

Secure support for independent student representation and services

Universal membership of democratically elected student representative organisations is indispensable to protecting and promoting student rights. The representation and services provided by independent student organisations also contribute significantly to the development and maintenance of sound institutional governance practices, policy development, collegiality and procedural fairness.

CAPA's review of the impact of voluntary student unionism (VSU) on postgraduate student associations (PGSAs) found that:

- At least 8 universities no longer have an independent organisation representing postgraduate students
- At least 4 PGSAs are surviving on less than 5% of their pre-VSU funding
- PGSA staff numbers have reduced by half and many roles diverted from advocacy and representative support
- Of 20 PGSAs that responded to a recent questionnaire, 30% are unable to provide advocacy services

Organisational restructuring on many campuses has meant that universities are increasingly involved, either directly or indirectly, in the governance and management of student organisations. Of particular concern is the threat this poses to the continued provision of independent representation and advocacy. As one PGSA commented in the recent CAPA questionnaire:

Our biggest concern is that the new structure will silence the independent student voice. Currently [the PGSA] can issue a press release, but we are unsure what restrictions will be placed on [the new organisation] in this regard. I suspect the question will not be resolved until [we have] a need to issue a controversial press release.

Key Targets

- Require each institution to support representation and advocacy provided by independent student organisations
- Require that students decide and control the structure and governance of their representative organisation(s)
- Commonwealth to remove the "VSU" amendments from the Higher Education Support Act (HESA) and ensure adequate funding for student organisations