

JAG Conference and CAPA SCM

NUPSA Research Representative Report

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I was lucky enough to attend the Jobs After Graduation (JAG) Conference and the Special Council Meeting of Council of Australia Postgraduate Associations Incorporated (CAPA) along with the President of NUPSA and the International Representative, who was there in his role as the Eastern Branch Officer of CAPA. I would like to thank the executive for giving me the opportunity to represent NUPSA and our postgraduate students at this event, and I hope we can use the information and ideas we brought back to continue providing an active voice and support network for our postgraduate students!

What follows is a brief day by day breakdown of each event.

Day 1- Jobs After Graduation Conference

The conference opened at 10.30am with a panel discussion around equity in the workplace and the university. The panel consisted of members of the CAPA executive: the VPNOG, the VP of Equity, South-Eastern Branch Officer and the NATSIPA liaison Officer. They discussed increased racism on campus, and the difficulties associated with undergoing undergraduate and postgraduate research as part of an equity group. NUPSA contributed that a low SES students also experience hardship in a university setting, and this was briefly taken into the panels discussions. Ultimately the session confirmed the importance of cultural and social awareness. Student Associations need to ensure that correct and up to date information is always provided for students, and the ensure students are aware of all social, academic and cultural support networks provided on their campuses and within the local community. It is also important that all student representatives are up to date with policies and regulations that affect students so correct information can be given at all times and best support can be provided.

Regarding discussion stemming from low SES students, there was also an interesting suggestion that universities could provide interview attire rental for students. Perhaps this is something NUPSA could look into.

The next session of the day had a lecturer from Griffith University discuss his personal journey from study into Industry and back into academia where he is currently completing his PhD in Physiotherapy. This was a highly specific presentation that told the personal story of how industry and career experience can enhance the PhD experience for some disciplines. For me, this session highlighted the many different PhD experiences, and made me think about the process of the PhD and how typically, it is a precursor to a career, rather than a reaction to one. With the perception of the "PhD as the new degree", this session prompted thought around what student associations can do to support students heading into Industry and academia, as the speaker's experience is becoming less and less frequent.

The next speaker was from the CPR Group and spoke at length about the interviewing process and how to change your mindset to appeal to the interviewer. He ran an interactive workshop style presentation where audience members were given a typical interview question, and had to adapt their experience to not only answer the question, but describe themselves as an asset to the business, appealing the employers mindset. In other words, he focused on things such as assertive speaking, positive mindsets, and thinking outside the box to make yourself seem more attractive to an employer. He would have been wonderful for a workshop space, but the conference did not seem like the context for his presentation. He provided an interesting and engaging seminar that would be great to offer postgraduate students preparing to finish their research and join the workforce.

After lunch, the same presenter discussed similar ideas in more detail, specifically about thinking outside the box and appealing to the 'why' of a business. He described how businesses are not only in business to make money, and how it is important to know that intrinsic 'why' of an organisation. Each will have an idea of "What" they do; "How" they do it; and a "Why", which encompasses the core goals of an organisation.

We finished the day with another panel discussion on Life After Graduation. It discussed the process of moving into the workforce, and how prepared students felt at their ability to enter their desired career spaces. There was a nice diversity on the panel in terms of career pursuits, with some in academia and some in industry, and this made for a discussion that encompassed several perspectives and contexts. I did note during this session that the university has support for incoming students, but there is not a great deal for outgoing students. There tends to be a period of 6 months where students are 'in shock' or 'in limbo' at the end of the PhD if they are unable to move straight into work. There was an emphasis on building your resume throughout the PhD in terms of grants, online profiles, publications and relevant extra-curricular activity. Perhaps this may inspire some workshops looking at jobs after graduation, when and how to start applying for jobs etc.

Conference closed at 3pm.

Day 2- First Day of SCM

10am start. After formalities, CAPA discussed their projects for the coming year, which are (in short):

- Employability focus which engages with the 'new PhD'
- Travelling to all associated campus' to build relationships on the ground
- Addressing racism on campus'
- Advocate for women on campus' and target sexual assault problem
- Pushing for income support for non- scholarship postgraduates
- Address the changes to 457 visas and advocate for legislation to strengthen citizenship
- Campaign against the budget cuts to University education

They also discussed the introduction of CAPA awards that would recognise affiliates with strong campaigns. After this discussion of issues affecting postgraduates across Australia and the general goals/targets for CAPA in the coming year, the CAPA executive gave brief reports about their action and progress in the past year. Of relevance to our students may be the media officers creation of a postgraduate blog, which aims to bring postgraduates together Australia wide and facilitate stories

and discussion across Australian universities. The NATSIPA liaison Officer emphasised the problem of racism and anti-Semitism in Universities, and expressed the need for all students to feel safe and confident in reporting any issues to security and the relevant organisations. The Victorian transport concession campaign (Fare's Fair) was discussed, and NUPSA expressed concern that no action has been taken for other states, although this may be an agenda item for this coming year. The South-Eastern Branch Officer reiterated problems with racism on campus and the travel concession campaign in Victoria, which will be expanded into NSW this year hopefully. She also discussed issues arising from the deregulation of university fees, which means that if domestic coursework students drop a course for legitimate reasons, they qualify for a refund. International students, however, still have to pay for the course. The Disability Officer discussed the Invisible Illness campaign which aims to raise awareness and support for mental illness throughout the PhD.

After lunch, we resumed with the Women's Officer's report which primarily discussed action against sexual violence on campus' across Australia. As we were running behind schedule, the rest of the reports were rushed and did not facilitate much discussion. The Regional Reports revealed that CAPA has lost some affiliates and are endeavouring to establish and re-establish connections with more Universities.

We then heard back from the Queer Caucus, which occurred during the lunch break. Key issues for the year were gender neutral bathrooms and undertaking of Allied training, which I hope will be a priority for our NUPSA executive this year.

At this point we broke off into our Regional groups to discuss issues specific to our regions that we would like raised in the coming year. NUPSA raised the quantity of international postgraduate students and online students, and the need to provide these groups specifically with additional support. We also mentioned the restructure of UON Global, which placed added pressure on NUPSA to provide workshops and services that are no longer facilitated by UON Global. Other universities in our region mentioned drowning as an issue, something our own University has felt harshly. It is a regional initiative to instigate water safety training for International and Domestic students alike to prevent future tragedy. Other concerns in our region included the cost of transport for International students, racism on campus, and the disparity between the time it takes to do a PhD and the length of scholarship funding. It was also NUPSA's prerogative to mention the possible instigation of late fees and establish the position of other Student Associations in our region. There did not seem to be any similar fees at other Universities in the region, and all student representatives were against the instigation of late fees.

We had a 15-minute break, and the SCM officially opened late at 2.45pm.

The SCM began with the acknowledgment of country, the constitution of attending organisations, and the office bearers. There were three organisations who had not finished paying their affiliation fees, and as such the council voted to decide whether to give these organisations voting rights. RMIT expressed that they had not paid as they were unsure whether they would continue their affiliation with CAPA, and this led to discussion regarding whether they should have the right to vote. Ultimately, NUPSA supported their right to vote, as CAPA is a postgraduate council representing all postgraduate students in Australia, of which RMIT are some. A motion was passed that all parties should have voting rights.

NUPSA had already identified several issues with the 2016 ACM minutes, and as such did not approve the minutes as they stood. The recommended amendments were made to the minutes, and there was significant discussion to make up the missing information that should have been present,

but somehow was missed in the documents preparation and subsequent dissemination. The NUPSA President was able to contribute as he was present last year, and eventually the minutes were approved as best as could be given the lack of details. There was a vote to approve changes addressing the inconsistencies in the CAPA regulations stemming from the various issues with the 2016 CAPA executive. The CAPA regulations are now consistent.

The next agenda item was a discussion of the structure of the CAPA executive led by the VP NOC, which led to much debate around the purpose of the SCM in the first place. Some parties were of the belief that the SCM was to discuss collaborative campaigns that affect students more directly, such as a campaign addressing the new budget. This was added to the agenda as a result, and the ultimate motion that was moved regarding the CAPA structure was for the CAPA executive to provide some options as to how the new executive might be organised to avoid such open ended debate.

Due to the concern about CAPA's response to the budget, the CAPA president then discussed the five points from the budget that they would address in the following year's campaign. In short:

- 2.5% (2.8 billion) cut to commonwealth grad. Funding

- The increase in student fees

- The decrease in annual earnings before HECS debt must be repaid (down to \$42,000 p/a)

- Enabling courses are no longer free

- And, New Zealand students no longer have commonwealth assistance.

On this note, Day 1 came to a close at 5pm.

Day 3

Started at 10.30am. We began with a discussion about the construction of a campus information database. This would be a resource for student organisations to use to source information such as organisation structure, demographic of postgraduate students, fees, accommodation, parking and facilities, organisation constitution and policies. The intention of the database is to allow a more informed decision making process that can be informed by the actions of other universities and student organisations where relevant. This will hopefully facilitate new ideas and valuable resources for student organisations Australia wide, and also provide a database of information for collaborative research.

We then broke off into groups to discuss possible campaign approaches for the new budget. This was a profitable session, and I look forward to seeing CAPA and other University postgraduate groups taking action and advocating for postgraduate student rights. At this stage, I encourage students to educate themselves around the various ways that the changes to the budget affect them, and make their voices heard, whether this be through conversations with peers, or writing to relevant crossbenchers.

Following this we had a group discussion about university actions towards Sexual Assault on university campus'. People said that University events focusing on women such as Blue Stocking Week were received well, and the Dear Angela campaign has been introduced in some universities for students who feel uncomfortable in public spaces. Overall it was a start to an ongoing discussion that will hopefully result in some positive campaigns.

During the lunch break, the Indigenous Caucus (which was open to promote discussion), Women's Caucus and the International Caucus took place.

After lunch we had a discussion of CAPA finances, and then moved onto ideas for research CAPA may be planning for the next year.

The day finished with general business where NUPSA raised several issues. First was that at last year's meeting a motion was passed that the PRA position would be reviewed. We discussed the merit of retaining the PRA officer, and ultimately a motion was passed that the structure would remain the same and the PRA would keep his position. Secondly, NUPSA raised the issue of International PhD's inability to enrol in a part-time PhD, and finally the lack of physical resources for online students who live far from their enrolled campus. We discussed the likelihood of online students in this position gaining access to the libraries of other universities, which is a project that CAPA will take up in the coming year. In some states a pass exists that allows students access to approved libraries, so this is an approach that may work. The general business finished with a question of whether staff should be given voting rights, stemming from a particular member that some deemed inappropriately vocal throughout the past couple of days. It was ultimately decided that staff may attend on behalf of executive members, but they are there as observers who can contribute if the council deems it appropriate. The day ended rather negatively as various council members expressed their disappointment with the representatives from RMIT, who turned up late to the last day after such tenuous beginnings the day before. This got rather inappropriate, and I felt it got quite personal, but eventually we moved forward, and the SCM was called to a close.