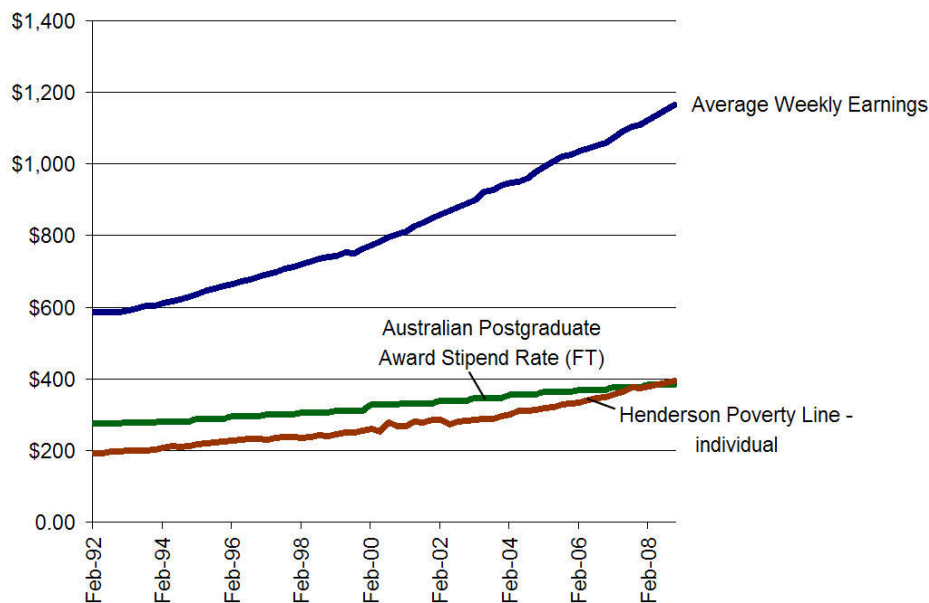


*** Attention Education Journalists:
EMBARGOED for 5:00 am Wednesday April 30th, 2008 ***

APAs to Break Poverty Line



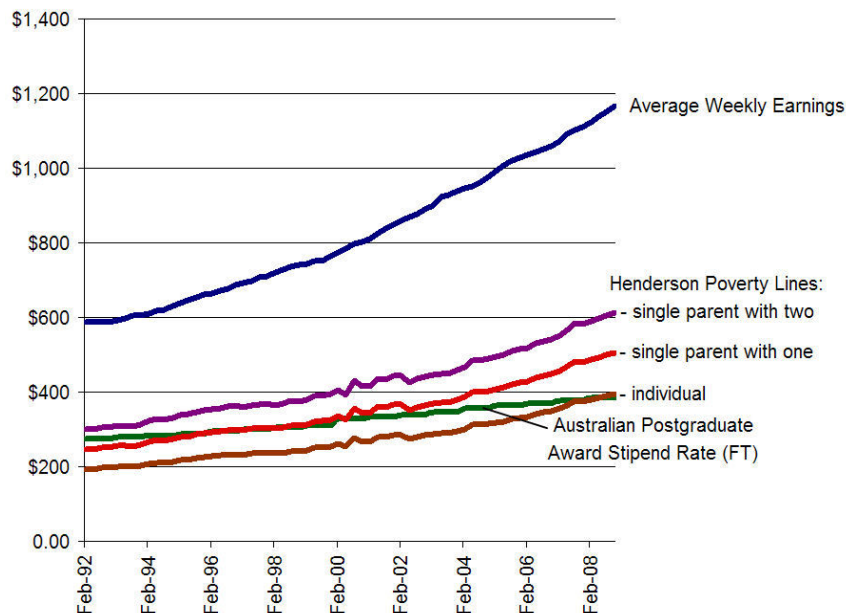
Australian Postgraduate Award Stipend Rates with Average Weekly Earnings and Henderson Poverty Line

Figures released today by The Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) show that for the first time the stipend rate for Australian Postgraduate Awards (APAs) will slip below the poverty line by the end of 2008.

“These figures spell out what research postgraduates already know – that the basic stipend rate for the APA is, by itself, simply not enough to live on” CAPA President, Nigel Palmer said.

“Stipend rates have certainly failed to keep pace with average weekly earnings. Postgrads on an APA with carer responsibilities have been below the poverty line for some time. Based on the average annual increase in seasonally adjusted household income, we expect the standard rate for the APA to register below the poverty line for individuals for the first time by the end of 2008”.

The estimates are based on stipend rates for Commonwealth-funded postgraduate research awards compared with average weekly earnings and Henderson poverty data for single individuals, and those with carer responsibilities.



Stipend Rates with Average Weekly Earnings and Henderson Poverty Lines for individuals with dependents¹

	Average Weekly Earnings	Henderson Poverty data - individuals			
		Two dependents	One dependent	No dependents	APA Stipend (full time)
December quarter 2007	\$1,110	\$581	\$480	\$374	\$377
December quarter 2008 (projected)	\$1,165	\$611	\$505	\$394	\$385

Comparative data on APAs were compiled in collaboration with the Council for Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS), and form part of CAPA's submission to the Federal Government's current review of the national innovation system.

"Drawing attention to APA stipend rates is not about PhD students crying poor: there are areas of greater hardship out there, especially for research students without a scholarship, and among full time coursework postgraduates. Adequate resources and support for research students are however essential if we are serious about ensuring sustainability for our innovation and research capacity nationally.

"The purpose of the APA is to enable research students to focus on research. The reality is that stipend rates have not kept pace with costs. These include the costs of living, spiralling rent costs, and also the costs of doing research.

"Postgraduates must fill the gap, which under current conditions of the APA award means seeking out additional employment for no more than 8 hours per week. Often the only way they can do that is through taking on casual teaching, where they then face an effective rate of pay below the minimum wage. As their workload normally exponentially exceeds their "paid hours", they are caught in a real bind: they are still struggling financially, but now they are swamped with marking papers at a piecemeal rate.

¹ Compiled by the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA). Sources: *Poverty Lines: Australia – December Quarter 2007*, available at www.melbourneinstitute.com/labour/inequality/poverty/default.html. Data on Henderson Poverty Lines and Commonwealth funded postgraduate stipend rates compiled based on information from Graduate Careers Australia and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). Data on Average Weekly Earnings compiled by The Council for Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS) based on ABS Average Weekly Earnings (seasonally adjusted) available at www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6302.0

If the new government is serious about its innovation agenda, it needs to get serious about adequate resources and support for those who support much of our research output”.

One of the main features of the ALP’s campaign launch in the lead up to the 2007 Federal election was a commitment to increase the number of Australian Postgraduate Awards (APA’s) offered to commencing research students from 1,580 in 2008 to 3,500, effectively doubling the number of scholarships offered by 2012.

CAPA commends the ALP for making support for Australia’s research postgraduates a priority, and now calls on the new government to follow through on that commitment by;

- Increasing the stipend rate for all Australian Postgraduate Awards by 30%

	APA stipend rates		APAI
	Full time	Part time	
2008 rate	\$ 20,007	\$ 10,710	\$ 26,140
+ 30%	\$ 6,002	\$ 3,213	\$ 7,842
	\$ 26,009	\$ 13,923	\$ 33,982

- Increase the duration of all Australian Postgraduate Awards to at least 4 years (full time equivalent) to match the term of candidature
- Exempting all scholarships and awards from assessable income for taxation and income support purposes (including, importantly, part time awards), along with amending Commonwealth scholarship guidelines to give recipients greater flexibility in going part time
- Ensure dedicated services are in place to support postgrads through to the successful completion of their degree (address the impact of VSU on postgraduate students)

“A few simple fixes in this area will have a significant positive impact on the sustainability of Australia’s research and innovation capacity into the future. The time to act is now.” CAPA President, Nigel Palmer concluded.

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CAPA is the national peak body representing Australia’s 270,000+ postgraduate students.
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