

Report for NUPSA Inc. Executive Committee on CAPA Conference

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This year, along with the NUPSA Research rep. and I had the pleasure of attending the CAPA SCM at Griffith University on the Gold Coast. CAPA represents the peak postgraduate student body in Australia. CAPA was founded in 1979 to advocate in a national capacity the interests of the Australian postgraduate student body. This includes to date over 340,000 students which is split amongst 280,000 coursework students and 60,000 research students. CAPA's role as a student body is split into three major roles: to advocate, research and lobby in respect to postgraduate student interests.

The SCM represents a key opportunity for affiliate entities to meet to discuss issues that affect their campuses and to reflect on the progress of the organisation for the year. The SCM also presents an opportunity for affiliates to work together on campaigns for the remainder of the 2017 year. For the 2017 SCM CAPA also hosted a Jobs After Graduation forum which to provide skills and workshop based activities for affiliates to take back to their bodies. The significant agenda items for the 2017 SCM include the CAPA opposition to the federal budget, the joint CAPA effort with UA and other associated stakeholders working on a new sexual assault strategy, the potential to expand CAPA to include New Zealand affiliates and the potential to develop strategies for new affiliates to join, as well as the potential for universities to have sub-affiliate access to CAPA.

On the importance of the days agendas I will summarise the events and the NUPSA's position as such:

Day 1

The opening days event was focused on Jobs After Graduation which focused on issues postgraduate students may face when transitioning into the workplace, as well as speakers from the academic realm to give insight into the academic realm, and professional speakers to help advise on skills workshops for postgraduate students.

The initial mornings discussions focused primarily on equity issues in the workplace and what strategies employers could take to ensure that equity groups felt included and were represented in the workplace. The equity panel was represented by people from international, queer, womens' and indigenous backgrounds. The themes primarily focused on ways employers could help promote an inclusive workplace to ensure that all groups were represented and respected. Unfortunately there was a lack of focus on increasing participation of students from a low SES background in the workplace and the equity panel may be better represented in the future by including students from this background. In respect to ensuring a non-judgmental approach to SES students the audience suggested that workplace cultures change to place less emphasis on appearance. Some suggestions

from the audience suggested student organisations could look to hire suits to provide to students undergoing interviews.

The morning session focused on an academic speaker from Griffith who had an unconventional journey through to academia. Their primary advice was to ensure one has good mentors to help them progress through their academic journey and that diversity in their degree was necessary. It was also important to ensure that early career researchers are supported to ensure that they are able to progress and ensure a smooth transition into the workplace.

The following afternoon session was delivered by a consultant from CPR group based in Southern Queensland which focuses on improving delivery of service for volunteer sports clubs. The speaker was extremely confident and passionate and presented on the skills required to interview well. The session was interactive with attendees splitting into groups focused on how to respond to interview questions well. To ensure successful interviews, attendees were told to focus on the employers business and to focus on the interviewers. A speaker of this calibre would represent an amazing opportunity to provide workshops for students focused on improving their employability and would be a good focus for NUPSA to investigate.

Day 2

The second day of the conference began with a welcome to country from a member of the Kombumerri people. The session opened with the CAPA President discussing the major focuses of the conference looking at the future of postgraduate training and alternative financial models for CAPA to investigate. The President also indicated that this year CAPA was focusing on challenging the federal budget and was working closely with NUS against the budget. The President has also met with a significant number of ministers such as the Minister for Education and the Shadow minister. There was also significant work being performed in 2017 to ensure CAPA was perceived with the highest regard. In 2017 there would also be a focus on transferable skills for postgraduate skills. The President indicated that they had the chance to travel to over 50% of university campuses to date with a focus on Queensland for the future. Some of the key issues affecting affiliate members included quality of supervision, income support, racism on campus, changes to VISAs and residency rules which CAPA would be strongly focusing on.

The General Secretary then proceeded to discuss some of the major focuses in their role for 2017 which included the preparation of documents and organisation of CAPA elections. They have currently received over 50% of affiliate fees from members and were operating under budget. They indicated that CAPA has plans in 2017 to introduce awards for affiliate members to recognise the hard work they do on their campuses.

The next talk was delivered by the Policy and Research Advisor who was working on a number of submissions for the year including a very recent one focused on Science in 2030. A significant project of interest continuing on in 2017 would be looking at HDR completion rates, the lack of completion and the reasons affecting students. This would be a joint project headed by the newly employed Research officer.

The Media officer next summarised their role which included dealing with CAPA communications such as social media, the newsletter and various other platforms. CAPA would also be investigating a new blog.

The NATSIPA liaison officer talked about the key campaigns for 2017 which included a focus on 'Invasion Day', as well as Reconciliation Day and NAIDOC week.

The equity officer discussed how they had the opportunity to attend NUS UK to discuss postgraduate issues. They discussed issues related to racism on campus, as well as a need to campaign for security to accurately record student attacks on campus. They also discussed how they played a prominent role focusing on the Fairs Fare campaign in Victoria.

The International officer discussed how they were focusing on enhancing collaboration with CISA. They also had significant focus on VISA issues affecting international students and there would be some investigation into international students not being reimbursed for non-completed forms.

The Disabilities officer discussed how they were working on academic adjustments, with a future focus on HDR students. They were also looking into improving access for disabled students on buses.

The Womens officer discussed how they were working closely with UA on the development of the sexual assault strategy. They talked about the need to target VCs and councils as individual organisations.

The Queer officer was currently vacant but being represented by the Equity officer. The focuses this year were on inclusivity and a need for gender neutral bathrooms.

The VP NOC talked about their focuses on the recruitment campaigns to affiliate members. They also discussed how the Facebook page had been revamped and that there was a significant focus on the Value Postgrads campaign.

The branch presidents then summarised their meetings with the Eastern branch President, representing NSW/ACT, talking about liaising with affiliates, however, they did indicate some difficulties engaging Wollongong students. They also indicated that they were able to attend the NSW Sexual Assault meeting on behalf of NSW students.

Following presentations the affiliated broke into their separate branch caucuses to discuss issues relevant to the separate regions. The issues relevant to each campus related to increased racist incidents, concerns about beach safety and access for international students to concession passes. The affiliates also discussed the potential to develop a sharing platform between NSW/ACT universities for access of library and computers to be further investigated.

After the caucus meetings the conference officially opened with the acceptance of all affiliates present, financial or otherwise. The first agenda item addressed the need for CAPA to adopt a single set of regulations, with a future need to construct a new set of regulations.

CAPAs response to the federal budget was the final agenda item for the afternoon, with CAPA indicating their opposition to the budget. The President indicated that the budget would have a detrimental effect on students as the efficiency dividend cut would result in ~\$2.8 billion loss to universities which would have a negative effect on students. Furthermore, the increased fees would

likely result in reduced student numbers which would have a 'pipeline' effect on postgraduate students and would likely result in further increases to postgraduate degrees. The President also highlighted CAPAs disappointment towards the retrospective changes in the HELP repayment scheme with students now expected to pay back student loans when earning ~\$42, 000 p.a. There was also concern expressed in regards to changes made to NZ students studying in Australia who would no longer have access to commonwealth support. The President highlighted some positives in the budget which included enshrining the Higher Education Placement Program, which aims to increase participation of low SES students, in legislation; as well as changes to commonwealth support for postgraduate students who may choose to change institutions.

Following these summaries, the day's activities adjourned.

Day 2

CAPA began the second day with a focus on research agendas for the year which included the need for CAPA to collect data on affiliates, organisations and demographics of students. The purpose of this agenda would be to develop a research database for all affiliates to use and access.

Attention was then focused on the budget campaign again with CAPA to coordinate a national campaign with help from affiliates, should they want to support it. This included letters campaigns, the running of workshops, discussions in newsletters and direct emails to relevant stakeholders.

The following forum next focused on the need to develop a CAPA response for the Sexual Assault strategy being implemented by UA. To formulate ideas, affiliates were encouraged to break into smaller groups with our group identifying the key needs to look at: training which takes into account cultural differences, the need to ensure continued support and reviewal, and the need to ensure strategies are developed to community standards of best practice.

For the afternoon sessions I attended the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander forum which was an open caucus. The key issues identified here were focused on increasing engagement of indigenous students. It was important to consider cultural sensitivities in this respect and to also consider approaching NATSIPA, which advocates nationally for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Postgraduate students, for help on increasing engagement.

The last sessions of the conference focused on the need to increase the membership of CAPA. The first agenda item included expansion of the organisation to include NZ universities. The affiliates were in agreement that CAPA should investigate research projects into the inclusion of NZ universities. The next agenda item looked at discussing the inclusion of 'sub-member'/subscription members from universities to have access to CAPA materials and conferences. The affiliates were in agreement that CAPA should investigate research projects into the inclusion of sub-affiliate bodies. Lastly, the agenda focused on the need to increase membership to ensure all universities are represented by CAPA. The proposed model would look to affiliate graduate research schools in the mid-term to act as affiliates for universities without active postgraduate student bodies. NUPSA had some significant concerns about non-independent bodies providing representatives to be advocates for students, which could have detrimental consequences on independent student advocacy. The affiliates were in agreement that CAPA should investigate research projects into the inclusion of

students from universities being affiliated with graduate research schools. The preceding proposals would all be reviewed at the 2017 CAPA ACM.

In summary, this conference highlighted the critical role CAPA plays in Postgraduate student advocacy. CAPA has shown significant improvement in 2017 and it is of my opinion that NUPSA continue supporting and engaging as a full member of this organisation for the foreseeable future. NUPSA has improved relationships with affiliates, particularly in NSW which will be important in order to set our own student policies and agendas. I would like to thank the executive and the postgraduate student body at the University of Newcastle for giving me the opportunity to attend this conference.

James Pinkerton

President NUPSA