

\*\*\* Attention Education Journalists: **Embargoed until 3 November 2008** \*\*\*

## **Postgrads cautiously welcome “VSU” fix**

The Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) cautiously welcomed the announcement today from Minister for Youth and Sport, Kate Ellis, of measures to address the impact of the former Federal Government’s “VSU” legislation.

### **Compulsory fee reintroduced**

On measures announced today, universities would be able to charge students a compulsory fee of up to \$250 per year as early as July 1 2009. Students would have the option of deferring the fee to a HECS-style loan scheme.

### **National benchmarks for student support services and protocols for independent representation and advocacy proposed**

Along side the fee are proposals for university benchmarks for student support services, and protocols for independent representation and advocacy.

“I think postgraduates nationally will welcome this announcement with caution” CAPA President, Nigel Palmer said. “We certainly welcome the recognition by Government of the importance of student services and representation. Since the onset of “VSU” we have seen a dramatic decline in services and representation for postgraduates on most campuses. We would certainly need to see more detail on the proposed measures before concluding they will do anything to address this decline.

“These measures go some way in recognising that services and representation are an important part of university life, but there is a bigger principle at stake in this announcement. Since the onset of “VSU” we have seen the loss or appropriation of services and infrastructure formerly owned and run by students. The proposals announced today represent the culmination of this, effectively mandating a compulsory fee on students that will be entirely controlled and administered by universities. If a solution to “VSU” is restoring vibrant student services and representation that are independently funded and run by students, then the measures announced today fail in this.

“If students are paying, they need to have a direct say in how their money is being spent. At a minimum the Commonwealth should require institutions to account transparently for all revenues they yield through the re-introduction of a compulsory fee. An appropriate response however would be for the fee to be levied on behalf of student organisations, as was the case “pre-VSU”. There is nothing to suggest that student organisations currently struggling at the margins of sustainability will be able to take any encouragement from this at all.

At many institutions postgraduates are still a neglected part of the campus community, and postgraduate services and representation have been in steep decline since the onset of “VSU”. That these measures do anything at all to address this or not remains an open question,” CAPA President, Nigel Palmer concluded.

---

### **For media enquiries please contact:**

CAPA President Nigel Palmer - 0425 823 144

CAPA is the national peak body representing Australia's 270,000+ postgraduate students.  
Authorised by Nigel Palmer, CAPA; Printed by CAPA.  
Level 3, Trades Hall, 2 Lygon St, Carlton South, VIC, 3053