Submission from the Monash Postgraduate Association Inc.
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Review of Student Services, Amenities, Representation and Advocacy Guidelines
(“Guidelines”) made under the Higher Education Support Act 2003

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1. Providing information on advocacy services - Section 2.2.2
It is critical for students to be informed about their relevant representative body and in particular the advocacy services available. Having a visible and effective independent advocacy service is advantageous to both the student community and the university, and results in far fewer formal grievances by resolving issues informally and at an early stage.

As an example, the Monash Postgraduate Association provides a very successful independent advocacy service which senior university administrators have come to value as the many benefits become apparent. The service not only directly benefits postgraduates in sorting out problems, it also saves the university significant staff time and effort in resolving the issues.

Recommendation: Under 2.2.2 add “(c) independent advocacy services.”

2. Appointment of Advocacy Officers - Section 2.2.4
This section allows Advocacy Officers to be selected, appointed and paid through the university from SSAF. While the university may be able to show that these appointments are technically “disassociated from the HEPs decision-makers” there is no true independence. Without independence, there is the potential for conflicts of interest and both the university and student community are poorly served by this model.

Recommendation: Advocacy Officers should be employed directly by the relevant independent student association, not by the university.

3. Expenditure of postgraduate SSAF - Section 2.2.5
While the student cohort can be split in numerous ways, the clearest division is that between postgraduates and undergraduates. This split is reflected at every level within university administration as well as in federal government policies and funding. The difference between the needs of these two cohorts is dramatic and thus the services and support required by each is significantly different. In order for postgraduates to be assured that their SSAF is being directed to services that are of direct benefit to them, the guidelines need to be more specific.

As an example, at Monash University, only 22% of the postgraduate SSAF is directed towards postgraduate-specific needs. The undergraduate student associations receive 38% of the postgraduate SSAF and this is spent on services (eg Sex it up week) that are largely irrelevant to a group whose average age is 35 and who are likely to be juggling work, family and study. Clearly, postgraduates are very upset about this inequity and demand that the expenditure of their fees complies with the legislation in that it funds “services of direct benefit” to them.

Recommendation: Under 2.2.5 add “HEPs must ensure that postgraduate SSAF is directed to services of direct benefit to postgraduate students.”
4. **Use of the term “enrolled students”**.
The reference to SSAF being spent on services of direct benefit only to *enrolled* students means that SSAF-funded services and support cannot be provided to:

a. Students who wish to pursue a formal grievance against the university at the conclusion of their degrees (with grievance submissions allowed for under most university regulations within 6 months of completion); and

b. Research postgraduates who have submitted their theses for examination and are therefore no longer considered enrolled, but who may require support during the period between submission and the return of examiners reports, when work on thesis amendments is usually being undertaken.

**Recommendation:** Allow for expenditure of SSAF on students falling into one of the two categories described above.

5. **Timing of distribution of SSAF**
Some universities collect the SSAF from students via a single payment early in the year, but choose to distribute the SSAF to student associations in part-payments over the year. This means that student associations are not necessarily able to fully utilise the funds within the year of receipt. Postgraduates undertaking a single year course of study may not receive the full benefit of those services and facilities funded by SSAF.

**Recommendation:** That the guidelines include instruction to HEPS that SSAF funding must be distributed to recipient student associations in line with the rate at which it is billed.

6. **Complaint mechanism**
HEPs should not be permitted to use funding agreements to impose unnecessary restrictions on the recipients of SSAF, provided the expenditure of that SSAF falls within the SSAF legislation. In cases where unnecessarily “wide” funding agreements are imposed by HEPs on recipients of SSAF, there is no effective redress for the recipients under the guidelines or legislation. Student associations which rely solely on SSAF income have no means to pursue this through the Courts and there should be a mechanism of complaint in the guidelines.

**Recommendation:** The guidelines should include a process for complaint directly to the relevant Minister, for appeals lodged by recipients of the SSAF.