A proposal for the provision of SSAF-funded postgraduate services and support at Gippsland campus

Monash Postgraduate Association
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In 2012 postgraduates made up almost one third of the student population on Gippsland. Of the 1102 postgraduates, 176 were HDR and 926 were GPG. The majority of postgraduates were part-time (851), and only 217 were identified as falling under oncampus attendance mode (333 if we include multi-modal).

In summary, the Gippsland postgraduate population is small, diverse and largely off-campus. However, through their work on smaller campuses and off-site locations across Victoria, the MPA recognises that the smaller and more disparate the postgraduate population, the more essential postgraduate-specific services and facilities become.

One of the biggest challenges for HDRs studying on the Gippsland campus is the feeling of isolation, not just in terms of their academic life-styles within the campus community, but because the campus is situated in country Victoria. While there are many advantages to living in a rural community, the disadvantage of being two hours drive from Clayton campus is significant for HDRs, because the majority of HDR support activity is centred around Clayton campus.

Coursework postgraduates pay significant fees for their courses and often come with professional backgrounds. They tend to be older than undergraduates, often have work and family responsibilities and for those reasons will only attend functions that are targeted to their specific-needs. When they elect to enrol in a postgraduate course with Monash they have certain expectations about their experience including the quality of their course delivery as well as the quality of the facilities that will be provided to them.

The MPA would like to see strong postgraduate support services and facilities established on Gippsland campus for postgraduates. Gippsland postgraduates are demanding this support from the university, and have a right to demand this from the MPA, their representative body.

The current situation is unsatisfactory in that while MUGSU retains all the undergraduate and postgraduate SSAF, the MPA is unable to offer an effective level of services to Gippsland postgraduates. MUGSU primarily offers generic services to all students and some postgraduate-specific events, and could potentially deliver postgraduate-specific services. However it is evident from MUGSU’s frequent references to “not discriminating” between postgraduates and undergraduates in the
delivery of services, and the persistent under-funding of GAPS, (MUGSU’s postgraduate division), that there is no real understanding of why postgraduates might need specialist services nor is there any genuine desire or effort to deliver those services.

In an effort to improve postgraduate support on Gippsland campus, the MPA would like to see the postgraduate SSAF directed towards postgraduate-specific needs. This could be achieved by the postgraduate SSAF being held by the campus, and allocated to postgraduate projects as directed by a Gippsland postgraduate committee, comprising three GAPS nominees and three MPA nominees.

Some of the more immediate services and facilities identified by postgraduates as being required on Gippsland are listed below.

1. **Establishment of a postgraduate lounge**

Unlike HDRs, coursework postgraduates are not allocated a space in their departments but they do expect to have a space where they can work quietly, and interact socially with other postgraduates. Since the large increase in the GPG intake at Gippsland (Medicine), it has become even more obvious that such a space is needed. HDRs, while best accommodated in their departments, have indicated that they would like a social space to relax and socialise with other postgraduates, away from their schools. In 2012, there were 149 HDRs working on campus at Gippsland and 184 GPG working on campus or regularly visiting the campus (multi-modal attendance).

Postgraduates want a separate lounge away from noise (such as the current student lounge) with basic facilities. Access to a few computers, printing, scanning, powerpoints (for laptops) and computer charger lockers would be beneficial. A small kitchen area with a kettle, microwave, tea and coffee provisions and a sink. Some shared work tables and chairs and some lounge furniture. The room needs to be functional, well lit and properly set-up in order to be appealing to postgraduates and promote regular use.

It is essential that postgraduates be provided with 24/7 access via a swipe card entry system.

2. **Electronic screens**

The MPA is placing electronic screens on all Victorian campuses to advertise postgraduate-specific events and support services. The screens will be open to any faculty, school or central university unit to include any information that is postgraduate-specific. A screen on Gippsland campus, preferably in or near the postgraduate social space, would help to keep Gippsland postgraduates feeling connected to the wider university postgraduate community.
3. **Transport to Clayton**

A travel fund for postgraduates to access to cover the cost of:

a. a bus and driver to take large groups of postgraduates to Clayton campus
to attend Essential Skills seminars or compulsory coursework unit classes; and

b. a taxi to take individual or small groups of HDRs to the closest station to
catch the train to Clayton and/or Caulfield campus to attend Essential
Skills seminars or compulsory coursework unit classes; and

c. hire of a university pool car for the day to attend Essential Skills seminars
or compulsory coursework units on Clayton/Caulfield campuses.

4. **Loans**

A long-standing issue for international postgraduates is access to a loan to purchase a
car. International postgraduates are often unaware of the geographical location of
Gippsland in relation to Melbourne, until they arrive with their partners and children,
and realise the impracticality and cost of travelling via public transport. While
Monash offers small interest-free loans to all students, international postgraduates are
often unable to provide a local referee, having just arrived and not knowing anyone in
Melbourne. Without a local referee, the request for a loan will be turned down.
Many international HDRs are employed in well-known educational institutions in
their home countries. The MPA has lobbied the university loans committee to accept
professional referees from overseas educational institutions in place of local referees
but has been unsuccessful.

As this is a Gippsland-campus specific issue, the MPA would like to see a campus-
run loan system set up with greater flexibility around referees when considering loan
applications from international HDRs.