

Report for NUPSA Inc. Executive Committee on CAPA Conference

Name: James Pinkerton

Position/Working Party: Vice-President of NUPSA Inc.

Date: 08/12/16

Council of Australia Postgraduate Associations Incorporated (CAPA) Annual Council Meeting (ACM)

University of Sydney, Sydney, 23rd to 25th November 2016

This year I had the pleasure of representing NUPSA, and broadly, postgraduate students at the University of Newcastle, along with my fellow NUPSA Executive colleagues, the NUPSA President, the International student officer and the coursework officer. NUPSA was quite displeased with the performance of the CAPA Executive in 2016 and therefore believed it was most appropriate to send a large delegation to show our displeasure with the organisation, and also due to the close proximity of the conference to our university, which greatly limited travel costs. The overall goals for CAPA at this meeting were to voice our displeasure partly caused by lack of action of executive, lack of engagement with the Eastern region and Newcastle, and to ask the executive to justify the significant fees in which NUPSA contributes to CAPA each year. NUPSA's position was to state this displeasure and articulate that the NUPSA Executive was extremely disappointed with the organisation as a whole and that the actions of the year would result in NUPSA Executive voting on a motion to disaffiliate.

Briefly, I will summarise the three days events during the ACM.

Day 1

The initial day began with an address from Prof. Helene Marsh outlining to council the outcomes of the Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA) review. The review was commissioned in 2015 was composed to ensure that Australia maintains a quality research training scheme. This submission had 11 key findings and 6 separate recommendations to the current structure. The review found that the PhD student cohort had changed substantially since 1985, with a significant international student populace (compared to 1985), and a majority (>2/3) age bracket >30. The report also found that poor, remote and indigenous student numbers were very low, compared to the normal populace; and also found that there is poor knowledge transfer between the University sector and industry in postgraduate training.

Some of the key issues that need to be addressed in the paper included the satisfaction survey which only addressed graduates, potentially misleading the data; the fact that the Australian system may need to match up with the international system and begin to use masters degrees as an entry point for PhDs other than honours and that potential scholarship training schemes be put in place for supporting masters research students as their numbers have not increased in the last 30 years. Most importantly, the major recommendation to the current scholarship scheme has resulted in a deregulation of scholarship fees with a minimum payment of \$27, 700 pa up to ~\$41, 000 pa for 2017, with a scholarship lasting for 4 years to match the expected completion time for a PhD.

Broadly, NUPSA supports this recommendation but believes that moving all scholarships to match the Australian poverty line should be a minimum standard for all PhD scholarship schemes.

In respect to supervision it was recommended that Universities implement a more professional relationship between student and supervisor, as good supervision was shown to be a significant factor in student success. It was stated that students are not to be used for 'cheap labour' and supervisors need to adapt to appropriately train students for industry and post-study work outside of the normal academic sense.

Support for indigenous students was shown to be essential for 'closing the gap' and it was recommended that significant investment go into this support program. This was positively received by NATSIPA and the entire CAPA caucus.

Lastly greater industry engagement was suggested to be a key finding for future students and an internship training scheme for five months was suggested. This was not particularly well received by the CAPA caucus due to potential exploitation of labour.

The major recommendations of this report were accepted by the Australian government for the adoption in January 2017.

The next sessions of the day continued with the CAPA Executive giving their reports for the year.

The first report began with the CAPA President. The president was extremely tardy in their submission of their written report, having uploaded their report after giving a verbal report to the CAPA caucus. The president indicated that they had difficulty to engage all affiliates in 2016, particularly in the Northern and Eastern regions. They indicated this was partly due to inactive NOC regional members. These members were not paid honoraria but the president did not engage to replace these members instead opting for a 'wait and see' approach. They indicated to council that this may not have been the best approach. The president indicated that they had visited every major NOC area (excluding WA and regional areas) during the year and had indicated that they had been involved in major discussions with various government agencies and relevant unions. They lastly indicated that the policy and research position should be abolished with a paid position to be approached instead for CAPA.

The General Secretaries report indicated that CAPA had been relatively frugal in 2016 and had been able to meet the expected income revenue that was predicted during 2015.

The VP Equity indicated that the CAPA Executive worked reasonably well in respect to budgetary issues. However, they indicated that an election platform was missed for CAPA and they unfortunately were unable to get their 'support the poverty line increase' platform off the ground. They suggested that a serious campaign for consideration in 2017 be to address exploitation of international students in the work place; and also suggested that more staff for the organisation may be required to help the Executive function more effectively.

The VP NOC indicated that it had been a poor year for engaging affiliates and took most of the blame on themselves. They indicated that a functioning NOC is vital to CAPA.

The research officer highlighted that the major development of the year was the production of a party score card for the 2016 election. They indicated that unfortunately due to unforeseen circumstances they were unable to get a submission to government in time related to higher educational policy. They suggested the role be cut and merged with the VP NOC as they believed that an employed position was more suited to the task. NUPSA was against this proposal as NUPSA sees the role of CAPA as a student led association with students developing skills in their leadership roles. NUPSA sees this as integral for the organisation and was opposed to this merger of roles.

The media officer highlighted that it had been a good year for media; and the queer officer noted that marriage equality should be a target for CAPA in 2017.

Day 2

The second day of the conference began with a meeting of the Eastern caucus, which represents the NSW and ACT region. NUPSA was pleased to discover that 2 new regional candidates, UNESA (representing the University of New England) and SCU postgraduate union, representing Southern Cross University were in attendance. This caucus highlighted the issues for students in our region and the need for representation in our region. The issue of travel concession for our region was raised again and was highlighted as an important campaign for 2017. We next selected the President to represent the Eastern region for 2017, and I am pleased to announce that NUPSA's own International officer will represent the Eastern region for 2017.

Following the regional meeting the ACM began, with the credentialing of all delegates. NUPSA supported all delegates from financially 'strapped' institutions as it was our belief that it is important for them to have a voice and not be excluded due to an inability to collect funding. This is extremely important for new postgraduate student organisations who do want to represent their students but do not have the financial means.

NUPSA did not support the credentialing or discount to the Sydney University Postgraduate Association (SUPRA) due to dissatisfaction within the organisation. Many organisations were disgruntled at the performance of the 2016 executive and we believed that it was not fair for a wealthy organisation would use fees for a political protest when NUPSA with a much smaller budget pays fees in full. This motion was passed in favour with NUPSA against.

NUPSA would like to congratulate Gold Coast Postgraduate Association for becoming a full voting member of CAPA. The Gold Coast association has been an active non-voting member of CAPA in the national body and northern region and it was particularly pleasing to see them elected.

Following credentialing CAPA had 21 voting council members for the CAPA ACM.

Briefly, NUPSA supported the passing of executive minutes from 2015 and executive reports which were carried. In respect to the 2017 budget which included provisions for a staff position to assist the research officer, NUPSA suggested that more money be budgeted towards the position in order to attract the most skilled candidate for the position. These provisions were accepted by council and passed.

In relation to constitutional amendments related to the abolition of the research position, NUPSA was categorically opposed. NUPSA believes that students led advocates act are extremely important

to articulate the postgraduate student voice and that standing as elected officials in different capacities is extremely important for students to develop skills and further enhance the student experience. NUPSA understood the difficulties associated with the position and suggested that the employment of a part time staff member occur to assist the research officer. We opposed this amendment and it failed. NUPSA is pleased to see the continuation of the policy position for 2017.

Furthermore to proposed amendments, NUPSA was supportive of the motions to recognise NATSIPA as the official Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Postgraduate body, replacing NAIPAC; and the removal of gendered pronouns from the constitution. These proposals were accepted and passed by council.

Day 3

The general elections occurred for the CAPA Executive. NUPSA's own International officer ran for the position of VP NOC and was unfortunately unsuccessful. NUPSA would like to congratulate the president elect, Peter Derbyshire and his upcoming team for 2017.

James Pinkerton

Vice-President NUPSA