Postgraduate services and support at Monash University

A discussion paper in anticipation of the introduction of the Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) in 2012.

October 2011
1. Executive summary

The Federal Government has passed legislation that allows Australian universities to introduce a Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) in 2012. In anticipation of Monash University’s decision to introduce the SSAF across all of its campuses, the Monash Postgraduate Association (MPA) has compiled this paper on behalf of the Monash postgraduate community.

As of Friday 28 October, the university is proposing the following 2012 student funding distribution:

- Undergraduate funding: $101 per undergraduate
- Postgraduate funding: $42 per postgraduate

Under the university’s funding proposal, undergraduate student organisations have been directly allocated a significant proportion of the fees that will be collected from postgraduate students. Undergraduate organisations are governed by undergraduate students, which precludes these organisations from understanding and representing the interests and experiences of postgraduate students. In contrast, the MPA, which is the Monash Council recognised official representative organisation for all Monash postgraduates, is exclusively governed by postgraduates, and so is ideally positioned to provide targeted and effective services to the Monash postgraduate cohort. The MPA conservatively estimates an annual saving to the University of over $2 million as a result of its advocacy service alone. Accordingly, the University must view its funding of the MPA as a valuable investment in a vital asset, rather than just an expense.

By way of comparison, the University of Melbourne’s Graduate Students Association (GSA) represents approximately the same number of postgraduates as the MPA, albeit with an annual budget of $1,305,000; more than double the MPA budget. Furthermore, the GSA has 9 FTE staff and 2.5 FTE advocates, whilst the MPA has only 4.7 FTE staff and 1 FTE advocate.

In light of the above and the information contained herein, the MPA strongly recommends that the university instate student service funding parity between its undergraduates and postgraduates, by increasing the MPA’s funding level in 2012 and beyond.
2. Introduction

The Federal Government recently passed legislation to allow the introduction of a Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF), which enables universities to levy an annual charge of up to $264 (indexed to 2012) per full-time student to support specific services. At Monash University, many of these specific services are already offered by its recognised student associations. This paper raises a number of issues for discussion, including:

- the university’s proposed distribution of SSAF funds in 2012 and beyond;
- additional services and support mechanisms that could be provided to postgraduates at Monash University;
- the SSAF fee structure; and
- the process for allocating funding to student associations.

If Monash University is to remain competitive in the global higher education market, it is imperative that it provides postgraduate support services that are targeted, effective and professional. As the primary provider of postgraduate-tailored support programs and services at Monash, the Monash Postgraduate Association (MPA) plays a pivotal role in this aspect of the university’s endeavours. The MPA is the only recognised student organisation that is exclusively governed by an elected committee of postgraduates, who represent a diverse range of Monash postgraduate groups and experiences, which uniquely positions the MPA to represent and serve the interests of all Monash postgraduates.

Whilst the MPA exists primarily for the benefit of the postgraduate community, its activities undoubtedly help the university to recruit, retain and successfully graduate students. For this reason, the MPA’s activities underpin the university’s core business of teaching and research. With preparation for the TEQSA review currently underway, the university should ensure that every possible support is provided to the area of research training; a focus of the forthcoming review. Given sufficient funding, the MPA has the potential to make a significant contribution to the improvement of support for HDR postgraduates across all Monash campuses within the next 12 months.

The academic and social support services provided by the MPA across all six Victorian campuses, at the Sunway campus and at numerous off-campus locations are highly valued by postgraduates and the university community alike. However, these services are severely constrained by the MPA’s current resourcing. In combination with a steady growth in postgraduate numbers over the past decade, the introduction of the SSAF provides the university with a unique opportunity to review its distribution of the postgraduate student service fee. The chief objective of such a review should be to ensure that postgraduate needs in 2012 and beyond are supported in parity with the level of support that undergraduates will receive.

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1 See Section 8 for the historical distribution of the postgraduate amenities fee.
2 See Section 9 for the comparison of funding differences between Monash student associations.
3. Summary of postgraduate services at Monash University

The MPA represents and provides services and support to all coursework and research postgraduates on all Victorian campuses and off-campus locations including the Alfred Medical Research and Education Precinct (AMREP), the Monash Medical Centre (MMC) and the Law Chambers. Although the MPA does not represent honours students, the MPA’s services and support are extended to this cohort, who identify more readily with HDR postgraduates than with undergraduates (with whom they are classified) and seek out MPA services. In addition, the MPA provides advocacy services to postgraduates on the Sunway campus in Malaysia. The MPA’s extension of services to Sunway postgraduates and also to honours students is currently unfunded.

The Parkville Postgraduate Association (PPA), which is affiliated with the MPA, provides campus-specific services to postgraduates located on the Parkville campus. The PPA negotiates their funding directly from the university, which is paid through the MPA for administrative convenience, as the PPA is not an incorporated body. The PPA is relatively well funded for their size. The Gippsland Association of Postgraduates (GAPS), which is a part of the undergraduate student association on the Gippsland campus and receives their funding through that body ($2,000 per year), provides very limited services to postgraduates at Gippsland. Finally, the Monash University Postgraduate Association (MUPA) provides campus-based services to postgraduates located on the Sunway campus, but is severely underfunded.

The governance of the MPA by an annually elected postgraduate body means that services and activities are continually under discussion, regularly evaluated and where necessary, modified to ensure that they remain relevant to changes in the postgraduate cohort and the higher education sector. Postgraduate fora held on every Victorian campus each semester allow for the wider postgraduate community to participate in the direction of the activities of the MPA.

International postgraduates are extensive users of MPA services, particularly social events and events that provide opportunities to make academic and business contacts. International postgraduates are especially subject to isolation and can find it very difficult to assimilate. The MPA’s events are often the only opportunity that international postgraduates have to establish contact with other postgraduates and become involved with the Monash postgraduate community.

Finally, all of the MPA’s services and activities combine to provide another important, but less tangible, role that the MPA plays, which is that of creating a postgraduate community. Feeling part of a community provides many benefits to postgraduates, but perhaps the greatest benefit is that of peer support. This is particularly important for international and interstate postgraduates, who may not have access to the usual support networks of family and friends. As an international university, Monash should provide opportunities to celebrate cultural diversity and learn from international experiences. The MPA does exactly this through its social and community events.

In addition to the above, the MPA’s core services include:

- Advocacy, including support through APC, discipline and grievance procedures
- Intellectual property advice
- Coordination of postgraduate representatives on university boards and committees
- Onsite fora for information dissemination and to elicit postgraduate feedback
• Quality assurance through responses to university reviews
• Advice and feedback to the university to improve policies, procedures and programs
• Campus-wide postgraduate orientation programs
• Participation in faculty, school and department orientations
• Triple E program for HDR postgraduates
• MPA Excellence seminar program
• MPA Supervisor of the Year competition
• Coordination of a central calendar of postgraduate-specific programs
• Information dissemination via email news subscription and website (updated daily)
• Social functions such as trivia nights, free lunches, HDR nights at the University Club and postgraduate balls (with the University of Melbourne)
• MPA outdoor activity club

In addition to running its own programs, the MPA works collaboratively with a wide range of university central and faculty-based units, including MRGS, ECD, Library learning units, HDR faculty units, and eSolutions to offer jointly-run programs and develop new initiatives. The MPA acts as a repository for postgraduate-specific programs, with the MPA online calendars bringing together all of the postgraduate-specific events from all of the different service providers across the university, providing postgraduates with convenient and easy access to vital information.

The MPA believes that the current level of postgraduate services at Clayton, Caulfield and Parkville are, at best, an absolute minimum for a university of Monash’s stature and reputation. However, postgraduate services at Berwick, Peninsula, Gippsland, AMREP and MMC are currently subpar.

For a comprehensive list of the MPA’s postgraduate services please see Attachment B.
4. The MPA’s financial contribution to the university

The MPA’s work in providing academic support to postgraduates through improving practices and policies, providing advice and advocacy and generally maintaining quality assurance in supervision and course delivery has a significant effect on the university’s ability to attract and retain funding.

Every HDR completion has an estimated worth to the university of between $30,000 and $100,000. The 2010 MPA casework statistics show that 100 of the cases handled in 2010 were HDR postgraduates with ‘serious’ issues. Had they not been resolved by the MPA, the majority of these postgraduates may not have completed at all, either dropping out or transferring to another university. In either case, Monash loses funding under the current RTS scheme. A very conservative estimate of 50 HDR postgraduates with serious issues resolved by the MPA, at $30,000 per student, would result in a saving for the university of $1,500,000 per annum.

Fee-paying coursework postgraduates also come to the MPA to raise issues that affect their decision as to whether to continue or withdraw from courses. The cost of fee-paying postgraduate courses ranges from $2,000 to $45,000 per year. Withdrawal from a course prior to completion results in a loss of income to the university, and with MPA staff seeing over 100 coursework postgraduates each year with serious issues, the potential loss of income becomes significant. A conservative estimate of 50 coursework postgraduates with serious issues resolved by the MPA, at $10,000 per student, would result in a saving for the university of $500,000.

Neither calculation takes into account the loss of any associated scholarship funding, the cost of time invested in resolving these issues by senior staff and the HDR postgraduates who do not complete their theses within the funded time frame. The total saving for the university would be well over $2,000,000 per annum, just from the MPA Advice and Advocacy service alone. This amount would be a gross underestimate of the total value of the MPA, as additional support services and activities also contribute to retention and completion of postgraduates.

The MPA provides a tangible and measurable financial benefit for the university that is not currently acknowledged or taken into account in the university’s proposed 2012 funding model. The capacity of the university to retain disaffected postgraduates, and hence the associated funding, depends on the effectiveness of the MPA. The MPA should not be seen as a net cost, but instead as a valuable investment for the university.
5. The MPA’s current financial position

The MPA has been operating with a small deficit (approximately $28,000 p.a.) for the last three years, in an effort to maintain minimum services on all six campuses. This deficit has been funded by reducing contract staff and cutting several hardcopy publications, with the remainder being covered by the MPA’s surplus of approximately $200,000.

As an incorporated association, the MPA is required to hold sufficient funds to cover its costs in the event that the association should be closed down. The MPA’s remaining surplus is not sufficient to cover these costs and as part of our 2011 funding agreement, the university kindly committed to partially covering staff redundancy payouts should the need arise. The university also committed an additional $20,000 to the MPA budget in 2011, to provide for additional advocacy services. The MPA would therefore need an additional $48,000 ($20,000 advocacy funding and $28,000 MPA surplus) to the proposed funding levels just to maintain services without further recourse to its surplus.

If the MPA budget is not increased in 2012, the MPA will be forced to reduce staff and services. New initiatives piloted in 2011, such as the MPA Excellence seminar series and the Speaking skills for confirmation of candidature, will not be able to continue.

In addition, the university could address the longstanding inequity between the undergraduate and postgraduate funding. The ramifications of under-funding postgraduates, compounded over the last decade, are immense. As an example, the undergraduate student body on Clayton campus would earn over half the entire MPA budget from their surplus interest alone\(^1\). This is in addition to the annual funding provided by the university.

If the university agreed to direct postgraduate fees to postgraduate services, the MPA would be able to provide a superior level of postgraduate-specific services that would contribute directly to lowering the attrition rate, improving completion times and enhancing the postgraduate academic experience. Some of these potential services are summarised in Section 14.

\(^1\) Calculated on $7 million surplus earning 5% per annum.
6. Postgraduate funding calculations under the university’s proposed model

A. Adjusting the current university model
Under the university’s proposed 2012 funding model⁴, the postgraduate-undergraduate split of the SSAF is as follows:

Total fees for undergraduates = $4,015,729
Total number of undergraduates = 39,673
Amount spent per undergraduate = $101

Total fees for postgraduates = $677,898
Total number of postgraduates = 16,225
Amount spent per postgraduate = $42

Undergraduate services and representation are being funded at 2.5 times the rate that postgraduate services and representation are.

Using this formula, an MPA budget (incorporating PPA and GAPS) of $1,532,440 would be required to bring postgraduate funding into line with undergraduate funding. This also brings the MPA’s funding into line with the University of Melbourne’s GSA funding ($1,305,000)⁵.

B. Calculations based on postgraduate income
Alternatively, we could look at the income likely to be generated from postgraduates in 2012, taking into account the difference in fees between part-time and full-time students.

| Anticipated income from postgraduate amenities fees in 2012 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                 | Full-time numbers⁶ | Fee income $264 | Part-time numbers⁶ | Fee income $132 | Total income by campus |
| Berwick         | 13               | $3,432          | 4                | $528            | $3,960          |
| Caulfield       | 3,777            | $997,128        | 2,326            | $307,032        | $1,304,160      |
| Clayton         | 3,925            | $1,036,200      | 3,918            | $517,176        | $1,553,376      |
| Gippsland       | 269              | $71,016         | 1,026            | $135,432        | $206,442        |
| Parkville       | 117              | $30,888         | 501              | $66,132         | $97,020         |
| Peninsula       | 348              | $91,872         | 520              | $68,640         | $160,512        |
| Subtotals       | 8449             | $2,230,536      | 8295             | $1,094,940      | $3,325,470      |
| Total income    | $3,325,470       |                 |                 |                 |                 |

Under the university’s proposed 2012 funding model⁴, only 17% of the postgraduate amenities fee is directed towards MPA services and representation. Using the same formula to calculate the undergraduate fee income ($11,412,456), we can show that 36% of the undergraduate amenities fee is to be directed towards services and representation provided by the undergraduate student associations; this is double that provided for postgraduates.

Using this formula, an MPA budget (incorporating PPA and GAPS) of $1,197,169 would be required to bring postgraduate funding into line with undergraduate funding. Again, this brings the MPA’s funding more into line with the University of Melbourne’s GSA funding ($1,305,000)⁵.

⁴ See Attachment A for the Monash proposed 2012 funding model.
⁵ See Section 7 for University of Melbourne comparisons.
⁶ 2010 figures provided by the Statistics and Planning Unit pivot tables.
7. Postgraduate funding comparison between Monash University and the University of Melbourne

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2010 data</th>
<th>MPA</th>
<th>GSA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of research postgraduates</td>
<td>4,211</td>
<td>4,755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of coursework postgraduates</td>
<td>12,811</td>
<td>13,810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of campuses/sites where GSA/MPA services are delivered onsite</td>
<td>9 (6 campuses + AMREP, MMC &amp; Law Chambers)</td>
<td>2 Parkville and Burnley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income (ex GST)</td>
<td>$564,472</td>
<td>$1,305,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding per postgraduate</td>
<td>$33</td>
<td>$70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of total staff (full-time equivalent)</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of advocates</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The postgraduate association operating at the University of Melbourne, the Graduate Student Association (GSA) has, over the past ten years, received almost twice the funding received by the MPA, although the number of postgraduates at the two institutions is similar. In addition, the University of Melbourne has offered the GSA the management of a bar and a cafe, both located in the postgraduate precinct. The income from the rent of these two premises has enabled the GSA to establish a source of income independent to the funds received from the university.

As a result of their higher income, the GSA has been able to establish a number of postgraduate services that are not currently provided to postgraduates at Monash. These services include:

- Funding for 70 postgraduate groups at faculty and departmental level
- A print room that provides onsite thermal binding and a drop off/pickup service for hardcover thesis binding.
- A hardcopy full-colour magazine, mailed out to all postgraduates, twice a year.
- A daytrip program that includes 12 trips per year, with a capacity of 20-50 postgraduates per trip.
- A postgraduate centre open to both coursework and research postgraduates with 75 study spaces, run in conjunction with the Research Graduate School.
8. Historical distribution of postgraduate amenities fee

The current distribution of funding between the undergraduate organisations and the postgraduate organisations is still primarily based on the distribution of the postgraduate amenities fee that was in place at the time the VSU legislation was introduced. This distribution is set out below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Berwick</th>
<th>Caulfield</th>
<th>Clayton</th>
<th>Gippsland</th>
<th>Parkville</th>
<th>Peninsula</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MPA</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>MPA 14%</td>
<td>MPA 20%</td>
<td>MPA 0%</td>
<td>MPA 20%</td>
<td>MPA 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSU</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>MONSU/ Monyx 86%</td>
<td>MSA 25%</td>
<td>MUGSU 100%</td>
<td>VCPA 80%</td>
<td>MONSU/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VPSA 0%</td>
<td>Monyx 80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key
BSU  Berwick Student Union
MONSU Monash Student Union
Monyx Commercial entity
MPA Monash Postgraduate Association
MUGSU Monash University Gippsland Student Union
VCPPA Victorian College of Pharmacy Postgraduate Association (Now known as the PPA)
VPSA Victorian Pharmacy Student’s Association

In addition to their share of the postgraduate amenities fees, all undergraduate student associations and Monyx\(^7\) together with a contribution to a capital development fund held by the university, received 100% of the undergraduate student amenities fees.

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\(^7\) Monyx has been disbanded with equivalent services now being run by the university, comprising Employment and Career Development, and Monash Sport.
9. Comparison of funding between Monash University’s Victorian student associations

In 2011, the university funded the provision of postgraduate-specific services on Victorian campuses at $34 per postgraduate. In contrast, the amount spent providing services to Victorian campus undergraduates\(^8\) was, on average, $94 per undergraduate.

### 2011 undergraduate organisation funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus</th>
<th>Undergraduate organisation</th>
<th>Undergraduate population numbers (Dec 10)</th>
<th>Amount received in 2011</th>
<th>Amount received per u/g</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clayton</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>19,049</td>
<td>$1,363,759</td>
<td>$72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caulfield</td>
<td>Monsu*</td>
<td>8,369</td>
<td>$772,137</td>
<td>$92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peninsula</td>
<td>Monsu*</td>
<td>3,445</td>
<td>$338,643</td>
<td>$98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berwick</td>
<td>MUBS</td>
<td>1,991</td>
<td>$265,230</td>
<td>$133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkville</td>
<td>MPSA</td>
<td>1,056</td>
<td>$139,906</td>
<td>$133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gippsland</td>
<td>MUGSU*</td>
<td>2,962</td>
<td>$599,737</td>
<td>$203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>All campuses</strong></td>
<td><strong>36,872</strong></td>
<td><strong>$3,479,412</strong></td>
<td><strong>$94</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2011 postgraduate organisation funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus</th>
<th>Postgraduate organisation</th>
<th>Postgraduate population numbers (Dec 10)</th>
<th>Amount received in 2011</th>
<th>Amount received per p/g</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clayton</td>
<td>MPA</td>
<td>7,843</td>
<td>$544,472</td>
<td>$33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caulfield</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,103</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peninsula</td>
<td></td>
<td>868</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berwick</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkville(^9)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(618 + 1295)(^10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPA(^11)</td>
<td></td>
<td>618</td>
<td>$28,181</td>
<td>$46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gippsland</td>
<td>GAPS(^12)</td>
<td>1,295</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>$2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>All campuses</strong></td>
<td><strong>16,744</strong></td>
<td><strong>$575,653</strong></td>
<td><strong>$34</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These figures include funds for sporting facilities, which are run by the student organisations on Caulfield, Peninsula and Gippsland.
\(^8\) Averaged across all campuses.
\(^9\) MPA and PPA are affiliated and work together to provide postgraduate services at Parkville.
\(^10\) The MPA provides services to Parkville and Gippsland postgraduates in addition to the PPA and GAPS services, therefore the Parkville and Gippsland p/g population numbers are included in the calculation “per postgraduate amount” for the MPA.
\(^11\) Parkville Postgraduate Association (PPA) negotiates its own funding for social events from the university, which is paid through the MPA for administrative convenience. This funding is additional to the $33 per postgraduate received by the MPA for services to Parkville postgraduates.
\(^12\) GAPS is a postgraduate group sitting under the undergraduate student association at Gippsland (MUGSU). They negotiate their own funding for social events directly with MUGSU. This funding is additional to the $33 per postgraduate received by the MPA for services to Gippsland postgraduates.
10. Recommendation for postgraduate associations’ 2012 funding

The MPA believes that service fees paid by postgraduates at Monash University should be invested in services of direct benefit and relevance to postgraduates. This means that some of the postgraduate fees should be directed to supporting University delivered generic services used by postgraduates and the remaining portion of the postgraduate service fee should be directed towards postgraduate-specific services, such as those provided by the MPA, Parkville Postgraduate Association (PPA) and Gippsland Association of Postgraduate Students (GAPS).

The proposed 2012 distribution of funds to the student associations put forward by the university has not changed from the 2011 model. It is disappointing that the university is continuing to support a funding model that directs more of the postgraduate amenities fees to the undergraduate student associations than postgraduate student associations. There is no reasonable explanation for this inequity and the MPA sincerely hopes that the university will take this opportunity to provide the postgraduate community with the support it requires.

Postgraduates deserve to know where their amenities fees are being directed and the justification for that distribution of funds. To that end the MPA strongly recommends that Monash University adopts a funding model that ensures postgraduate services and amenities fees are distributed in an equitable, transparent and targeted manner.

For 2012, the university has proposed that undergraduate student association services and representation should be funded, on average, at $101 per undergraduate\(^\text{13}\). The MPA proposes that postgraduate student association services and representation should be funded at the same rate. This would result in a budget of $1,532,440, which would bring the MPA (incorporating PPA and GAPS funding) into line with its University of Melbourne counterpart\(^\text{14}\) and is still well below the estimated financial contribution that the MPA’s services make to the university.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^\text{13}\) See Section 6 for university funding models for 2012.
\(^\text{14}\) See Section 7 for a comparison of funding between the MPA and the GSA.
\(^\text{15}\) See Section 4 for an estimate of the MPA’s financial contribution to the university.
11. Student Service and Amenities Fee structure for postgraduates

The MPA would like to see a discounted service fee applied to postgraduates who are:

- part-time;
- situated at off-campus locations including, AMREP, MMC, Collins St, and Law Chambers; or
- studying by Distance Education.

These postgraduates should be charged at a lower rate, as they do not have access to the full range of services and activities funded by the service fee and provided to postgraduates located on the main Victorian campuses.

Recommended fee structure for postgraduates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time on campus</td>
<td>$264.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time on campus</td>
<td>$132.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus</td>
<td>$132.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>$ 65.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Process for exemption from payment of the SSAF

The MPA believes there should be a fair, equitable and transparent process for applying for an exemption from the payment of the SSAF. Examples include postgraduates conducting research overseas for a significant period of time, or postgraduates experiencing extreme financial hardship would be triggers for an exemption application process. Applications for exemption should be decided on a case-by-case basis, by a committee, which includes at least one MPA-nominated postgraduate representative, in the instance of an application from a postgraduate student.

13. Process for allocating postgraduate funds

Given that the university has indicated that they will reconstitute the Campus Service Councils, the MPA, as the only cross-campus student association, requests that the association continue to be funded and administered centrally, as per the university’s initial funding proposal.

The funding for the Parkville Postgraduate Association is currently administered through the MPA and it is recommended that funding for the only remaining postgraduate group, the Gippsland Association of Postgraduates, also be administered via the MPA to completely centralise postgraduate services and funding.
14. Potential postgraduate services

Of the following listed services that were piloted in 2011, the MPA is able to provide testimonials from postgraduate participants, on request.

14.1 Advocacy service expansion

Over the past two years the number of advocacy cases seen by the MPA Advocate has almost doubled, increasing from approximately 120 to 200. In the majority of these cases, students were contemplating dropping out of their courses and viewed coming to the MPA for assistance as a final attempt to resolve an intractable problem. The majority of these cases were resolved informally at faculty level (or lower) by the MPA, with only a few going to formal grievance procedures. The time taken by MPA staff on serious cases ranged from 3 to 80 hours per case. Some individual cases ran over a period of several years.

While all the faculties have informal grievance procedures in place, postgraduates choose to come to MPA for advice for mainly two reasons:

- they want an opinion independent of departmental politics and pressures that they can be sure is provided in their interests;
- they want confidentiality (behind-the-scenes advice) because they fear that any student complaint made to the department or faculty will brand the student as a ‘trouble maker’.

Resolution through informal negotiations enables postgraduates to complete their degrees, to complete on time and to leave with a more positive attitude towards Monash. The MPA advice and advocacy service makes a significant contribution to the university’s ability to retain government funding based on completions and to retain fee income from postgraduate fee-paying courses. In addition, it eases the workloads for faculty staff such as supervisors, HODs and Associate Deans, and leaves the university less vulnerable to litigation and bad publicity.

The Graduate Student Association (GSA) at the University of Melbourne employs two full-time and one part-time advocate to provide advocacy services to a postgraduate population similar to the size of the Monash postgraduate population. The MPA is struggling to meet the dramatic increase in casework and in order to properly support postgraduates requires an additional full-time advocate, which would bring the MPA advocacy staff to a total of two

14.2 Postgraduate conference scheme

Some faculty and school-based postgraduate groups organise and run postgraduate research conferences. These conferences, which are very well attended and highly valued, provide HDR students with an excellent opportunity to gain real-life experience in public speaking, conference presentation skills and for those on the organising committee, skills in project management. Similar to an international conference, HDR students can submit abstracts and give a presentation about their research. Conference proceedings are usually published. Monash early career researchers and experienced staff are often included providing a great forum for HDR students to build relationships and collaborations with fellow Monash researchers. The MPA regularly receives requests for financial support from postgraduate organising committees and in 2011 the MPA contributed $300 per conference to six

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16 See Section 4 for an estimate of the MPA’s financial contribution to the university.
conferences. The postgraduate organisers also receive funding from their schools and relevant professional associations, helping HDRs to create links with potential employers.

This activity is a wonderful opportunity for academic growth and development, which the MPA would like to see extended to all HDRs in all schools and faculties. A central online database could be developed where postgraduates could share information on how to organise a conference, source funding and sponsorship, book venues and catering, and link with industry partners and professional associations. Seminars could be offered on organising conferences, and workshops could be run on research presentation skills, where HDRs could practice their presentations prior to the conference.

14.3 MPA Excellence seminar series

In 2011, the MPA ran a pilot of its Excellence Seminar Series. This seminar series targeted professional and career skills development beyond the scope of academic programs, providing Monash postgraduates, staff, undergraduates and alumni with an incredible opportunity to hear from some of the most expert and influential people of our time. Six seminars were organised and run during 2011, featuring prominent speakers such as Chancellor Alan Finkel, 1998 World Champion of Public Speaking Brett Rutledge, Secret Millionaire Karl Redenbach and former Qantas CIO and Monash alumna Fiona Balfour. These seminars were extremely well received, and the MPA received much positive feedback as a result. As there aren’t currently any equivalent opportunities available to Monash postgraduates (including no equivalent of the undergraduate Ancora Imparo Leadership Program), the MPA is extremely keen to continue this seminar series in the future.

14.4 MPA Outdoor Activity Club

In July 2010, the MPA began to run a series of outdoor day trips for postgraduates in response to requests from the postgraduate community. These trips, which have included bushwalking in the Dandenongs, surfing lessons at Point Leo, excursions to Wilson’s Promontory and an overnight camping trip at Cumberland, have been very popular, particularly with international postgraduates who often do not have access to a car and find it difficult to get out to see the sights around Victoria. The trips are funded by the individual postgraduates with a small subsidy of $10 per head provided by the MPA. There have been many requests for postgraduates to be able to include their families, and the MPA would like to see this program operating on a much larger scale with a more substantial subsidy, similar to the travel opportunities offered to postgraduates at the University of Melbourne by their postgraduate association.

14.5 Triple E (Endeavour, Enrich, Excel) two-day program

This program is a joint venture between the Learning Skills section of the Library and the MPA. It is a two-day intensive program for research postgraduates and is run twice a year during semester breaks, alternating between Clayton and Caulfield campus. It is now in its fourth year and has been very successful with 80-100 HDR postgraduates attending each semester. What makes this program unique is that it is open to postgraduate students from all faculties and the presenters have experience in a range of academic disciplines, providing a platform for interdisciplinary dialogue. The MPA funds a lunch on the first day of the program to encourage social interaction. Student feedback has shown that the opportunity to interact with postgraduates from various faculties is highly valued, and that sessions such as
this provide postgraduates with a real sense of being part of a scholarly community. Further
details of the 2011 program are online at:

Feedback from participants in the program has indicated that two separate versions of this
program would be ideal to address the needs of two distinct cohorts: one for HDRs who are
just starting their candidature and a second, follow-up program for HDRs who are
approaching mid-candidature.

14.6 Webinar program

The MPA, in conjunction with Employment & Career Development, MUGSU &
eSolutions, is funding the testing of a program that allows for the real-time delivery of
seminars to individual Monash postgraduates located anywhere around the world.
Postgraduates can attend the seminar on-campus or log in via their personal computers to
participate, including being able to: access live video of the speakers; pose questions and
receive answers; communicate privately with the speakers or with the entire group; and access
a recording of the event.

This program would be of particular benefit to postgraduates who were part-time and
attending campuses out of business hours, distance education postgraduates who were located
overseas or interstate, postgraduates on remote and/or small campuses, those located at off-
campus sites such as AMREP or working in industry settings such as CSIRO. It could be
linked in with existing seminars and would be a cost-effective method of delivery if shared by
a number of user-groups within the university.

14.7 Skills training for MPA representatives and volunteers

Each year the MPA elects an Executive Committee comprising 15 postgraduates. In addition,
postgraduates are nominated to over 65 positions on university boards and committees. The
MPA also calls for volunteers to assist with orientations throughout the year, and this would
attract approximately 25 postgraduates. This equates to over 100 postgraduates actively
involved in representing the association each year.

The MPA would like to develop formal training programs for these postgraduates to develop
their skills and enrich their interaction with the association, ultimately enhancing the quality
of MPA representation. Improved MPA representation means postgraduate representatives
are better equipped to engage with and fully participate on university committees.

The three programs would comprise event management, advanced communication skills and
team-working skills. Each program would consist of 10 hours training, a project to be
completed under the supervision of an MPA staff member, and a final evaluation session.
Training sessions would be offered in 1.5-2 hour components and would be taught by experts
drawn from the Monash support staff, academic staff, alumni and occasionally by external
educators. Both the training and projects would focus on activities within the university
context, but would also develop transferrable skills needed for a transition into the workforce.
14.8 Speaking skills for confirmation of candidature

This is a new initiative being developed by the MPA in conjunction with the learning skills section of the Caulfield library, and the Centre for European studies. A series of 6-8 fortnightly group sessions is proposed. In these sessions, HDRs will have the opportunity to study and practice good presentation skills, learn to manage their nervousness and respond to suggestions/questions/criticisms from the confirmation panel. Other departments in the Faculty of Arts at Caulfield campus will be approached to participate in this initiative. It will be run as a pilot in Semester 1 2012, and could potentially become a unit for standard HDR training.

14.9 Postgraduate Groups

The MPA’s involvement with schools and departments through orientation work, seminar participation and advocacy suggest that the culture operating in a department can significantly affect the number of advocacy cases and resolution of cases seen by the MPA. A healthy departmental culture means that postgraduates are less likely to have problems to begin with, and when problems do occur, they are more likely to be resolved within the department, either through sensible management of the issue by staff and/or through peer support.

One of the ways in which a healthy culture can be developed is through the establishment of a postgraduate group and/or committee. These postgraduate groups are very different to the undergraduate clubs and societies as they are much more focussed on academic activities, and usually only run social events in conjunction with an academic activity such as a seminar afternoon or industry visit. Such postgraduate groups already exist and often receive funding from their departments, with some groups also receiving funding through the undergraduate-run program Clubs and Societies. However, postgraduates report significant difficulties in dealing with the more political undergraduate environment and find it inappropriate that their funding and activities should be determined by an undergraduate committee.

The MPA would like to support the development of postgraduate groups/committees across schools and departments, with a focus on involving postgraduates in academic activities as well as creating a means of improving communication between postgraduates and their schools. The benefits of these postgraduate groups would include:

Improved flow of information between:
- postgraduates within the schools and across the faculty
- postgraduates and faculty/school staff
- postgraduates and elected postgraduates representatives on Faculty Boards

Opportunities for postgraduates to:
- contribute to school decision-making
- become involved in running academic events eg, seminar series
- establish networks and academic collegiality
- access peer support
- organise social events

Opportunities for faculty/schools to:
- be kept informed about postgraduate issues/concerns
- use postgraduate group feedback on faculty/school proposals
• have well-informed postgraduate representatives on faculty/school boards and committees

14.10 Research

The MPA conducts small research projects, which are used to provide feedback to the university resulting in improved policies, procedures and practices. Many of the MPA’s recommendations from research papers have been implemented by various university units. The MPA staff have been invited to present as part of the university’s Masterclass training sessions for supervisors on the basis of research produced on postgraduate casework.

The MPA’s grass-roots level interaction with postgraduates, combined with their unique university-wide view across all campuses and faculties, places the MPA in a position to conduct valuable research, which informs and enhances the university’s performance. The MPA staff and committee members don’t just see postgraduates in terms of numbers – they are meeting with postgraduates every day, hearing their stories and relating to them as individuals on a personal level. This kind of regular interaction builds up a sense of trust and postgraduates know they can provide honest feedback without fear of retribution. External consultancies do not always have this level of access to the root of an issue, particularly those issues involving international students. Unlike external consultancies, the MPA provides this service to the university without additional fees. The MPA would like to conduct more substantial research into postgraduate matters to the benefit of both the postgraduate community and the university.
Attachment A – Monash proposed 2012 funding model

This information has been omitted as the university has requested that university-proposed models of funding not be circulated.
Attachment B – MPA 2011 services

1. Representation

MPA Executive Committee (comprises reps from each campus, portfolios representing international p/gs, women p/gs, equity and access. Meets once per month, meetings rotate around all Victorian campuses.)

MPA Annual General Meeting

Appointing and monitoring of postgraduate representatives on over 60 University committees and boards

Advice and advocacy – all campuses (eg negotiating supervision arrangements, mediating on intellectual property issues, support through APC, discipline and grievance procedures)

Research/surveys (eg report on the experiences of Distance Education postgraduates)

Postgraduate forums – one per semester on every Victorian campus and three off-campus locations

Quality assurance role:
- Feedback to departments, schools, faculties and central university re student concerns raised in MPA postgraduate forums.
- Working with university to improve regulations, policies and procedures, eg on MRGS working party reviewing IP form for research postgraduates, on MRGS subcommittee reviewing supervision survey.
- Working with university to improve general conditions for postgraduates, eg, extension of security bus run outside Clayton campus.
- Working with University to improve academic support for postgraduates, eg reversing decision to close computer lab on Caulfield, opening additional areas to postgraduates for study, increase in library hours at Caulfield.

Provision of MPA services and activities at off-campus locations including the Law Chambers, MMC and AMREP.

Statistics publication on postgraduate population profile.

CAPA (Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations) membership, used to lobby on federal and state-wide issues such as met transport concession for postgraduates.

2. Academic and Professional Development

MPA Excellence seminar program, a professional development seminar series: 2011 speakers included Alan Finkel, Jason Clarke and Brett Rutledge.

Triple E two day program, run in conjunction with the Library Learning Unit, aimed at improving HDR postgraduates’ writing and research skills.
Orientation functions:
- Orientation sessions – Caulfield, Clayton and Peninsula
- Mid-year orientation sessions – Caulfield and Clayton
- Orientation packs distributed to all postgraduates – all campuses, approx 7000 per year, containing information from MPA, library, ECD, HUB and MRGS.
- Research-specific orientation sessions at Clayton and Caulfield – in conjunction with MRGS
- Orientation packs for research postgraduates – in conjunction with MRGS

Seminars:
- Working with libraries, HUB, and ECD to direct and develop postgraduate-specific programs and seminars in response to feedback from postgraduates - all campuses
- Coordination and publication of a central online calendar bringing together all postgraduate-specific seminars on all Victorian campuses, run by various departments and service providers including the MPA.

Annual Careers Fair for postgraduates – in conjunction with ECD. The focus changes each year, in 2011 it will focus on academic careers, in 2010 it focussed on careers for Arts Faculty postgraduates.

3. Creating and Supporting Postgraduate Community

Collection and dissemination of information:
- MPA website, providing access to information for all p/gs, especially important for off-campus and DE p/gs
- MPA weekly email news service promoting postgraduate-specific events, courses, jobs and study opportunities offered by MPA, Monash University and external Australian organisations. – all campuses (over 2800 individual postgraduate subscribers, and approx 30 university academic and administrative staff)

Online publication: Compass, four issues per year, containing articles written by postgraduates about their personal and academic experiences.

Social events are an essential source of grass-roots information and are considered an integral part of representation. Many social events are linked with academic events, eg seminar followed by lunch. Some examples of social events running this year:
- Coffee club sessions, running fortnightly on Clayton and Caulfield campuses
- Lunches, attracting between 20 p/gs (Parkville) and 120 (Clayton).

Postgraduate Ball with University Melbourne Postgraduate Association (UMPA)

Trivia night for HDR postgraduates

MPA Supervisor of the Year award (annual event)

In 2010, the MPA ran and/or participated in over 150 postgraduate-specific events.