



Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations Incorporated

July 16th 2007

Mr John Carter
Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Carter,

RE: Inquiry into the *Social Security Amendment (2007 Budget Measures for Students) Bill 2007*

The Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) is the peak body representing Australia's 264,000 postgraduate students. This submission focuses on the sections of the Bill of most relevance to postgraduate students.

Rent Assistance

CAPA is pleased to observe that this Bill extends eligibility for rent assistance to Austudy recipients, and notes that this change addresses part of recommendation 2a in CAPA's submission to the Senate's *Inquiry into Student Income Support Measures (2004)*.

Access to Youth Allowance and Austudy for some Masters Students

CAPA acknowledges the extension of eligibility for Youth Allowance and Austudy to students enrolled in a limited number of Masters courses. This measure addresses part of recommendation 1 in CAPA's submission to the Senate's *Inquiry into Student Income Support Measures (2004)*, and confirms the critical need in this area as identified in the recent Universities Australia report, *Australian University Student Finances 2006*. It should be noted however that this measure is recognised only as a preliminary step in addressing this need, and in responding to measures in this bill CAPA would like to identify the following outstanding concerns:

Course Eligibility

Under measures in this Bill, only students in approved courses will be eligible to apply for income support, and universities must apply to have their Masters courses approved. Only Masters courses required for entry to a profession, or exist as a result of a course restructure, will be eligible. Course eligibility is to be at the

discretion of the Minister in accordance with the relevant Guidelines (yet to be released).

In recent Budget Estimates hearings the Department of Education Science and Training estimated that 920 Masters students in approved courses would be eligible for income support in 2008, increasing to approximately 1,470 in 2010. The most recent full-year data on enrolments published by DEST (2005) shows that there are 73,570 domestic Masters by coursework students. This estimate, along with the course eligibility requirements outlined above, suggests that these measures in their current form will allow access to income support to only a very small number of students in this group, and therefore fail to address the genuine need that has been identified in this area.

Recommendation 1:

Any specific eligibility requirements for Masters courses be removed, allowing all Masters courses eligibility under this Bill.

Recommendation 2:

Access to income support be extended to all students studying at postgraduate level to include both coursework and research higher degrees, regardless of the nature of the course in which they are enrolled.

Base Rates for Youth Allowance and Austudy

The recent Universities Australia report, *Australian University Student Finances 2006*, identified postgraduate coursework students in particular as enduring tough financial circumstances. Many of these students return to study later in life, often after a career change, and are more likely to be faced with challenging financial circumstances including a greater debt load through course fees, carer responsibilities and other on-going financial commitments. The current rates for Youth Allowance and Austudy place many students in extreme poverty. Even with access to rent assistance, most students are unable to live on income support alone, let alone those challenged with additional financial commitments and responsibilities.

Recommendation 3:

The base rates of Youth Allowance and Austudy be raised to, and remain above, the relevant Henderson Poverty Line.

Recommendation 4:

The age of independence be reduced to 18 years of age to bring it into line with most other measures of social and financial responsibility.

The Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) welcomes the opportunity to offer a submission for this inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nigel Palmer'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Nigel' and last name 'Palmer' clearly distinguishable.

Nigel Palmer
National President
Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA)