and Learning Centre and the Centre for Educational Development and Academic Methods (CEDAM) provides information and learning assistance to graduate students with respect to their studies. It also promotes awareness at postgraduate induction programs conducted by the University, by addressing issues concerning students and the services available to them.

Newsletters & Magazines

PARSA annually publishes the *Postgraduate Survival Guide* which summaries services and facilities available to students both on campus and outside. It includes an informal perspective of student lifestyle and information that would be of assistance. The *Postgraduate Survival Guide* has been acknowledged in many student surveys as a primary source of reference for both formal and non-formal information.

Antitheses, a newsletter that was published every 6-8 weeks, outlining current issues of interest to the postgraduate community, will from 2005 onwards be published on the new PARSA website, which is being developed.

Web site

The PARSA website (<http://www.anu.edu.au/parsa/>) is updated on a regular basis and is maintained by the Publications Officer, who is employed on a part-time basis by PARSA. The website provides information to services on campus and informs students of how they are being represented by PARSA. It provides a host of useful links and information. This website is currently being developed further.

4. Representation:

General description of bodies served upon & Constituted bodies

PARSA collectively represents the interests of postgraduate students at ANU on over 40 University committees (Annex I). The University also approaches PARSA on an ad hoc basis to obtain information from a students' perspective during decision-making.

5. Social interaction:

Events

The social events conducted by PARSA include free events such as regular BBQ's, brunches, morning and afternoon teas and subsidised events like an annual Trivia Night, learn to dance nights (2004 - Latin and Bush Dancing, 2005 - Rock 'n' Roll), wine, cheese

and jazz nights, beer tasting, Karaoke, Irish Nights, etc. In 2004 PARSA held 20 social events with a total attendance of over 1700 people, while 16 social events planned for in 2005, PARSA anticipates a turn out of about 1500 people.

Email forums

Two e-mail forums are subscribed to when group decisions are been made by PARSA. They include the PARSA Executive Committee Mailing List and the PARSA Private Mailing List. The latter includes addresses of the Postgraduate Representative Council (PRC) members. In addition, the two working groups: the Education and Advocacy Group and the Social and Outreach Group communicate via their own e-mail lists.

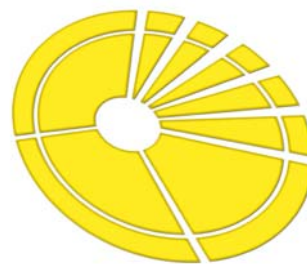
6. Unique provisions offered by the PGA:

PARSA offers a loan scheme of up to \$1000, which needs to be repaid within 12 months or before graduation, with an interest rate of 8%, to students with urgent financial difficulty.

Annex I

University Committees represented by PARSA

ANU Council
Honorary Degrees Committee
Academic Board
General Services Fee Committee
Peer Group
Grievance Resolution Panel
Appeals Committee
Endowment Board of Governors
The Faculties Forum
Institutes of Advanced Studies Forum
Committee on Research Policy
Divisional Research-SHE Committee
Divisional Research-SSA Committee
Committee on Education Policy
Divisional Education-SHE Committee
Divisional Education-SSA Committee
Information Strategy Committee
Divisional IT-SHE Committee
Divisional IT-SSA Committee
Divisional Planning-SHE Committee
Divisional Planning-SSA Committee
Equity and Diversity Committee
Campus Planning Committee
Transport Reference Group
Campus Advisory Committee
Student Services Committee
Graduate Accommodation Bursary
Graduate Student Loan Committee
Environmental Management Planning Committee
Science Library Advisory Committee
University House Board of Fellows
Sport & Recreation Council
Clubs & Societies
Creative Arts Committee
Human Research Ethics Committee
Donations Policy Committee
UniSafe
VC Supervision Awards Committee
The National Institute of the Humanities and Creative Arts
Finance Committee
International Strategy Committee



AUPGSA

Adelaide University Post-Graduate Students' Association AUPGSA

Membership of Adelaide University Post-Graduate Students' Association (AUPGSA) is comprised of all the enrolled postgraduate students at the University of Adelaide. This includes honours and postgraduate coursework students, as well as research masters and doctoral candidates. The AUPGSA has more than 5000 members (we are a third of the size of the undergraduate SAUA body). Our members study, conduct research and teach at the North Terrace, Roseworthy, Waite, and Thebarton campuses, as well as other locations. Many are international students; in fact, three of our five 2005 executive members are international students.

Membership Profile by Program Type for AUPGSA in 2004

		Postgraduates	Percentage
Higher Degree by Coursework	Master's by Coursework	1896	
	Doctorate by Coursework	33	
	Higher Degree by Coursework Total	1929	37.72%
Higher Degree by Research	Doctorate by Research (PhD)	1519	
	Master's by Research	252	
	Higher Degree by Research Total	1771	34.63%
Other Postgraduate	Postgraduate qualifying or preliminary	1	
	Graduate Diploma (new area)	559	
	Graduate Diploma (existing area)	305	
	Graduate Certificate	511	
	Cross Institutional Program (Postgraduate)	37	
	Other Postgraduate Total	1413	27.63%
	Grand Total	5113	
Attendance Type			
	Higher Degree by research – Full-time	984	55.56%
	Higher Degree by Coursework and other postgraduates – full-time	907	27.14%
Domestic/International Enrolments			
	Australian enrolments	3609	70.58%
	International enrolments	1504	29.41%
Average age			
	25 years and over	4105	80.28%
	30 years and over	2847	55.68%

In terms of demographics, our members, as highlighted in the chart above, are older than the majority of undergraduate students, and are more likely to have their own families while often undertaking studies part-time to advance careers in varying stages of development.

Our relationship with the University and its staff is very different from those of undergraduates. Postgraduates, and especially research students enrolled at the University of Adelaide, consider themselves to be an important part of the University community. Postgraduates are actively involved in teaching and research; they are generally on campus for significant period of time, even during non-semester periods. The interactive role played by postgraduates on campus, in addition to the rules, policies and procedures relating to our programmes, highlight how different our community is from the undergraduate body. These differences necessitate a unique combination of services for the AUPGSA's members.

In providing services to such a diverse group of students, the AUPGSA takes on a number of different roles. On the individual level, the AUPGSA provides students with information about a wide range of issues, including insurance, theses, and fees. On a broader scale, the AUPGSA represents its members on a wide range of committees and boards across the University, as well as in the wider community.

Another important area in which the AUPGSA assists its members is by advocating on students' behalf when they have a grievance against the University in general, or their particular departments. We can act as an advocate and representative, or provide advice and support to students who wish to resolve issues themselves. The Association also assists when individual grievances become group actions. The AUPGSA provides advice that is independent of the University, and draws upon the experience of other postgraduate students. It also is able to offer independent feedback to the University concerning postgraduate issues.

We do not neglect the social side of being a postgraduate student. The Association hosts numerous social events, including quiz nights, barbecues and lunches. These are important to postgraduate students as many, especially dedicated research students, may lead a fairly isolated life. Therefore it is imperative they are given the opportunity to interact with other postgraduates and establish themselves within the postgraduate community.

The Association organises the annual *AUPGSA Awards* to recognise outstanding service to postgraduate students. Students nominate individuals (general and academic staff) and departments that have provided outstanding assistance in their research, studies or in navigating through postgraduate student life at the University of Adelaide.

The Research Training Scheme (RTS) places more pressures on postgraduate students than ever before. Therefore, the AUPGSA has significant experience assisting the growing number of postgraduate students with problems and finding ways to alleviate and cope with these stresses. We also have an established an excellent working relationship with the Graduate Centre and other parts of the University administration that are essential for meeting the needs of our members.

Objectives of the AUPGSA

The Objectives of the Adelaide University Postgraduate Students' Association are to represent students enrolled for postgraduate courses of study at the University of Adelaide (hereinafter referred to as the University) and members of the Association:

- (a) To provide an independent voice for, and promote the interests of, the postgraduate community of the University;
- (b) To work with the Board of the Adelaide University Union, and with the University, to secure the objectives of the Adelaide University Union;
- (c) To promote interdepartmental academic and social contact between members of the Association;
- (d) To disseminate information of interest to members of the Association;
- (e) To obtain amenities and services for students enrolled for postgraduate courses of study in the University and for members of the Association.²

Representation

As the peak postgraduate student body at the University of Adelaide, the AUPGSA represents its members on a wide range of committees and boards across the University and the Adelaide University Union. We are regularly invited to speak and/or participate at Alumni events and postgraduate inductions, also supervisory training workshops. In addition, the AUPGSA is represented at the national level by the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA), of which the AUPGSA is a member.

AUPGSA provision of information to members

The AUPGSA publishes submissions and reports, information booklets and pamphlets, newsletters, and other publications on a frequent basis.

Website: The Association maintains a website that includes contact details, information about our functions and services, and copies of our publications.

Magazine: *cubed*³ is the AUPGSA's new magazine, and is published quarterly. Its predecessor, *Clever Country* was published from July 1991 until December 2003.

Annual Report: AUPGSA produces an *Annual Report*.

Postgraduate Student Handbook: The AUPGSA publishes an annual *Postgraduate Student Handbook* that contains information relating to all aspects of postgraduate study.

Discipline Representative Kit: The AUPGSA's *Discipline Representative Kit* contains information designed to help Discipline, School and Faculty representatives operate as effectively as possible.

Submissions and Reports: The AUPGSA's Research Officer was and will again be engaged in ongoing research and produces submissions and reports on a wide range of issues that affect postgraduate students.

² *Constitution of the Adelaide University Postgraduate Students' Association Incorporated*, as adopted 25 March 2004, 2

Pamphlets: The AUPGSA publishes pamphlets about intellectual property and other issues relevant to postgraduate students and their studies.

Email List: The Association maintains an opt-in email list to provide timely updates, and a discussion forum, for members. We expect access to our full list of over 5000 postgraduates will be returned to us in first semester, 2005.

As one can see, the AUPGSA provides a wide variety of services to our members. The AUPGSA believes that its services help to make postgraduate study a positive experience for students at the University of Adelaide. The AUPGSA plays a significant role within the structure of the University, and hopes to continue to do so for many years to come. That said, without the income generated from student fees, the services that the AUPGSA will be able to provide will obviously be limited. The AUPGSA would like to take this opportunity to reassure the Senate Committee that we do not indulge in political activism in any form nor do we have any aspirations to do so! Our aim at the AUPGSA is simply to provide our members with the services and support they both require and desire during their enrolment and throughout their period of study at the University of Adelaide.



Monash Postgraduate Association Inc (MPA)

Statement from the Monash Postgraduate Association Inc. (MPA)

The Monash Postgraduate Association (MPA) represents postgraduate interests and provides services to over 14,500 postgraduates at Monash University.

The MPA receives approximately \$36 per postgraduate from the amenities fee collected by the university on behalf of the student associations and other service providers. With this funding, the MPA provides postgraduate-specific services and activities across all six Victorian campuses of Monash University, as well as at several off-campus locations such as the Alfred Hospital complex and the Monash Medical Centre. The MPA services extend across all faculties and are provided in direct response to the needs of both coursework postgraduates and research postgraduates.

The MPA services include:

- campus-specific **orientation information packs** and sessions
- **orientation sessions** and information packs tailored to research postgraduates
- weekly **email news service** advertising internal postgraduate-specific information (eg seminars, scholarships) and external (eg. government initiatives such as Young Achiever schemes)
- MPA **website** as a source of information for postgraduates
- **academic seminars** and workshops
- an annual **careers fair**, connecting postgraduates with potential employers
- **advice and advocacy** on issues such as supervision, intellectual property, course quality and equity
- **social events** to create a sense of community and to combat the isolation experienced by many postgraduates, particularly international postgraduates
- **quality assurance** role
- open **forums** to provide a mechanism to collect and feed back student concerns to the university
- **lobbying** academic and administrative bodies within the university to improve policies, administrative structures, facilities and services in line with postgraduate needs
- postgraduate-specific **research projects** (eg Women in Research)
- **postgraduate representation** on university committees and boards, allowing postgraduates to participate in the decision-making processes of the university
- **English conversation** classes for international postgraduates
- **publications:**
 - The MPA Guide to Postgraduate Programs*, semesters one and two
 - Compass*, the annual postgraduate magazine
 - Postgraduate Student Statistics*, produced annually

To ensure continuity and quality of services and activities across all six Victorian campuses, the MPA employs 2 full-time staff and 4 part-time staff to carry out the core business of the association, under the direction of the elected postgraduate committee. This enables the MPA to provide professional-level services within a stable environment.

The MPA is externally audited every six months and ensures accountability to the Monash postgraduate community through transparency of financial and operational records. The MPA is an incorporated body and as such, complies with the requirements of the Incorporated Associations Act.

Postgraduates need and expect the university to provide appropriate support services to assist them to gain their qualifications. Many postgraduates also expect that their university experience will not only provide a formal qualification, but opportunities to engage in the wider postgraduate community: to network, to socialise and to cement professional relationships that will extend beyond the duration of their degrees.

Passing the proposed VSU legislation will mean that postgraduates will lose essential academic and social support services and Australia's ability to attract international postgraduates will be greatly diminished.



The Tasmania University Postgraduate Association TUPA

The Tasmania University Postgraduate Association, TUPA, is the peak representative organisation for the University of Tasmania's 1800 postgraduate students. In the course of its history, TUPA has introduced reforms, made representations on the behalf of postgraduate students, provided advocacy and speedy professional advice for those in need of it and have worked to reduce the social and educational barriers of advanced tertiary education at a regional institution.

The University of Tasmania is a research-intensive university, a fact demonstrated in the breakdown of its constituency. Of our postgraduate constituency, 795 are equivalent full-time student load enrolled in a Masters or Doctoral research degree, with a total research cohort of 1139 including part time candidates and submitted candidates. The University of Tasmania currently has a burgeoning Graduate Coursework programme, with numbers now exceeding 800, with many of these students belonging to Tasmania's growing international student cohort.

Three quarters of the University of Tasmania's postgraduate community is committed to full time study and are more professional, disciplined and mature in the pursuit of their degree than their undergraduate counterparts. As the average age of a postgraduate at the University of Tasmania is thirty-five, significantly higher than its peer institutions, the experience and demands of our postgraduate constituency is considerably different to that of traditional student unions.

As a postgraduate- to-postgraduate service, TUPA is concerned with the facilitation of a genial and productive atmosphere. In the pursuit of convivial environment we have a triple mandate of **Advocacy**, **Community** and **Representation**. This mandate, begun and annually reviewed since a review of three years ago, has ensured increased participation and positive feedback from our postgraduate students.

TUPA provides a comprehensive **Advocacy** service for postgraduates within the University and has made available, when necessary, legal aid and representation. The advocacy TUPA provides limits the occasion of litigation, as it provides an opportunity for potential problems to be resolved before a postgraduate feels that the only reasonable course of action is litigation. For the purpose of this advocacy, TUPA employs a professional advocate removing concerns of well-intentioned but amateur endeavour and ensuring the best result from the complainant postgraduate.

As a regional university, physically separated from the mainland by more than mere distance, a feeling of **Community** is an important counter to the sensation of isolation and

alienation common to postgraduate study. The creation and maintenance of intellectual and peer community is especially important in our regional University and its more isolated campuses. An extensive year round programme of social functions and professional development workshops ensures that should postgraduates desire to abjure the atomisation of professional research, lab work and coursework they are encouraged and welcome to do so. TUPA also coordinates a presentation series with the University of the Third Age, allowing our members to share their research with an attentive audience and be included in an important community project. The content and execution of the social and professional development programmes has been tailored to the demographics of the University of Tasmania's three main campuses, and has secured a high level of participation and positive feedback. The tailoring of events has seen a recognition of family commitments and professional working hours, and so TUPA now includes family film nights, breakfasts, palate appreciation courses, information technology workshops and taxation advice presentations.

Despite the advocacy and community aspects of our mandate in ensuring a productive and enjoyable time at the University, internal and external forces may conspire to cause grief to in a postgraduate's time at the university. The alleviation of this grief is the chief purpose of TUPA's role in **Representation** to the University, the State and Federal Government and private industry. Within the University structure, TUPA holds membership upon the Academic Senate, Research College Board, the Board of Graduate Research, the Services for Students Management Committee and University Teaching and Learning where our advice is sought to gauge feeling and reaction amongst the postgraduate community as to the direction of the University. Where advocacy focuses on the individual and problems that have already occurred, representation attempts to prevent the problem from occurring in the first place.

It is pertinent to note that TUPA maintains an apolitical and impartial stance in all presentations and associations, so as to facilitate communication with any group or individual, regardless of political stance, in the best interests of our community.

TUPA is an organisation respected and consulted with by the University and a service provider that gives direct, useful and tangible services to its members. The absence of TUPA would be noted not just by our members, but by the University and the local community also.



The University of Western Australia Postgraduate Students' Association UWA PSA

The PSA represents all postgraduates enrolled at UWA and has historically done so, regardless of whether or not student fees have been collected. In 2004, the PSA represented 4129 postgraduates or 2666.2 EFTSL.³ Of these students, 1752 were enrolled in Higher Degree by Research programmes, whilst 2377 were undertaking postgraduate coursework. The vast majority of UWA postgraduates are onshore students with only 588 students based offshore. 24.92 percent of the postgraduate body at UWA is made up of international students.

In terms of demographics, the UWA Postgraduate body differs significantly from the undergraduate body. For example, 81.3 percent of the postgraduate research body is aged 25 or over, and 55.6 percent is aged 30 or over. The average age of coursework postgraduates is even higher, with 84.2 percent aged 25 or over and 62.4 percent aged 30 or over. Further, 57.3 percent of all postgraduates are part-time students. This figure can be separated into the research and coursework divide:

35.7 percent of all research students are part-time

73.5 percent of all coursework students are part-time

The nature of the postgraduate body at UWA necessitates a unique set of services which are provided with the aim of ensuring that the experience of a postgraduate student at UWA is positive in every way. The PSA believes that it provides a significant level of these services to postgraduates at UWA.

The PSA considers itself a service provider and attempts to ensure that postgraduates at UWA are provided with the support they require throughout their period of study. Given the large number of full-time postgraduate Research students, many of whom are on campus for at least 48 weeks of the year, the PSA's elected committee, a body consisting of 21 individuals, is dominated by research students. That said, the PSA's Constitution requires that at least one committee position is filled by a coursework student. PSA Committee members also provide representation for special needs groups, such as international postgraduates and queer postgraduates.

The UWA PSA's services are best categorised by five major themes: *Communication, Social Interaction, Representation, Support, and Advocacy*. Over the last three years, following the introduction of an Amenities and Services Fee (A&S Fee) in Western

³ Effective Full-Time Student Load

Australia, the UWA PSA has been able to greatly expand the level and quality of the services we offer to postgraduates. The loss of the A&S Fee would impact significantly on the scale of services offered to postgraduates.

In terms of *Communication*, the PSA provides postgraduates with a regularly updated website advertising PSA and UWA events, as well as information from the sector such as notices from the Australian Federation of University Women. The PSA also provides a regular (every 7-10 days) electronic newsletter, *PSA News* to postgraduate subscribers, and has recently re-launched its thrice yearly publication *Postscript* which is mailed to all postgraduate students. Additionally, the PSA participates in the University's orientation period at the start of each semester. This involves providing stalls at induction events and 'Orientation Day', as well as hosting PSA events such as a special welcome for international students and a sun-downer for all postgraduate students aimed particularly at welcoming new students to the University.

Perhaps the most important parts of the PSA's communications programme are the information events we hold. These include:

Careers Week: a three day series of seminars, launched in 2004, which highlight the skills and employability of postgraduate research and coursework students. In 2004 approximately a quarter of all enrolled research students attended the various seminars held during the week.

Research Week: a newly launched four day programme which provides information on the various stages of graduate research for prospective honours and postgraduate researchers; as well as current research students who have questions pertaining to their candidature.

These events bring together the postgraduate community, the University and outside stakeholders and provide postgraduates with opportunity to learn and gather important information, to interact with other postgraduate students, as well as providing postgraduates with an opportunity to become familiar with both academic and general staff who can provide advice and guidance in both research training and career development.

The PSA recently hosted a seminar on supervision where postgraduate research students were able to talk openly about their expectations of supervision and the way in which they believed supervisors and postgraduates should interact. The results of this seminar were presented by the PSA Committee to new supervisors undergoing a staff training programme run by the University. This event highlights the way in which the PSA works to aid in the improvement of the quality of supervision and teaching provided at UWA.

Social Interaction is particularly important for postgraduate research students, many of whom have a tendency to lose track of time in the office or lab and forget about the need to communicate with others effectively. The PSA attempts to encourage postgraduate interaction whenever possible not only through our information events, but through social events such as the PSA Quiz night, PSA Sports Day, morning and afternoon teas, and sundowners.

The PSA takes its role in student *Representation* very seriously. PSA committee members serve on UWA committees from the UWA Senate, the University's governing body, down to the Faculty and School level. The PSA also serves on review panels and interview panels for prospective staff members in areas related to postgraduate study. The PSA works hard to

foster a positive relationship with the University and works closely with the Graduate Research School and Student Services. In an effort to ensure effective representation, the PSA often undertakes comparative research to ensure that UWA Postgraduates are provided with the best possible resources and learning environment. The PSA believes that by representing the views of postgraduate students at all levels of the University, we are able to ensure that the vast majority of postgraduates are able to progress through their studies worry free. Given the significant number of part-time students, especially amongst the postgraduate course-work cohort, the PSA feels it is essential that students' interests are represented during those periods where they are not on campus.

In terms of *Support* offered to postgraduate students, the PSA offers a series of grants and awards. These include, the Convocation/PSA Travel Awards. Since the introduction of the A&S Fee, the PSA has entered into a partnership with the UWA Alumni Association to provide merit based travel awards to postgraduate students. The PSA now provides up to ten PSA Conference Travel Awards aimed at postgraduates nearing the end of their candidature with limited travel funds available who wish to present significant findings at a conference. The PSA also offers small grants which foster cross-disciplinary interaction between postgraduates. These funds are generally used to hold seminars and to help defray the costs of visiting scholars. The PSA also provides additional services such as the free use of a lounge for postgraduate events; and free access to the PSA's printer.

The UWA PSA is also able to provide *Advocacy* for postgraduates with grievances against the University. The advocacy system relies in part upon research conducted by the PSA committee and staff and practical information gathered from PSA committee representatives. The PSA's advocacy tasks are greatly enhanced by the positive relationship we have with the University, whose policy is to direct students with a grievance to one of our advocates.

The PSA believes that the services we provide can both enhance the experience a postgraduate has whilst studying at UWA, and ensure that the University's processes always take into account the concerns of the postgraduate community. In light of our experiences during the state imposed ban on student fees, the PSA recognises that the level of services we will be able to provide will decline significantly if collection of the A&S Fee ended. Events such as our semester welcomes, Research Week and Careers Week will cease. Likewise, the grants the PSA provides will be significantly reduced or stopped altogether. The UWA PSA urges the Senate to amend the legislation before it, so that Amenities and Services Fees for essential non-political activities on university campuses can continue to be collected.

Natalie Mast | UWA PSA President, 2005
ngmast@cyllene.uwa.edu.au



University of Melbourne Postgraduate Students' Association:

Introduction to UMPA

UMPA is the student union for postgraduates at the University of Melbourne. On 7th February 1994, UMPA became an incorporated association and at the same time was formally recognised by the University as an autonomous representative student organisation in University statute 15.3. This marked UMPA's transformation from an essentially voluntary organisation (with minimal paid part-time support, begrudgingly provided by Melbourne University Student Union) to a recognised legal entity with its own annual funding agreement, lease agreements and a mandate to be a provider of a range of academic, representative and support services for postgraduates.

As is the common practice at universities throughout Australia, all postgraduate students at the University of Melbourne are members of UMPA, unless they indicate at enrolment that they do not wish to be members. In 2004, there were 12,160 postgraduate students at the University (7,760.6 EFT). (Source: University Planning Office) Again as is common practice, the University collects an "Amenities and Services fee" from all students, and they are required to pay this irrespective of whether or not they have indicated their wish not to be members.

This is an important point in the context of the expressed aims of the proposed legislation. The University of Melbourne, in common with all Australian and indeed overseas universities, sees a distinction between a general fee that all students are required to pay for the provision of services to all in their university community, and the membership of an organisation of students which should be, and indeed is, voluntary. Postgraduate students at Melbourne who do not wish to take part in the democratic representative processes of UMPA do not have to. But they are provided with access to all the services by virtue of paying their fee.

The Likely Effect of the Legislation on the Provision of Student Services, and Related Consequences:

As has been noted, the key thrust of the proposed legislation is the outlawing of compulsory non-academic fees rather than the fictitious compulsory membership of student organisations. As funding from the Amenities and Services fee represents just over 90% of the UMPA budget, virtually all of UMPA's services would disappear were the bill to be passed. Below is the detail of the services and facilities currently provided to postgraduate students.

Events and Activities

Events for the year begin with the welcome dinner for AusAID students and the orientation BBQ lunch on the lawns of the Graduate Centre and have included trivia nights, family events (Cinema on the Lawn), art exhibitions, and the annual Postgraduate

Ball, daytrips around Victoria (including the Victorian Parliament and AFL football matches), and food and music nights.

Many of these events are provided free of charge to postgraduates or are heavily subsidised by UMPA. Where a fee is charged, there is frequently a distinction between members and non members. This year and in Semester Two of 2004, the Communications Group began experimenting with cost recovery charges with some interesting results. There is evidence to suggest that postgraduates were price sensitive on particular events and certain price points were a disincentive for participation. Many events are designed to attract participation by Postgraduate Groups. Apart from promoting cross-disciplinary interaction, part of the Postgraduate Group funding granted by UMPA is paid back to UMPA through the group members' participation in UMPA events.

University Committee Representation and Research

According to the UMPA Inc. Constitution (see Appendix 3) Section 17 Clause (4):

"The council determines who the postgraduate representatives on University committees shall be." In order to fulfil this crucial role in maximising postgraduate student involvement in the decision making processes of the University, UMPA has established a Postgraduate Representatives Network (PRN). The extent of this network, and the vital role it plays in the governance of the University can be seen from the following table indicating the status of the postgraduate representatives on central University committees.

Funding for Postgraduate Activities: The Student Initiatives Scheme provides funds for students in academic locations where a postgraduate group does not yet exist; This scheme has funded postgraduate retreats, seminars, conferences and the publication of some postgraduate journals.

UMPA's Postgraduate Groups Scheme: The Postgraduate Groups Scheme provides on-going funding for groups of students organised around a department, faculty, centre, campus or other academic location. There are currently 49 groups affiliated to UMPA. Groups are eligible for \$900 to \$1200 per year and are granted funding for events or activities that are permitted within the terms of the Tertiary Education Act (Victoria). UMPA provided more than \$20,000 in total to postgraduate groups throughout 2004.

Advocacy:

UMPA's team of staff advisers provides independent advice and support to postgraduates, as well as researching issues affecting postgraduates. Casework includes support and advocacy at student disciplinary and appeals hearings. Common issues on which students seek advice include academic rights, administrative issues, assessment appeals, grievances, discrimination, sexual harassment issues, women's issues, international student issues, casual academic employment issues and academic supervision issues. Seeing so many postgraduates enables UMPA's advisers to identify trends and to inform, negotiate with, and lobby the University on necessary systemic changes.

Publications

UMPA publications include:

- The quarterly magazine *Postgraduate Review (PGR)*, mailed out to all postgraduate student members;

- *360 Degrees*, an all-round guide for postgraduates at the University of Melbourne. Available from UMPA Reception and via the UMPA web site;
 - UMPA's *Thesis Writing Guide* which can be purchased at UMPA for \$2;
 - *Traffic*, a refereed interdisciplinary postgraduate journal, available by subscription or from UMPA Reception for \$12.
- UMPA News, the fortnightly email subscription newsletter

General Services:

UMPA Reception provides thousands of students with assistance, information and referral, ranging from detailed information about University facilities to coordinating bookings for postgraduate events. Reception also processes applications for 24-hour access cards to the Graduate Centre. There are now over 2,500 after-hours access swipe card holders. The Graduate Centre has 70 carrel spaces, which can be used on a shared basis and which provide postgraduates with a computer and a room to study.

UMPA's Graduate Publishing Centre computer lab provides postgraduates with round the-clock access to Macs and PCs, along with scanners and graphics software. UMPA staff members are available to assist students in the use of these resources during office hours. UMPA's print room offers many services, including printing and binding students' documents on a cost recovery basis.

Outreach

The Outreach program provides services to postgraduates studying at non-Parkville locations. The program is delivered by the Outreach Officer who, together with UMPA Council members, attended and made presentations at 60 faculty and departmental inductions in 2004. Services included the delivery of UMPA's seminar program to non-Parkville locations and regular visits to campuses and locations across Victoria. In 2004, more than 30 visits were also made to metropolitan outstations, including the Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute, and the Royal Melbourne, Royal Children's, Austin Repatriation, St. Vincent's, the Alfred and the Northern Hospitals. The Outreach Officer meets with individuals and groups of students to discuss issues of concern regarding postgraduate study, and to relay information about the services and facilities available to students.

Conclusion

As we pointed out in the preamble, the simple but accurate answer to the question about the effects of the proposed VSU legislation is that all the services and facilities outlined above will cease to exist, along with the employment of the 19 staff who provide them. The withdrawal of funds from student associations will also mean, for example, that the funds can no longer be distributed to clubs and societies that are acknowledged by universities themselves to be an essential part of the campus experience. This will have a particular impact on international students and on groups such as Queer students for whom it is essential that there are groups and spaces dedicated to their interests and needs.

It might well be argued that if the services are seen as an essential component of students' university experience, then the University will continue to provide them. There is the obvious question of where the University will find the \$12.68 million to replace the Amenities and Services fee revenue. The most obvious answer, in a context where the proportion of university income from student fees continues to rise, is that universities will

increase course fees to make up the shortfall. This will be acutely felt by postgraduate students who have borne the brunt of a deregulated fee regime for the past seven years. An analysis of postgraduate coursework fees at the University of Melbourne shows an average fee rise of 61% from 2001 to 2005, with some course fees rising by over 100% in that time. All that is likely to happen for most postgraduates is that what they save in an Amenities and Services fee they will lose in an increased course fee.

The equity issues related to this are also important. As was shown in UMPA's recent submission to the Senate Inquiry into Student Income Support (see:

<http://www.umpa.unimelb.edu.au/publications/umpareports.html> Paper No. 27) the living costs for student at the University of Melbourne are such that few students have much disposable income. The situation is particularly acute for APA scholarship holders who are expected to act as the equivalent of a full-time worker on just \$18,837. This illustrates just how risible is the notion that students will gladly pay for all the services they use, and will gladly fund the clubs, societies and activities they see as important. Those students who have independent sources of income, or who can be subsidised by wealthy parents may well be in a position to do so. But the majority of students, particularly postgraduate students who have passed the age of asking mummy or daddy for help, will not be in a position to pay anything other than their course fees and living expenses, and the moderate amount required in the Amenities and Services fee so that less well-off students are not discriminated against in service provision because of their inability to pay.

But more importantly, there is the question of independence and student control. While it may seem irrelevant who organises the subsidised social events and so on, the fact that it is done by students themselves (or professional staff implementing the decisions and directions of elected students) is the key point. From the practical point of view, student direction of student services leads to more appropriate service delivery. A perfect example is the position of Outreach Officer created at UMPA in 2003 following an extensive survey of the whole of UMPA's membership (see:<http://www.umpa.unimelb.edu.au/publications/umpareports.html> Paper No. 15). No such equivalent position exists at the University providing services to students who are based away from the main campus. The establishment of the Women's and Queer officer positions on UMPA council is also a result of student lobbying.

Only with fundamental student control over the spending of their money is there any chance of a truly democratic program of events and services that truly represent student interests as opposed to a patronising provision to students on whom are imposed the responsibilities of adults but from whom are expected the choices of children.



Submission Conclusion:

The aim of this submission has been to highlight a condensed list of the services currently provided to research candidates and postgraduate coursework students represented by the postgraduate associations which form the Research Intensive Consortium.

The objective of the petitioning postgraduate associations is essentially to maximise the experience of postgraduates enrolled at the leading research-orientated universities in Australia, enabling postgraduates to attain the best results from their degrees and assisting the parent university in better understanding the issues which postgraduates face.

You have read that, as a student constituency, postgraduates range in experience and expectation and are engaged variously in part- or full-time study, sometimes with family and often with employment (be it external or university-based) commitments. Postgraduates are concerned with the quality of their education; are professional in their pursuit of this goal and are deservedly demanding of services to facilitate their completion.

This submission has highlighted the need for the provision of advocacy in unfortunate and unforeseen circumstances, as well as the importance of representation on university bodies to ensure institutional awareness of postgraduate concerns. The diversity of the postgraduate student body necessitates different approaches to welfare, in both the context of physical recreation and mental wellbeing. The members of the RIC are experienced in these necessities and sympathetic to the concerns of postgraduate welfare. It is this experience and sympathy that universities are often removed from and thus unable to provide, resulting in a net loss for the student and the university.

The submission has also outlined the growing demand amongst postgraduates for the supply of professional information to aid in employment and personal development. The RIC contends that our associations are currently providing these crucial elements to postgraduates; however, if the collection of amenities and services fees were to cease, then the quality and indeed, in many cases, the basic provision of services to postgraduates would be severely compromised.

The RIC is sympathetic of the Government's concerns regarding the usage of student funds for non-student issues, yet contends that safeguards could easily be put in place to prevent such abuses, thereby continuing to provide Australian and international students with the well-rounded educational experience previous generations have enjoyed.

By removing our primary source of income, the provision of the services that the members of the RIC provide would become at best tokenistic, and at worst non-existent. The RIC believes that the downscaling and, in the long term, possible absence of postgraduate associations will result in less attractive universities for an increasingly mobile, informed and demanding professional student population. The continued presence of these associations will, however, provide incentives for domestic and international interest and enrolments in Australian universities.