

The Impact of VSU on Postgraduate Students

A report by the
Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations

August 2007



Prepared by:

Sally Skinner
Carol Chenco
Nigel Palmer



Authorised by Nigel Palmer, CAPA; Printed by CAPA.
Box 42, Level 3, Trades Hall, 2 Lygon St, Carlton South, VIC, 3053
(03) 9650 7666 or 0425 823 144

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Acknowledgements

CAPA would like to thank PGSA representatives and staff members who contributed ideas to the development of the questionnaires. CAPA also extends thanks to those organisations that completed the 2006 and/or 2007 questionnaires.

Abbreviations

CAPA	Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations
DEST	Department of Education Science and Training
ESOS	Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000
HESA	Higher Education Support Act 2003
NUS	National Union of Students
PGSA	Postgraduate Student Association (includes any organisation representing postgraduate students at a tertiary institution)
RESSO	Research and Education Staff of Student Organisations
SOPSO	Staff of Postgraduate Student Organisations

Summary:

Key findings

As of July 1, 2007 at least 8 universities no longer have an independent postgraduate student organisation.

Of the 20 PGSA's that responded to the 2007 questionnaire:

- 8 are receiving less than 50% of their pre-VSU funding, including 4 that are receiving less than 5%.
- While 70% have some funding support from their university, many have conditions attached including some that prevent the payment of honorariums and affiliation fees.
- Staff numbers have been halved. 7 responding PGSA's have no staff at all.
- 30% are unable to provide advocacy services.
- Three have been forced into mergers with other student organisations, while others must cope with continued pressure to merge and greater university control.

Implications

It is difficult to know the full extent of the situation faced by the PGSA's that were unable to respond to the survey. It is clear however that in a number of cases where the CAPA VSU survey was not returned there was simply no one left who could. This reflects a situation on those campuses where the needs of postgraduates formerly catered for by postgraduate student organisations are now no longer being catered for at all. Postgraduate students are among those most disadvantaged by the impact of VSU.

1. Background

1.1. About CAPA

The Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) is the national peak body representing Australia's 264,000 postgraduate students. These students are engaged in both coursework and research programs and include 90,000 international students.¹ All postgraduate students have the opportunity to become involved in the national body through their local postgraduate association.

Formed in 1979, CAPA has been the national voice for postgraduate students for 28 years, and as such is the oldest national student organisation in Australia. CAPA's efforts were initially focused around research student issues, however this focus quickly expanded to all facets of postgraduate education including the needs of international students. CAPA has also supported the development of the independent National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation (NIPAAC).²

CAPA plays a lead role in proactive campaigning and high quality research on a broad range of postgraduate issues. CAPA is highly regarded as a constructive partner in the higher education sector and a credible voice for postgraduate students in the national media. There is regular liaison with other higher education sector bodies, and CAPA regularly contributes submissions to government and parliamentary inquiries and reviews.³

Briefing papers produced by CAPA often feed directly into the policy setting of political parties as well as directly informing the policies and procedures that universities themselves put into practice.⁴ All of CAPA's research, submissions, sector level representation and other activities are informed by the basic principles of quality and equity in postgraduate education. These values support an Australian higher education system that is both equitable and internationally competitive, and provide for a continued investment into Australia's social capital over the longer term.

1.2. Postgraduate Students

Australia's 264,000 postgraduates are roughly comprised of 50,000 research and 214,000 coursework higher degree students. International students

¹ Department of Education Science and Training, *Students 2005 [full year]: selected higher education statistics*, available at: www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/students_2005_selected_higher_education_statistics.

² CAPA 2004, *Twenty five years of CAPA - the fight is far from over*, CAPA, Carlton, Victoria (available at www.capa.edu.au/about).

³ A full list of CAPA's submissions is available at www.capa.edu.au/submissions.

⁴ Among the most prominent examples is CAPA's *Statement of Minimum Resources for Postgraduate Study*, available at www.capa.edu.au/briefing-papers.

account for 90,000, or 34% of total postgraduate enrolments nationally. All together postgraduate students make up 28% of the total higher education student population.⁵

Honours and Graduate Entry students are not counted as postgraduate students by the Department of Education Science and Training (DEST), however these students often identify themselves as part of the postgraduate community, and many postgraduate student organisations welcome them as members and provide services tailored to their needs.

Despite the diversity of students that make up the postgraduate community, there are factors in common for many individual postgraduate students:

- The majority of postgraduate students are aged over 25, and accordingly often have greater pressures in terms of financial commitments and carer responsibilities. As the recent Universities Australia report has demonstrated, these students often pursue further study at great personal cost, and frequently struggle to balance study, work, family and financial responsibilities.⁶
- Many students find postgraduate study an isolating experience, often compounded by the fact that many postgraduates relocate to pursue their studies, or may have infrequent contact with their academic department or other postgraduate students.
- Many postgraduate students find themselves more vulnerable to problems such as intimidation, harassment, and poor resourcing than their undergraduate peers, in part due to the greater variation in learning environments they encounter.

The term 'student' does not easily convey the diversity among postgraduates, the range of endeavours they undertake, nor the professional approach many adopt in pursuing their studies. Despite CAPA's efforts as the national body, postgraduates are still marginalised in the higher education debate. It is postgraduates however who keep the wheels of the higher education sector turning. They fill the ranks of researchers and casual teachers, effectively carrying the sector in terms of teaching and research output, and, further, represent the future of the higher education sector itself.

1.3. Postgraduate Student Organisations

Prior to VSU, postgraduate students on many campuses had access to services provided by their own postgraduate students' association, independently funded from (often a very small proportion of) annual student services fees. Detailed background on the pre-VSU status of many

⁵ Further detail available at www.capa.edu.au/postgraduates. Full statistics provided by DEST, *Students 2005 [full year]: selected higher education statistics*, at: www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/students_2005_selected_higher_education_statistics.

⁶ *Australian Student Finances Survey 2006 Final Report* available at www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au.

postgraduate associations can be found among submissions to the Senate *Inquiry into the Provisions of the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Student Union Fees) Bill 2005*.⁷

Postgraduate student associations (PGSAs) vary in structure, autonomy and, to some extent, in the services they provide. Most are independent from other student organisations, while a few exist within the broader structure of a student union or guild. The unifying factor is a commitment to independent postgraduate-specific representation and services. Most are focussed on providing effective independent representation and advocacy.

The 28 postgraduate organisations that were able to complete either the 2006 or 2007 CAPA VSU survey appear below:

Adelaide University Postgraduate Students' Association
Charles Sturt University Student Association
Curtin University Postgraduate Students' Association
Deakin University Student Association
Edith Cowan University Postgraduate and Honours Student Association
Flinders Postgraduate Students' Association
Griffith University Postgraduate Students Association
James Cook University Postgraduate Student Association
La Trobe University Postgraduate Association
Monash Postgraduate Association
Macquarie University Postgraduate Representative Association
Murdoch University Postgraduate Student Association
Newcastle University Postgraduate Student Association
Postgraduate and Research Student Association ANU
Postgraduate Association of University of Western Sydney
Queensland University of Technology Postgraduate Student Assoc
RMIT Postgraduate Association
Southern Cross University Postgraduate Association
Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association
Tasmania University Postgraduate Association
University of Ballarat Postgraduate Association
University of Melbourne Postgraduate Association
University of New England Postgraduate Association
University of New South Wales Postgraduate Board
University of Technology Sydney Students' Association
University of Western Australia Postgraduate Students' Association
Victoria University Postgraduate Association
Wollongong University Postgraduate Association

⁷ Available at www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/eet_ctte/highed_unionfees/submissions/sublist.

1.4. VSU

In December 2005, the *Higher Education Support Act (HESA) 2003* was amended to prohibit compulsory membership of student organisations and the collection of compulsory fees for university student services. Commonly known as 'voluntary student unionism' (VSU), this had the outcome of effectively eliminating the majority of the funding for university student organisations.

As far back as the 1970s there have been various political and legal attempts, at the state and federal levels, to remove compulsory services and amenities fees. Despite most universities being established under State Acts, from 1999 the Coalition federal government made several attempts to introduce VSU nationally through utilisation of Commonwealth funding powers. In 1999 a Bill passed the House of Representatives but did not have majority support in the Senate. In 2003 a new attempt was made, but again did not have Senate support and the legislation lapsed in the House.

1.4.1. Legislation

In the 2004 federal election the Coalition was returned, this time with a majority in the Senate. The Federal Government was then able to ensure passage of their VSU legislation, to be titled the *Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Student Union Fees) Bill 2005*. Despite protests from opposition parties and even concern within the Coalition, the Bill was able to be passed with the support of Senator Steve Fielding. The legislation was passed on the last sitting day of the Senate in December 2005, and came into effect on July 1 2006.

The force of the legislation was to a ban universities levying a compulsory fee for the provision of student services not of an academic nature and the *compulsory* membership of student organisations. If universities defied the ban, they risked the penalty of a significant reduction in their total basic grant funding.

1.4.2. Implementation

The VSU HESA amendments applied to all domestic students enrolling to study for the first time after 1 July 2006. Students who had been enrolled prior to 1 July, could be charged a compulsory fee for the remainder of 2006. Universities sought advice from the Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) regarding this provision. Some universities decided to charge ongoing students while others decided that this was inequitable.⁸ To add to the confusion, the *Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000* had been amended to allow institutions to continue to charge international students a service fee without breaching the HESA.

⁸ Macnamara, Lisa and Hicks, Ron 2006, 'Early invoices sidestep VSU law', *Australian*, 31 May

Given the significant financial cost if found in breach of the Act, most universities initially acted with extreme caution. Some universities were able to move funds around to shore-up essential services.⁹

Student organisations cut back services and funding for specific purposes including orientation programs, financial hardship loans, childcare, student newspapers and student theatre.¹⁰ Staff redundancies began as student organisations either folded or restructured to focus on membership recruitment.¹¹

1.5. Summary

While the impact across the sector was certainly dire, information coming from CAPA affiliates indicated that the picture was particularly gloomy for PGAs. Under these circumstances the decision was made to investigate the impact of VSU on postgraduate students and PGAs.

⁹ Edwards, Hannah 2006, 'Salvage plan for student fee shortfall', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 Jan

¹⁰ Morton, Adam 2006, 'Uni orientation disoriented', *Age*, 20 Feb; Sinton, Eve 2006, 'Pulp gets canned', *Northern Rivers Echo*, 24 Feb; O'Dwyer, Erin 2006, 'Fees rise, services cut for uni students', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 March

¹¹ Morton, Adam 2006, 'Unis wield axe as new rules loom', *Age*, 28 Feb;

2. VSU Impact Survey

2.1. Background

The implementation of VSU generated a sizable volume of media, political comment, and university and sector statements acknowledging the disaster for the sector. Virtually all responses and comment however ignored the impact on postgraduate students and PGSAs. In fact only one of the hundreds of identified articles in the major newspapers dealing with the VSU impact mentioned PGSAs at all.¹² Articles that summarised impact also ignored postgraduate representation and services.¹³

University staff and the sector generally seemed oblivious to the loss of postgraduate-specific services, as academics continued to advise students to 'take part in postgraduate association events' unaware that in many cases these no longer existed.¹⁴

Those monitoring the impact of VSU nationally also only assessed generic impact. An ongoing study by the National Union of Students (NUS) ranks universities against benchmarks for support of independent student organisations.¹⁵ These benchmarks do not consider cohort-specific service support. In some cases, the ranking process has given a high rating to universities where specific postgraduate support and services has been abolished or significantly curtailed. Certainly, some PGSAs had opposite assessments of the quality of university support offered.

2.2. Terms of reference

In December 2005, the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* was amended to prohibit compulsory membership of student organisations and the collection of compulsory fees for university student services. The legislation came into effect as of July 1 2006, and was in place for domestic students across all universities by January 2007. Impact of the legislation however was felt even before it was passed, as universities and student organisations began the process of readying themselves for the loss of funding.

In July 2006, CAPA initiated a research project with the intention of assessing the effects of VSU on postgraduates and postgraduate student associations.

2.3. Research strategy

Background information was gathered from general sources including media, contact lists, websites and personal communication.

¹² Morton, Adam 2006, 'Students blacklist universities', *Age*, 12 June

¹³ Healy, Guy 2006, 'Impact of VSU to date', *Campus Review*, v16, n30, 2 Aug

¹⁴ Linda Conrad quoted in Cook, Margaret 2006, 'Doctor in the house', *Age*, 17 July

¹⁵ Available at www.unistudent.com.au/campaigns

In mid-2006 a questionnaire was sent to individual PGSAs. A total of 22 questionnaires were returned out of 34 sent out, resulting in a 65% response rate.

In mid-2007 an online questionnaire of 27 individual PGSAs was conducted via a survey website. Responses were received from 20 PGSAs, resulting in a 74% response rate.

The population frame for the second questionnaire differed slightly from the first because in a number of cases CAPA could not identify a contact at the PGSA to complete the survey. Twelve PGSAs completed both questionnaires.

Although two questionnaires conducted a year apart should make a longitudinal study possible, the variation in the population frames and patterns in response rate have not resulted in a representative sample, and direct comparison between results of the two questionnaires must therefore be made with caution.

2.1. Sources

2.1.1. Media reports

All reports in the national media relating to the impact of VSU were collated. Duplicates of the same story appearing in different media were not retained. Where possible local media reports were also accessed.

2.1.2. Websites

The website of each PGSA was examined. Since the introduction of VSU few were being regularly updated (possibly an early indication of loss of staff and expertise).

2.1.3. Email lists

The Research and Education Staff of Student Organisations (RESSOS) email list also provided some general information. Discussion on the list was used for background only.

2.1.4. Key contacts

Where possible the President and one staff member from each organisation were contacted. Even this proved quite difficult. Multiple follow-up contacts by phone and email were necessary in many cases.

2.1.5. CAPA Affiliate lists

CAPA maintains contact details of elected representatives and staff at affiliate PGSAs. Updates to this list provided some indication of loss of staff and representative positions. For example, a list of staff in Victoria totalled 30 in

mid-2005. By mid-2007 the total was 16 staff, with 5 of the 8 PGSAs having no staff at all.

Australia wide, 8 PGSAs have failed to respond to any contact from CAPA in 2007 and their websites were either down or very outdated. From this CAPA had to assume that these associations had either ceased to exist or had lost the capacity to function.

2.2. Research constraints

2.2.1. Confidentiality and anonymity

At the time of running the 2006 questionnaire, many PGSAs were engaged in delicate negotiations with their universities, with other student organisations or both. Some information gathered in the survey was offered as entirely confidential, and not to be reported. All remaining information was gathered on the condition of anonymity. An undertaking was given that any information provided would not be used for any purpose outside of the VSU survey.

2.2.2. VSU impact during research

PGSAs experienced the impact of VSU comparatively early. One of the early impacts of VSU was that student organisations were in many cases forced into intensive competition for resources with one another. Many PGSAs found that services targeted toward postgraduates and staff with specialised experience in working with postgraduate issues were amongst the first to be cutback. Some universities and student organisations saw VSU as an opportunity to limit PGSA independence. As PGSA representatives battled for the survival of their organisation, and as staff were made redundant or redeployed, the time commitment to participate in the questionnaires just was not available.

2.3. Questionnaires

2.3.1. Questionnaire 1 (June 2006)

A draft questionnaire to ascertain the impact of VSU was developed.

PGSAs were contacted by email and notified of the intention to develop a questionnaire. They were invited to provide initial feedback and suggestions for questions to be included. Initial responses were received from 7 PGSAs and their input included in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was difficult to design largely due to the variation in PGSA structures and in the relationship to undergraduate organisations. In many cases the structure and relationship also changed in response to VSU. Monitoring VSU impact was made more complex as not all PGSAs were starting from the same point.

The finalised questionnaire was distributed as a word document by email on 22 July 2006 to the key contacts of 34 PGSAs. (No contact details were available for 2 other PGSAs). The 34 were requested to return the questionnaire by email, fax or post by 29 June 2006.

At 29 June only 5 had been returned. By 31 August, after extensive follow-up, a total of 22 had been returned. This is a response rate of 65%. Of those not returned, 2 PGSAs would not participate, 3 PGSAs had not responded to any contact, and 7 were still hoping to participate.

Despite having 7 outstanding responses, a decision was made to proceed with the analysis of the 22 questionnaires.

2.3.2. Questionnaire 2 (June 2007)

The results of the 2006 questionnaire were collated and a verbal report presented to the CAPA Annual Council meeting in December 2006. The 2006 questionnaire included questions about projections for 2007. At the time of conducting this questionnaire, most PGSAs were in a state of uncertainty about their future. A decision was made in May 2007, to conduct a 2007 questionnaire to achieve a more precise and current account of the impact of VSU.

Responses to the 2006 questionnaire were assessed to select questions that could provide a longitudinal comparison. Additionally, as time constraints on PGSAs were severe, with loss of staff and representatives, the questionnaire needed to be as brief and easy to complete as possible.

The numbers of questions were reduced, but wording was kept consistent with the 2006 questionnaire. The method of administration was changed to a Web-based survey format using the SurveyMonkey web survey site. The facility to make some questions 'required' was utilised.

The key contacts of PGSAs were sent an email inviting participation and containing a clickable link to the survey website. CAPA could locate contacts for only 27 PGSAs.

PGSAs were asked to respond within a time frame of 7 days. This was later extended by a further 6 days. This extension was necessary as many PGSAs no longer had staff or fulltime elected representatives, and needed more time to read and answer the questionnaire. Ultimately responses were received from 20 PGSAs.

2.4. Data Collection Summary

Response rates, while good by survey standards, are problematic. The PGSAs that completed the survey are those that are still operating sufficiently to have an elected representative or staff member with the knowledge and time to complete such a questionnaire. Some PGSAs that completed the 2006

questionnaire were not even contactable by the time the 2007 questionnaire was distributed.

The universities represented by the PGAs that completed the questionnaires vary in size from 2,000 to 16,000 postgraduate students. At most of these institutions, the postgraduate student headcount is at least 25% of the total student body.

3. Findings

A summary of the results of the two questionnaires is presented below. Extended comments from the responses by PGSA's are indicated in shading. These comments have been edited to remove identifying information.

The 2006 questionnaire included projections for 2007. Where these are relevant to the 2007 questionnaire, they have been included. Discrepancies between the predictions and actual situations can be accounted for by the variation in population response frames between the two questionnaires, and by the climate of uncertainty existing in 2006.

3.1. Questionnaire 1 (2006)

The questionnaire asked about the situation prior to July 2006 (pre-VSU), and the transition period from July to December 2006. Questions were also asked about the likely situation in 2007.

These summarised results represent the 22 PGSA's who returned completed questionnaires. Questions have only been summarised in this section of the report where a significant proportion (in most cases almost 100%) of PGSA's responded to a particular question.

3.1.1. Involvement in change (question 5)

As universities and student organisations began the process of working out how they would continue to provide services, it appeared that many PGSA's were being excluded from this discussion. The questionnaire asked about involvement in the process.

Of the 19 PGSA's who responded regarding working parties convened to plan for the provision of student services under VSU, most (79%) had been invited to or intended to offer a submission to the working party. But over half (58%) of the 19 did not receive access to the final report.

Some PGSA's appear to have been deliberately excluded from the negotiation process with the university by the general student organisation of which they are associated:

We are advised that, unilateral as this approach may appear, it is in the best interests of all concerned.

The uni has advised that the PGSA merge with the student union and handover the assets to them.

3.1.2. Structure and independence (question 6)

Most PGSAs pre-VSU and during the transition period were either independent and not formally affiliated with any other student organisation or autonomously governed departments of a larger student organisation.

The change in these categorisations for 2007 projections was that more answered in the 'not sure' category or thought they would be integrated into a student union or guild:

Uni wants us to merge with the Guild under a new model. PGSA not happy with this ... Will do our own membership and fight a merger. Will encourage students to join PGSA instead of Guild due to lack of postgrad specific services Guild plan to offer.

We have [been] left [with] a volunteer committee of postgrad students with no access to revenue at all, no honoraria, no services, no nothing.

The Guild have not, are not and are likely not to pursue the interests of postgrads at this uni unless it is their last avenue for survival ... All our board/committee members provided our skills and services for free. The Guild council is still paying its members. We will continue to exist even if in name only.

Under the proposed combination of organisations the PGSA will not survive in its current state. Whilst the intention was to provide an equal voice on the governing body for different current orgs, this has not been altered and the PGSA has only 1 vote whilst the undergrads have 2 and the services [dept] has more ... The PGSA will apparently exist within a representation branch of the larger org which will include the ... undergrad org and the postgrad org. It is intended that this will exist primarily as collectives eg enviro, queer, international, education etc. Currently such collectives exist and are almost exclusively dominated by undergrads due to their time availability on campus and the general emphasis of the groups themselves. It is unlikely that this undergrad emphasis will change. The continuing survival of any postgrad representational body is questionable under the proposed model, despite there being a designated postgrad position on the governing body.

3.1.3. Prospects for funding and university support (questions 7,8,11 and 12)

Uncertainty was near universal in the responses to income questions. Few PGSAs had secured anything other than short term funding commitments from their university and the prospects for 2007 were bleak or, at the very least, uncertain:

The Guild is reducing funding to all other student organisations.

[The Guild] is being dismantled and the uni is taking over the assets and reserves. They then intend to sell them off for profit or tender.

3.1.4. Representation and services (question 14)

Table 1

Service	Pre VSU (Pre July 1)	Post VSU (July 1 - Dec 31)	2007 projections
Advocacy and advice	21	17	14
Representation on university committees	21	19	15
Social activities and events	19	17	15
Orientation services	18	15	13
Facilities – meeting rooms, lockers	15	11	9
International student support	14	13	12
Equity initiatives	7	6	6

Across the board there is a clear decline in services offered to postgraduate students. Of greatest concern is the reduction in representation and advocacy. It remains unclear whether those PGsAs are able to continue providing the services at pre-VSU levels, notwithstanding increases in postgraduate student enrolments throughout the sector.

Prior to VSU the vast majority (95%) of responding PGsAs offered 'advocacy and advice' and 'representation on university committees'. Most (86% and 82% respectively) of the PGsAs also offered 'social activities and events' and 'orientation services'.

While advocacy, representation, social activities and orientation activities remained the most likely for PGsAs to continue to offer following the introduction of VSU in July 2006, many were unable to offer them at pre-2006 levels and some could not offer them at all.

The uni did recognise the importance of advocacy for students and wanted to see a re-structure of the organisation that included this support.

Student organisations [will] not provide any services or employ any staff. What [will] happen to organisation assets [is] unclear.

Budget of [PGSA] severely reduced. Honorariums of exec likely to be removed (except for President). Removal of scholarships and book grants. Removal of promotional items and admin and student support staff. Reduced social activities / networking opportunities.

3.1.5. Staff (question 13)

Table 2. EFT staff at total PGSAs

PGSA	Pre VSU (Pre July 1)	Post VSU July 1 - Dec 31)	2007 projections
All	46.72	28.67	18.67

As shown in the table above, staffing loss was dramatic and projections for 2007 showed considerable loss of staff from most PGSAs. It is important to note that while representation is generally done by student representatives, with support from staff members, advocacy services are almost exclusively provided by staff employed by PGSAs. This table represents a real reduction in the capability of student organisations to provide essential services.

3.2. Questionnaire 2 (2007)

3.2.1. Income (question 7)

PGSAs were asked about their membership structure for 2007 and whether they were charging a membership fee. Prior to the legislative change most PGSAs relied solely on student services fee revenue and few PGSAs had access to other revenue streams.

In 2007, membership was free for 55% of the 20 responding PGSAs. For the 45% charging a fee, some had a flat rate while others had membership levels with varying fees. The maximum fee charged was reported as approximately \$60 at 4 PGSAs, 3 were charging between \$100 and \$200 and 1 was charging \$299.

Universities are providing some financial support for 70% of the 20 responding PGSAs:

We have been very well supported by our University. While all our funding comes from the university we have been supported to continue operating as an independent body.

Of those supported by the university, at least half have conditions attached to the funding. Some conditions stipulate services that must be provided. Some preclude the payment of honorariums:

Funding agreement in place for 2007, situation for 2008 uncertain.

As funding sources vary, PGSAs were asked to estimate total PGSA funding for 2007 as a % of the pre-VSU funding allocation. An estimate of less than 50% of pre-VSU funding was given by 40% of respondents, with funding levels less than 5% for 4 PGSAs.

3.2.2. International students (question 8)

The amendments to the ESOS Act permitted universities to continue to charge a services fee for International students despite the implementation of VSU. While the majority of PGAs were unsure whether or not International students were being charged at their university, 10% stated a compulsory fee is charged and 30% stated that there is no charge.

3.2.3. Structure and independence (questions 9 and 10)

PGAs were asked about their organisational structure and level of independence from the university and other student organisations.

Of the respondents, 40% are independent and separate from other student organisations, 15% are autonomously governed departments of a broader student organisation, and 20% are wholly integrated with another student organisation, union or guild. These results are similar to the 2007 projections from the 2006 questionnaire.

Many of the written comments focused on the problem of budgets being controlled by another student organisation, often one with no postgraduate students on its board or executive:

[Guild] Executive members appear obviously strained with their own workloads such that postgraduates appear to have a lower than usual priority.

The University will not deal directly with our PGA - we have to be funded through the guild but they have not allocated any funds this year and do not plan on doing so until at least next year but they want us to affiliate with them first.

3.2.4. Representation and services (question 11)

The majority of responding PGAs provided the following services to ALL postgraduate students (descending order):

Representation (90%)
Orientation (75%)
Social activities and events (75%)
Advocacy and Advice (70%)
International Student Support (65%)

Less than half of PGAs provided the following services to ALL postgraduate students (descending order):

Equity initiatives (45%)
Facilities e.g. meeting room (40%)
Arts and cultural (30%)
Legal services (30%)
Counselling services (20%)
Housing (15%)
Clubs (15%)

Most PGSA's were providing services for all postgraduates regardless of membership. Only approximately 15% of PGSA's provided members-only services.

These results of services in descending order of offering are very similar to what was projected for 2007 in the 2006 questionnaire. However, there is persistent uncertainty about the continuing capacity to offer services:

The future is very unsure. The memberships have dropped heavily and especially PG memberships. The kind of funding the PGSA is in for the next year is unsure, and the challenges to deliver and represent are enormous with limited funding.

Postgraduate student representation on university committees is essential. This includes membership on governing committees and ad hoc committees and working parties. The respondents were asked only about membership of the University Council. One half of all respondents indicated that members involved with their PGSA were also members of university councils. Those students though are now much less likely to have the support of PGSA staff and are more likely to experience problems in communication with the postgraduate student cohort.

VSU has definitely made my job of connecting with postgraduate students, and to know what their needs are, far more difficult than might otherwise be the case.

3.2.5. Staff (question 12)

Respondents were asked how many staff (equivalent full time) were allocated to or employed by their PGSA. This question was intended to find out the staffing numbers dedicated to postgraduate-specific services and support. The 20 responding PGSA's had a total of 27.5 EFT staff in 2007. A 0.5 position was reported at 3 PGSA's, while 7 had no staff at all. Even though staff numbers were higher overall than stated in the 2007 projections from the 2006 questionnaire, importantly, the roles of existing staff have changed, reflecting reduced advocacy and research roles.

Forced to reduce full time advocacy position to 1 day a week.

3.3. Findings Summary

While some of the same questions were asked in both questionnaires, care should be taken in drawing conclusions from a comparison of answers across both questionnaires. While the response rates were similar, only 12 PGSA's answered both questionnaires. Given the small number of PGSA's, this difference in the population response frames could impact significantly on the results. In other words, it is difficult to draw clear conclusions where the situation may appear to be better or worse than anticipated, as this may

simply be a reflection of the particular PGSAs that completed the 2007 questionnaire.

Questions about involvement in change were not asked in the 2007 questionnaire. The results of the 2006 questionnaire suggest that, at least initially, most PGSAs were involved to some extent. Final decision-making, however, appeared to have excluded the important stakeholders, including PGSAs and postgraduate students. Just over half the PGSAs were provided with the final report. Anecdotal stories told of knowing that the report was finished but having to wait weeks to hear the outcome.

Organisational independence is a serious concern. A significant part of the effectiveness of student organisations is their independence from the university. While funding agreements have allowed many PGSAs to survive, at least in the short term, these PGSAs are now in the position of having to manage the degree to which those funding agreements curtail their independence. This may be through explicit conditions placed in their agreements, or implicitly through pressure that may be brought to bear whenever funding agreements may be due to be renegotiated.

Many PGSAs have also experienced pressure from their universities to merge with the undergraduate student organisation. Persistent through both questionnaires is evidence of extensive problems for many PGSAs that have been forced to merge with a general student organisation. In many cases dedicated services and representation for postgraduates appear to have been lost.

Income has been greatly reduced due to the loss of membership fees. Despite many universities providing some financial support, the little funding that is available is often not within the control of the PGSA. Loss of income has meant that staff numbers have been dramatically reduced across the board and many PGSAs are now unable to offer many of the services they had in the past.

Core services such as representation, advocacy and activities continue to be offered at most PGSAs but it is unclear whether these are being offered at pre-VSU levels, if they are still specifically for postgraduates, if they are still being actively promoted or if they are able to meet demand. Several universities have given a commitment to continue to fund advocacy, however the capacity for PGSAs to continue to offer other services, including equity initiatives, and training programs is greatly reduced.

The reduction in services may be the most significant issue for postgraduates. Representation on university committees may still exist, but the capacity for this to be effective will be reduced through lack of student representatives and lack of staff support. Advocacy services may still exist but must be provided at reduced capacity due to fewer staff. Cafes and other food outlets may still exist but their opening hours may no longer be appropriate for the needs of postgraduate students.

As well as a loss of staff, the roles of remaining staff have changed. There are now almost no research staff employed at PGSA's and less staff are employed to undertake academic advocacy. What is not known is how many staff positions have been converted to membership recruitment and promotional roles.

4. Implications: The impact of VSU for postgraduate students

The impact of VSU has already had widespread implications for the higher education sector. This section outlines some of the further implications of the impact of VSU on postgraduate students, along with the effect this is likely to have on individual universities and the higher education sector more broadly.

In the course of their studies, postgraduate students often have to balance competing work, study, family and financial responsibilities. They often also have to cope with the isolation that may come with postgraduate study, and sometimes find themselves faced with academic difficulties for which they need specialist advice. Central to the needs of postgraduate students therefore is access to advocacy and advice informed by an understanding of the issues they are faced with, and dedicated services aimed at supporting them through their studies.

This requires an environment of constant monitoring and improvement, where universities should be able to be competitive in terms of what they invest in support of both quality and equity in postgraduate education. The impact of VSU directly threatens this, through the loss of funds to support independent postgraduate advocacy, through continued threats to the organisational independence of postgraduate organisations and their ability to represent their constituents' views, and through the loss of funds to support dedicated services in support of postgraduate students.

4.1. Threats to independent advocacy and representation

In its submission to the Senate inquiry, CAPA anticipated that:

Should the current Bill become legislation, postgraduate research students risk losing their access to specialist advocates with a sound understanding of research specific issues and experience in advising on supervision problems. The academic and social events that contribute to the vibrant research culture on many campuses will decline, and in many cases cease altogether. Student representation on university boards and committees, which has led universities to adopt minimum resources policies, supervision accreditation and training programs, transparent scholarship selection processes and fairer intellectual property policies, will lack the resources necessary for their representation to be effective.¹⁶

Of all of the services any student organisation can provide, independent advocacy and representation is the most important. The services provided by all student organisations, and in particular by postgraduate student organisations, have evolved in response to the needs of students.

¹⁶ CAPA 2005, *Submission to the Inquiry into the provisions of the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Student Union Fees) Bill 2005*, Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee

Postgraduate organisations are at the forefront of providing for the needs of students in an environment dramatically changed and continually evolving. The services postgraduate organisations provide vary depending primarily on the level and security of funding and also on patterns of enrolment, their relationship with other student organisations and whether service provision is centralised in one body or distributed amongst several.

There are two components of independent representation and advocacy: firstly the advocacy services available to individual students, and secondly the representation function that in effect bridges the quality assurance cycle between students, student advocates, student representation and university policy, procedures, administration and management. Two of the most significant consequences of VSU for postgraduate students are the loss of funding to support dedicated advocacy services for postgraduate students, and the threat to the organisational independence of postgraduate student organisations.

4.1.1. Loss of resources to support advocacy services

While PGSAAs have prioritised the provision of advocacy, many have been forced to reduce their staff levels. Others are now in a position of sharing staff with the general student organisation, meaning that postgraduate specialist advocacy may not be available.

International students are significant users of student organisation services. This is partly a result of their being on campus full-time, but is also because they are in greater need of services.¹⁷ At universities with a relatively high international postgraduate student enrolment (over 30%) they comprise approximately 90% of PGSA advocacy load. Already many of these students have limited access to help in applying for special consideration and in the progress review process, for example. They are also becoming more isolated due to the loss of experienced advocates and other support networks.

The role of advocacy is also an integral part of university procedures, most notably as part of academic assessment and appeals processes. Advocates minimise confusion by exploring students' concerns in depth and identifying their issues and needs. For example, students accounting for difficulties in academic progress can spend time with an advocate talking through and identifying all of the issues involved, making the subsequent task faced by the review committee much easier.

Students are much less likely to approach an organisation providing advocacy services where they do not perceive them to be impartial and separate to the university. This is especially the case for international students. The fact that students do not come forward with their difficulties or concerns however does not make their problems go away. A direct implication of students not having

¹⁷ Burke, Kelly and Jopson, Debra, 'Stressed-out students queue up for sick notes at exam time', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 May 2005, available online at: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/National/Stressedout-students-queue-up-for-sick-notes-at-exam-time/2005/05/15/116095857419.html>

access to informed, impartial advice is that problems they may be having will be identified later in their enrolment, and by that time are likely to have escalated into more serious difficulties that are more complex, more acrimonious and more difficult to resolve. In the absence of such services, often the only option for resolving grievances will be through outside lawyers, increasing both the cost and the adversarial nature of the process for all parties involved.

While the advocacy function initially assists individual students, generally the outcomes have wider implications as they often lead to changes in university policy and procedures. The advocate role also contributes to university accountability by ensuring that policy and procedures are implemented consistently and appropriately and by identifying systemic issues that may arise. Most postgraduate advocacy units maintain confidential reporting on caseload trends. This information is extremely valuable for universities who seek to make improvements in the quality of the postgraduate programs they offer as well as the quality of the student experience more generally. Well resourced postgraduate associations can in effect offer an “early warning” service for universities through student representation on university committees that is informed by the problems identified through the advocacy service and by broader caseload trends.

4.1.2. Threats to representation and organisational independence

Postgraduate student representatives are members of faculty committees, academic boards, sub committees and working parties, university councils, and student assessment and appeal committees. Most committees involve a substantial time commitment from representatives.

Student representatives are most effective on committees where they are able to benefit from background information, training and meeting briefings provided by student organisations. Prior to VSU, PGSA's were also able to prepare and maintain research material on postgraduate issues and were regularly active and constructive participants in internal university reviews. Well-supported student representation means much more than simply engaging individual student representatives in university decision-making. With appropriate support, student representation means informed participation in the way universities are run, which yields benefits for both universities and students alike.

Understood in this way, independent representation is in fact a key quality assurance mechanism. Well supported student representation can identify issues that improve quality: for example, as a result of student organisation lobbying most universities now have policies on minimum resources for research students. When their representation is informed by advocacy, representatives can identify practice weaknesses and the potential impact of university-proposed changes on particular groups of students. University management has recognised this fundamental representative role, which has accordingly been built into policies and procedures.

Representation is a service from which every student benefits. Most university policy and procedures have been developed with student representative input. For example, current students and staff may not realise that the policies that provide them with rights of appeal and natural justice would not exist were it not for student representation on university boards and committees.

For the advocacy function provided by the PGSA to be able to be genuinely effective in the longer term, one-on-one advocacy services need to be matched with a well-supported means of representing the interests of postgraduate students. In many cases, independent representation for postgraduate students is at risk due to continued threats to the organisational independence of their postgraduate students association.

Postgraduate student representatives are carrying out their roles on university boards and committees with limited assistance and support:

The PGSA has been merged into the whole student organisation ... and does not exist autonomously. A committee was set up for postgrads ... The current postgrad member of the student council and board has recently resigned, and new PG representation has to be organised for these bodies. So far, this has been difficult, as it has been challenging trying to communicate.

Recruitment of postgraduate representatives for both PGSA and university committees is also becoming increasingly difficult:

Having trouble recruiting postgrads to the committee as they have to be financial members of the undergrads to be eligible for nomination.

The loss of independent PGSA's represents the loss of democratic representation for postgraduate students. Even more concerning is the possibility that universities themselves may create new departments designed to take over the role of PGSA's, student unions and guilds. The danger for independent advocacy and representation is that the university itself will then set the agenda for all student activities, feedback and involvement in university decision making:

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.

Maintaining contact with all postgraduate students is becoming an increasingly difficult undertaking:

One PGSA service that the university snapped up was moderating an email list to all postgrads. The PGSA now has to go through the university to get messages to postgrads and messages could be heavily moderated.

PGSAs, whether totally autonomous or independently governed within a wider student organisation, were established because postgraduate students have perspectives and needs that differ significantly from those of the undergraduate student body. Under VSU, this independent voice has disappeared at many universities.

4.2. Loss of dedicated services for postgraduates

In its 2005 submission to the Senate inquiry into the VSU HESA amendment, CAPA predicted that:

While postgraduate organisations may generate some external income from sponsorship and commercial dealings, they are dependent for the majority of their income on the general services fee. If income from this fee ceases or is severely reduced, the services provided by student organisations will diminish or in some cases cease altogether. Certainly the diversity of provision of services will come to an end, as it will no longer be possible to cater for all needs. Many staff and casual student employees of student organisations and subsidiary services will lose their jobs should the current Bill be implemented.

At some postgraduate organisations these effects will be felt immediately; at others reserve funding may allow them to continue to provide some services in the short term. Student organisations at the older universities are more likely to survive because they have existing facilities and service arms that can generate some income. It is the student organisations at newer and smaller regional universities that are likely to suffer the most.¹⁸

It would appear that the PGSAs who completed the questionnaires are the lucky ones. They are still surviving, albeit under reduced circumstances. The results therefore present a 'best case' scenario. They do not reflect the annihilation of the PGSAs from at least 8 universities.

Despite significant funding reductions, PGSAs continue to attempt to provide universal access to postgraduate-specific services. Central to the provision of dedicated services and representation is the support of staff with skills and experience in working with postgraduate students.

Funding for staff is significantly reduced and even where some is available, it is often not under the control of the PGSA. Staff have been halved across Australia and completely gone from many PGSAs. Those staff who remain are now often focused on promotion and recruitment activities. Even those services that are still provided are offered at reduced levels.

The PGSA is still autonomous though is much more under the control of the undergraduate body. We've lost the PGSA office and now the staff member is required to assist in other areas of the association.

¹⁸ CAPA 2005, *Submission to the Inquiry into the provisions of the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Student Union Fees) Bill 2005*, Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee (available at www.capa.edu.au/submissions).

Academic and social events, while retained at some PGSA's, have also been reduced generally:

[The PGSA is] under the guild and made to jump through hoops if the postgrads want to do anything! Scratchy relationship at best.

Accompanying the loss of dedicated staff to support postgraduates has been a trend toward a to generic model of service provision, or a "one size fits all" model for student services. Where formerly there were staff with background and experience in providing services for postgraduate students, many student organisations are instead providing student services on an undifferentiated basis, that is, generic services making no distinction between undergraduate, postgraduate or international students. This trend inevitably also means a corresponding drop in the quality of those services.

4.3. Research on postgraduate issues

While PGSA's have prioritised the provision of advocacy, many have been forced to reduce their staff levels. Many others are now in a position of sharing staff with the general student organisation, meaning that postgraduate specialist advocacy may not be available. What has effectively disappeared is the research activity on postgraduate issues that previously informed advocacy and representation at the campus level. There are now very few staff left at campus level who are dedicated to researching postgraduate issues. Predominantly the remaining research activity on postgraduate issues is that carried out by the national postgraduate body CAPA. As a result of VSU even that capability is becoming significantly constrained.

In its submission to the Senate inquiry, CAPA predicted that:

It is questionable whether CAPA would be able to participate to the degree it currently does in higher education issues should the current Bill be passed due to the financial effects on CAPA's affiliate organisations. Should this be the case, the provision of a cohesive postgraduate voice at a national level would diminish and policy debate on postgraduate issues would no longer be informed as it is currently...

CAPA is dependent on an affiliation fee from its members, thus national representation is dependent on financially viable affiliate organisations. If affiliates cannot provide funding, CAPA's role will be seriously diminished. This will eliminate a key player from national higher education debates and deny valuable student input into the decision making of other sector bodies such as the AVCC. Other national student organisations will be similarly affected, thus silencing the national student voice.¹⁹

¹⁹ CAPA 2005, *Submission to the Inquiry into the provisions of the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Student Union Fees) Bill 2005*, Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee

CAPA is funded through affiliation fees from PGSAs. Despite their own adverse financial situation, many PGSAs were still able to pay all or part of their 2007 fees, as collectively PGSAs believe it is vital to maintain a strong research profile and an effective voice for postgraduate issues at the national level. In 2007 CAPA continued to play an important role in the sector while operating on less than 50% of the pre-VSU budget. Resources are stretched extremely thin, and, given the uncertain financial situation of many PGSAs, it is unclear how sustainable this will be.

Until 2006, CAPA provided total funding for the National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation (NIPAAAC). CAPA also employed a 0.6 researcher to work solely on Indigenous higher education issues under the direction of NIPAAAC. This position was located in the CAPA office with CAPA funding all associated costs. This position was made redundant in late 2005 and the funding for NIPAAAC was also reduced. CAPA has a long-term commitment to supporting NIPAAAC and affiliates were determined that some funding would be continued.

In 2005, CAPA employed 4 staff (in addition to the NIPAAAC researcher) at a total of 3.8 EFT positions. In 2007, this has been reduced to 2 staff at a total of 1.4 EFT positions. Honorariums have been abolished for all positions except that of President. That position has a reduced honorarium and has been made part-time. The positions of general manager and administration officer have been cut. While the two research positions were retained, these remaining staff have had to assume most of the duties of the redundant positions, severely diminishing the time available to focus on research.

4.4. Predictions

- In the absence of access to adequately supported independent advocacy it is likely that universities will observe a decline in academic indicators for postgraduate students in areas such as academic progress and completion rates. This will be due in large part to the fact that specialised services which previously supported students who were having difficulties will be gone.
- Advocates that are not perceived to be impartial and independent from the university will continue to see a decline in the number of students approaching them for advice. Far from suggesting that there are simply fewer problems among the student population, it is likely that over time there will be an increase in difficult grievance cases, and an increase in the number of student grievances that escalate to the level of ombudsman, external lawyers and the media.
- It is also likely that there will be a continued trend of “slippage” on policies and procedures relating to postgraduate students that will have a negative effect, which will come about because of the lack of informed participation by student representatives. Without this involvement by students it is also likely that there will be a continued

deterioration in accountability and transparency in university decision-making, especially in regard to issues such as arbitrary increases in fees.

- In the absence of representative organisations that are perceived to be independent, it will be increasingly difficult to engage with individual students in the postgraduate community to foster effective social networks and build on the volunteerism that was a feature of independent PGSA's in the past. These difficulties will extend from activities and social events through to encouraging effective participation in university committees and reviews.
- Overall student satisfaction will decline wherever there is the loss of an independent, adequately resourced student organisation. The key factors influencing this will be a sense that students will have nowhere to go with their questions or concerns, and the simple fact that they will have very few options to broaden their student experience outside of simply getting their degree. For postgraduate students in particular this will mean an overall decline in the quality of their student experience, with few opportunities to engage more broadly with the university community and with their peers, and an overall loss of a sense of collegiality. The increased sense of isolation will over time negatively impact on retention and completion rates, as postgraduates will no longer have the support networks they had in the past.
- Some universities have taken a positive approach to supporting independent postgraduate student organisations on their campus, and maintaining dedicated advocacy, services and representation for postgraduate students. It is hoped that the trend of cutting back in this area will be reversed, and more universities will recognise the opportunity to distinguish themselves as a quality institution, one that is genuinely supportive of a vibrant research culture and one that genuinely values postgraduate students. Such an approach will make those institutions more attractive to prospective students, and will likely also have a positive effect on their quality assurance processes, on student satisfaction indicators and on academic indicators such as retention and completion rates.

4.5. Conclusions and future research

The first casualties of VSU were representation and services for postgraduate students. The biggest loss to the higher education sector was the skills and experience of the staff of these organisations who were committed to supporting quality student services for many years, and were widely respected and greatly valued members of the university community. For postgraduate students in particular VSU has meant a loss of dedicated services. Student representation and organisational autonomy for their representative organisations is now under continued threat.

The impact of VSU on postgraduate student organisations is yet to stabilise. More redundancies are mooted and more universities are pressing for mergers and university takeovers. Some PGSA's are currently operating on reserves.

Further research in 2008 would give a clearer picture of the impact of VSU, and how universities and student organisations have responded. Any subsequent research into the on-going impact of VSU must also address the appearance of new student "service providers" and other outlets for student services that are either directly or indirectly under university control. Further research in the new environment may be best achieved through detailed case studies or through in-depth interviews. The use of identified data may also help in assessing the extent to which those universities who have taken a positive approach to supporting quality student services have yielded benefits more broadly for their university and for their campus community. Greater transparency among universities in what they invest in their students will also support continued quality improvement in this area, and an informed choice for students deciding which university they will attend.

5. References

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6. Appendices

6.1. 2006 Questionnaire

Name of University

Location, campus

Name of Postgraduate Student Association (PGSA)

Q1. Is your University charging a compulsory services/amenities fee for the following groups of students? (If **'yes'** how much?)

Q2. Which student organisations at your University are offering voluntary membership for students in Semester 2 2006 and in 2007?

Q3. If you are aware of any services that will be available for **members only**, please indicate in the table below.

Q4. **Prior** to any VSU related changes what organisations provided services at your University?

Q5a. Are you aware of any committees, working parties or consultancies convened at your University to plan for the provision of student services under VSU?

Q5b. Who do these working parties / committees / consultancies report to?

Q5c. Who are/were their members? (Please select ALL that apply)

Q5d. What is the timeframe for the planning (if known)?

Q5e. Who initiated the planning? (Please select ONE only)

Q5f. Has your PGSA been invited to provide/does your PGSA intend to offer

Q5g. Did you receive and do you have access to a Final report from the working party/committee?

Q5h. How would you describe the way planning decisions have been made?

Q6a. Are you aware of planning/decisions regarding **restructuring of student organisations** at your University for 2006-2007?

Q6b. Has your PGSA had the opportunity to be involved in this planning?

Q6c. Do these plans involve the merger, winding up or takeover of your **PGSA**?

Q6d. Do these plans involve the merger, winding up or takeover of other student services, organisations or assets?

Q7. In seeking the support of your University, has your PGSA made a submission outlining the services you offer?

Q8a. Has your University offered any commitment to provide financial support for your PGSA under VSU?

Q8b. What amount (as a % of the pre-VSU services/amenities fee allocation) has been offered by your University to your PGSA?

Q8c. What is the timeframe of this funding offer?

Q9. Do any students involved with your PGSA currently also sit on University Council?

Q10. Please indicate the incorporated status (under state Associations Incorporations Act) of your **PGSA**.

Q11. How is funding allocated to your PGSA?

Q11c. Thinking about **2007**, how will funding be allocated to your PGSA?

- Q12 Please estimate your PGSA funding allocation as a % of the services/amenities fee
- Q12c. Thinking about **2007**, please estimate your PGSA funding as a % of the pre-VSU allocation.
- Q13 How many staff (equivalent full time) are employed by or allocated to your PGSA and what are their roles?
- Q14. What services are provided to postgraduate students by your PGSA?
- Q15. Please include any other information about your PGSA and VSU related changes (eg: take-over of postgraduate services by the University or other student organisations, reduction in equity representation or honorariums, likelihood of PGSA survival):
- Q16. Do you have access to any relevant documents (Q5g and Q7) **and** are able to share them as a resource for other PGSAs?
- Q17. Finally, if there are any other comments you would like to make regarding the survey or the situation at your PGSA, please provide these below

6.2. 2007 Questionnaire

- Q1. Name of PGSA
- Q2. Name of person completing the survey
- Q3. Email contact address
- Q4. What is the maximum charge for full year membership of your PGSA in 2007?
- Q5. Is your University providing financial support for your PGSA in 2007?
- Q6. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, are there conditions attached to this support (eg services that must or must not be offered)?
- Q7. Please estimate your total PGSA funding for 2007 as a % of the pre-VSU (funding) allocation.
- Q8. Is your university charging a compulsory student services fee for International students in 2007?
- Q9. How is your PGSA governed?
- Q10. Is your PGSA incorporated (under a State Associations Incorporations Act)?
- Q11. What services are provided to postgraduate students by your PGSA?
- Q12. Approximately how many staff (equivalent full-time) are employed by, or allocated to, your PGSA?
- Q13. Do any students involved with your PGSA currently also sit on University Council?
- Q14. Please provide any comments you would like to make about your PGSA and VSU related changes (eg take-over of postgraduate services by the University or other student organisations, reduction in equity representation or honorariums, likelihood of PGSA survival)?
- Q15. Please provide any other comments you would like to make?
- Q16. If we receive sufficient responses, we will produce a summary table showing the impact of VSU at each PGSA. (This table would not include the free-text comments you provided in the previous section). Do you agree to your PGSA being identified in the table?

6.3. HESA “VSU” amendments

Schedule 1—Amendments
Higher Education Support Act 2003

1 After section 19-35
Insert:

19-37 Requiring membership of certain organisations or payment of certain amounts

- (1) A higher education provider must not:
- (a) require a person to be or to become a member of an organisation of students, or of students and other persons; or
 - (b) require a person enrolled with, or seeking to enrol with, the provider to pay to the provider or any other entity an amount in respect of an organisation of students, or of students and other persons; unless the person has chosen to be or to become a member of the organisation.
- (2) A higher education provider must not require a person enrolled with, or seeking to enrol with, the provider to pay to the provider or any other entity an amount for the provision to students of an amenity, facility or service that is not of an academic nature, unless the person has chosen to use the amenity, facility or service.
- (3) Subsection (2) does not apply to an amount that the higher education provider requires the person to pay if the amount is for goods or services that:
- (a) are essential for the course of study in which the person is enrolled or seeking to enrol; and
 - (b) the person has the choice of acquiring from, but does not acquire from, a supplier other than the higher education provider; and
 - (c) either:
 - (i) are goods that become the property of the person that are not intended to be consumed during the course of study; or
 - (ii) consist of food, transport or accommodation associated with provision of field trips in connection with the course of study.

1A Application provision

Section 19-37 of the Higher Education Support Act 2003 as amended by this Act does not apply to anything done by a higher education provider before 1 July 2006, unless:

- (a) it is done on or after 1 January 2006; and
- (b) it relates to a person who is enrolled with, or seeking to enroll with, the provider; and

- (c) the enrolment is, or will be, for a period of study starting on or after 1 July 2006; and
- (d) the person is not enrolled with, or seeking to enrol with, the provider for a period of study in 2006 starting before 1 July 2006.

2 At the end of subsection 33-20(2)

Add:

Note: A higher education provider's basic grant amount for the grant year can also be adjusted in respect of the grant year under section 33-37.

3 At the end of Subdivision 33-C

Add:

33-37 Adjustments for breach of section 19-37

(1) A higher education provider's *basic grant amount for the grant year is reduced by an adjustment in respect of the grant year if, on one or more occasions during the grant year, the provider breaches a condition imposed under section 19-37.

(2) The adjustment under subsection (1) is an amount worked out using the formula:

Reduction amount — Total places allocated
where:

reduction amount is \$100.

Note: The reduction amount is indexed under Part 5-6.

total places allocated is the total number of Commonwealth supported places allocated under section 30-10 to the higher education provider for the grant year.

(3) This section does not apply in relation to a breach of a condition imposed under section 19-37 by a higher education provider if:

- (a) the breach consists of requiring a person to pay money to the provider or another entity; and
- (b) as a result of the requirement, the person paid money to the provider or other entity; and
- (c) the Minister has given a written notice to the provider under subsection (4); and
- (d) the provider or other entity repays the money to the person within 28 days after the Minister gave the notice to the provider.

(4) If the Minister becomes aware that:

(a) a higher education provider has breached a condition imposed under section 19-37; and

(b) the breach consists of requiring a person to pay money to the provider or another entity;

the Minister must give to the provider a written notice:

(c) requiring repayment, within 28 days after the notice is given, of any money paid to the provider or any other entity as a result of the requirement; and

(d) stating that failure to repay any such money within that period will result in a reduction under this section of the provider's *basic grant amount for the grant year in question.

The notice may relate to more than one breach.

(5) A failure by the Minister to give a notice under subsection (4) in relation to a breach of a condition imposed under section 19-37 does not prevent this section from applying in relation to the breach.

(6) This section does not apply more than once in relation to a higher education provider's *basic grant amount for a grant year.

4 After paragraph 54-5(b)

Insert:

(ba) if the breach is a breach of a condition imposed under section 19-37—the amount of any adjustment under section 33-37 in relation to that breach, or any other breach by the body, during the same year;

5 At the end of subsection 104-3(1)

Add “or with subsection (5)”.

Note: The heading to section 104-3 is altered by inserting “**etc.**” after “**Guidelines**”.

6 At the end of section 104-3

Add:

(5) *Open Learning Australia must comply with section 19-37 as if it were a higher education provider.

7 Section 198-5 (after table item 1)

Insert:

1A Reduction amount Section 33-37 2007