

President's Conference Paper

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NUPSA were lucky enough to host CAPA's (Council of Australia Postgraduate Associations Incorporated) ACM (Annual Council Meeting) this year, so this was a particularly momentous CAPA conference for us. The first day was hosted at Callaghan campus (5th December), and the final days were at NewSpace (6-7th December).

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 ACM is the time where Council meets to discuss CAPA's initiatives for the upcoming year, elect the incoming CAPA Executive, and network with affiliates. The key issues on the agenda were CAPA's restructure, the elections, locking in the initiatives CAPA would begin working on for 2019.

My report is based on my own experience of the Conference; as NUPSA was hosting, I did have to leave conference proceedings occasionally to ensure smooth running of the sessions, and to liaise with the PO and SRSO about food preparation, room preparations, etc. What follows is my account of the three days.

Day 1

I met the Project Officer (PO), the LGBT rep and the Coursework rep at 8am to ferry items from the NUPSA office over to the GP building where the conference proceedings were taking place. NUPSA funded tea and coffee throughout the ACM. When the CAPA executive

arrived I assisted them in setting up the room, hanging banners, organising printing and copying of relevant documents CAPA bought with them, before heading down to the bus stop to meet arriving CAPA affiliates and escorting them to the room. I'd like to personally acknowledge the NUPSA Project Officer for the amount of running around he did for the CAPA President on the day preparing things that had been left to the very last minute. The morning would not have run nearly as smoothly without him. I'd also like to acknowledge the LGBT rep. who was our tech. support for the three days of the ACM!

The first day was primarily about the Restructure. CAPA has put forward several ideas to restructure over past years, and none have been approved by Council for a variety of reasons. The primary reasons for restructure presented to Council were to improve CAPA's operations and effectiveness by rebuilding a structure that more directly aligns with their core functions, and to ultimately work towards a more stable financial situation through the effectiveness of the organisation.

A student from Wollotuka gave the Welcome to Country to open the day. I welcomed everyone to Newcastle, and the Equity Officer opened with a brief talk on appropriate and respectful communication and conduct. We then heard from each affiliate about their best achievement for the year. It was really encouraging to see so many amazing initiatives from the associations present, and a positive way to begin the day's proceedings. We then heard briefly from UniBank, who were present for the three days to discuss the banking needs of affiliates, and run a raffle. We then broke for a morning tea sponsored by Unibank.

The ACM opened at 11am, and went through the process of determining the voting delegates. We then heard the office bearers reports. NUPSA would like to specifically commend CAPA's President for her work this year, along with the Equity Officer, and Gen Sec. We are really pleased with CAPA's progress this year, specifically their increased strategic engagement with the media, support mechanisms for affiliates to improve their representation and support of equity groups on campuses, and the detail with which the restructure proposals were put together.

The President discussed the three campaigns they had focused on for the year: Bury the Bill, Income Support for Postgrads, and Raise Our Voice. She also discussed the collaborative efforts with UA to change policy on inappropriate supervision relationships, and the list of demands compiled to tackle Sexual Assault on University campuses. CAPA have released 23 media releases this year alone, greatly increasing their media presence. While not mentioned

by herself, the President maintained regular contact with affiliates, making regular updates and contact a priority of the role. Finally, she reported on an internal issue regarding the lack of an executive officer- the President conducted a full-scale governance review with GenSec, after playing both roles for a period of time at the start of the year.

Equity Officer discussed the resource booklet developed throughout the year for affiliates to better represent and support equity groups on their campuses. They also conducted an internal review of CAPA's equity processes.

VP NOC primarily discussed the meetings he attended, and recommended maintaining the NOC structure, and said if its Branch Presidents are active then it works well.

The Policy and Research advisor discussed the fluctuation in workload of this role in that it is largely reactive. He developed a number of submissions relating to CAPA's campaigns throughout the year.

GenSec discussed her four focus areas of the year which were Reporting & Admin Improvement, Financial Sustainability & Better Practice, 2018 Financial Audits & Reviews and the 2018 Organisational Review & Restructure. NUPSA would like to commend her on the detail and thoroughness with which these tasks were undertaken and presented. The restructure, as the main topic of the ACM, was broken down in this way: to improve the functionality and performance of Engagement (previously NOC), examine the duties of the Finance & Admin Officer position, look at opportunities for budget savings and improvements to quarterly reporting, and then make recommendations for the optimal structure for CAPA (which I will discuss later).

The media officer discussed how they had maximised CAPA's media presence throughout the year by developing stronger relationships with media personnel and acting quickly when working on press releases.

NATSIPA discussed their collaborative attack on the Federal government's actions against higher education affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and their contributions to developing Culturally Appropriate protocol around referring to and advocating for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and groups.

We then heard from the branch presidents and their engagement with their areas. Western branch co-presidents achieved two new affiliates for CAPA.

Women's Officer discussed the NOWSA conference held at UON, and gave a shout out to NUPSA's assistance, as well as Bluestocking week and the NTEU Women's Conference.

The Queer Officer Discussed their campaigns for the year and meetings attended.

We did not hear from the remaining equity officers due to absence at the time of the presentations.

After the reports, we broke for lunch. The Research rep, LGBT rep and myself escorted affiliates to Park on the Hill where NUPSA funded a BBQ lunch cooked by the PO, the Coursework rep and the Returning Officer from NUSA. This was a nice opportunity to show affiliates more of the Callaghan campus. While Wollotuka was unable to run this lunch as originally intended, the NATSIPA liaison offered affiliates the chance to visit the Wollotuka Institute at the end of the day's proceedings. NUPSA were extremely pleased that affiliates would still get this opportunity!

Following lunch, we began discussions of the restructure of CAPA. Council discussed staff costs, positions, necessary changes to the Constitution and industry impact while keeping in mind the need for stability. It was suggested that outsourcing a bookkeeper may assist in stability as office bearers change, and add to the transparency of operations. A part-time staff member will be retained, and a 3 month transition period was expected to move to which ever structure was decided upon. It was also determined that the President already performs the branch president roles, so the Engagement structure that currently exists is not best practice.

Approved New Structure of CAPA

CAPA presented two options for a possible restructure, a Single Committee Structure, and a Board Structure. The Board structure was unanimously agreed upon (and recommended by the CAPA executive) without much discussion or contest. The board will consist of 5 elected affiliates from the ACM on 3 year terms, consisting of a small affiliate, big affiliate, combined postgraduate/undergraduate affiliate, and Western Australian affiliate. The board will be in charge of budget-setting, in consultation with the committee and as approved each year by Council. The board is also tasked with long-term strategic direction; for example, planning for a sustainable CAPA.

The Board then feeds into the President/Executive Director's role on a 2 year term, who is supported by Staff and a Research Officer. Branching out from here are the other positions;

Policy and Research Advisor; Media Officer; NATSIPA liaison Officer; Queer Officer; Women's Officer; Disabilities Officer and International Officer.

I had to duck out of the room to assist the PO in clearing up the food space, and prepare afternoon tea, but when I returned there was a summary of Council concerns: cost of office bearer stipends; the associations longevity; does the proposal of longer terms exclude international or Masters' students from running; and the power of the Board. Board concerns also included their degree of experience, the structure of its members, its accountability and its engagement. It was decided by Council that a Vice President role is also required here to support the President, and ensure that the role does not become too cumbersome, and there is a failsafe should anything happen to the President. There was debate about whether this should be a Vice President, an Engagement Officer, or a Gen Sec, however the title VP allows flexibility as the operations of the new structure develop.

As discussions continued after afternoon tea, Council was extended to finalise the new structure and how and when it would be implemented. It was agreed that although there was concern around the increased stipends, financial issues around the structure could wait until the following days. It was determined that given CAPA's current position, the new structure should be implemented as soon as possible, meaning that the next days elections would be for the new structure. The GenSec role would remain to aid the President in the transition. As the roles of the Board members are non-specific at this stage, it was deemed inappropriate to elect the Board at this ACM. It was decided that the roles and powers of the Board would be determined by a working group of affiliate members, laid out in detail and presented to Council at the SCM in 2019. At this point, the Board itself will be passed, the positions elected, and the full new structure will commence.

Day 2

I met the SRSO and the LGBT rep at NewSpace at 8.30am to prepare the room and set up the tea and coffee station. Unfortunately I missed the first hour of proceedings as I was meeting a visiting Canadian affiliate of the University, so I entered the room at 10:30am when Council were discussing finances.

Disturbingly, affiliate fee remissions are 20% of CAPA's possible income, meaning that CAPA's budget is significantly lowered by the continuous fee remission applications. Additionally, CAPA is in receipt of only 50% of what was billed out to affiliates this year.

This means that the key issues for CAPA financially largely come down to the affiliates. Late payments, and fee remissions led CAPA to cut its face to face engagement, and abolish its travel allowances, meaning less representation at Conferences also, making affiliates more likely to request remissions due to CAPA's performance, etc etc.

Council discussed several options to reform this cyclical occurrence, the most supported idea being financial reward systems for affiliates who pay on time. Late fees were also suggested, however it is unlikely that this will result in more payments given the diverse range of reasons affiliates do not pay, or request remissions in the first place. It was also put forward by an affiliate association that fees be a percentage of each affiliates budget rather than a cost per head. This was refuted because each association is allocated funding in different ways, and ultimately it was determined that this would decrease CAPA's revenue rather than increasing it. It was also suggested that CAPA invoice affiliates for the following year to ensure remissions are completed earlier on. NUPSA was supportive of the reward system, and end of year invoicing, and would like to again acknowledge Gen Sec for the quality of the financial reports. A new model for affiliate invoicing and payment will be presented in 2019 to be implemented in 2020. We then broke for lunch.

After lunch, PARSAs gave a presentation of their newly published strategic plan, which was interesting and thorough. It occurred to me that NUPSA might develop a survey to go out to postgraduates every two years so that we might measure NUPSA's engagement- this should consistently show that 85% of recipients know they are NUPSA members, and we could track our own progress in engagement and provision of services and advocacy. This is obviously dependant on the outcome of our own restructure however.

We then proceeded to the elections.

NUPSA would like to note that a Returning Officer was donated for the ACM from NUSA at CAPA's request (as UON runs NUPSA's elections and so could not provide our own). The Returning Officer received little to no training as to CAPA's elections process, and was treated extremely poorly by affiliates and the CAPA executive alike. Whilst Council are a room full of student representatives, it did not feel like it throughout the elections process, and I was embarrassed that the Returning Officer was exposed to a Council of student representatives who presented in this way. I would like to extend my thanks to the CAPA Equity Officer in their assistance in dealing with this issue, and the staff members who

assisted the Returning Officer. I hope delegates and CAPA's executive reflect upon and learn from what occurred.

NUPSA would, however, like to congratulate those who were elected and/or re-elected. We are extremely confident about the new representatives, and look forward to working with them in 2019!

After afternoon tea, the budget was discussed. It looks as if in future the host affiliates will finance CAPA's ACM and SCM. Whilst this makes sense for CAPA in terms of its financial situation, NUPSA's hopes that when CAPA stabilises, it will return the opportunity to smaller affiliates to host these meetings, as hosting will become financially out of reach for the lesser funded associations.

The budget presented was passed on the condition that CAPA prioritise saving money wherever possible, and continue to investigate further funding. Stipends were again a significant issue, as there are significant proposed increases to stipends under the new structure for the President and some other members. Currently, CAPA is finding difficulty in other avenues, as donors prefer to sponsor specific events over campaigns. When CAPA's primary output is advocacy and large-scale campaigning, localised events are rare, especially in the current financial climate, so there has been little success.

It was intended the International Caucus and the Disabilities caucus would be held during the afternoon, however budget discussions had gone overtime. Some affiliates commented that as they had to leave early the next day that more "important issues" should be discussed and the caucuses delayed. The implications of these comments were quite uncomfortable, as they implied that the caucuses, whose aims are to discuss the particular issues of equity groups, are less important than other proceedings. As student representatives, it is important to remember that we advocate for and represent a diverse range of equity groups, and when there are pro-caucuses running parallel, all attendees have the opportunity to discuss the issues of different groups, and explore different ways we can better support and advocate for those groups. After debate, it was decided that the Disabilities caucus and pro-caucus would go ahead, and the international caucus be delayed until the following day.

I attended the disabilities pro-caucus. We discussed what various associations and their universities were doing to support students with disabilities, and it was revealed that physical disabilities were universally better catered for than mental health. One of the things NUPSA put forward was UON's Crisis-line, which grew into an idea that CAPA might investigate the

possibility of a national high-education crisis support line where staff are aware of the unique issues faced by higher-degree students across Australia.

The day finished, and the LGBT rep, the SRSO and I headed to CAPA's formal dinner event. The Research rep and the Coursework rep met us there. It was a lovely evening where I was able to chat to several delegates from other Universities. NUPSA was lucky enough to win Welfare Initiative of the Year Award for the second year running for our International Student Mentor Initiative. It was really encouraging, and I was honoured to have the opportunity to discuss this initiative with other delegates.

Day 3

The final day of the ACM commenced with the International Caucus. After arriving early along with the LGBT rep and the SRSO to prepare the tea and coffee station and set up the room, I attended the International pro-caucus. We discussed language requirements, an issue NUPSA had noted at UON, but we realise now is a significant issue Australia-wide. The primary issue culminates in the fact that Australian Universities use international students as a revenue stream, and they arrive ill-equipped to undertake the degrees they have enrolled in. We discussed language levels being too low to ensure students are prepared for higher degree research, and courses designed for students to fail. NUPSA also raised sexual health in international students, where many fear consulting doctors about their sexual health, illness, and mental health for a variety of cultural reasons, and/or deportation. We called for a campaign around sexual health awareness, and open dialogue around mental health.

We then moved onto Council discussions around forming the working group to decide the members and respective roles of the CAPA Board. These are to be presented to Council members 1 month before the SCM. It was determined that the working group should be made up of 8 individuals who are not members of the CAPA executive.

This discussion became conflated with a number of other concerns seen in parallel to the restructure discussion. PARSAs again raised Council's concerns around the budget, calling for a *balanced* 2019 budget to be presented to Council at the SCM that prioritises cost-cutting and revenue creation. They also raised the need to follow Rules and Regulations more clearly throughout the ACM and SCM process. These requests were all passed by Council. GUPSA noted the lack of focus on CAPA's strategic plan, something that should be informing the restructure rather than resulting from it. It was determined by Council that CAPA must produce a strategic plan to be presented at the SCM.

We then separated to join the queer caucuses. I attended the queer pro-caucus where I was asked to take the minutes. The queer pro-caucus was quite disappointing, as it showed the same video as the SCM, and asked the same questions to be answered by attendees. I would have liked to see some discussion about the issues delegates were seeing in their respective campuses and look at some ideas of what CAPA might be able to do in this space, however there was no forum to do so.

Council resumed to discuss planning for 2019 CAPA initiatives. After some discussions with GUPSA about the lack of action taken by CAPA for the mental health of postgraduates, NUPSA raised this with Council, asking about the lack of follow-up, while acknowledging that CAPA had had an effective year. GSA approved this query and agreed that this should be a key focus for CAPA in 2019.

We broke into brainstorming groups to discuss campaigns that CAPA should take into next year. NUPSA joined with NATSIPA and mutually saw mental health as one of the biggest overarching issues for postgraduate students across Australia. One of the main barriers we had encountered in improving mental health services and support for postgraduates however, is that despite international research showing that postgraduate mental health is particularly poor, there is little to no corroborating research in Australia. We proposed a national survey that would attain data on postgraduate mental health, exploring living situations, issues pertaining to equity groups, impacts on family, homelessness and poor financial supports etc. and the ways these issues impact on presenting symptoms of mental health issues. Delegates could contribute data and questions based on the issues seen in their own cohorts, and surveys they have conducted within their own universities to ensure the survey speaks to as many student experiences as possible. The results from the survey would be used to provide actual data for the state of postgraduate mental health in Australia, helping CAPA and affiliates to form their own campaigns around how best to support postgraduate students' mental health. Unfortunately, Council ultimately did not support this investigation.

Other groups raised the exploitation of international students, the lack of transparency around SSAF funding policies, homelessness, and the Fare's Fair campaign, all of which were determined to be key campaigns CAPA would focus on in 2019.

We then broke to the Women's caucuses before finishing the discussion of CAPA's goal campaigns. The primary concern raised in the women's caucus was the extent of the universities responsibility for individual women students- does it cover their place of residence, placement locations, outside campus? The position of women's officer was contested for the first time in my experience, which was good to see.

Council resumed to confirm CAPA's campaigns for 2019. NUPSA recommended a joint campaign with CISA for the international student issue, as this is CISA's territory as well as CAPA's, and it may allow CAPA to explore additional concerns. This appeared to be widely supported. Ultimately all suggestions were pursued except the mental health survey, or a

mental health initiative. NUPSA notes that despite several associations raising mental health as a serious issue at the past three Council meetings, very little action has been taken. NUPSA expects CAPA to seriously pursue mental health as a primary concern given evidence that it is an ongoing and serious issue for postgraduate students in Australia.

We then broke for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pro-caucus. We had this outside, which was rather nice. We asked how NATSIPA can support associations without an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative? NATSIPA now has a sponsorship program for associations without an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, which provides support and advocacy for individual students who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. We also discussed the appropriate terminology to use when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and the need to ensure that policy and regulations used the appropriate language and enforced it.

Council reconvened for the final time to discuss CAPA's 40th Anniversary year, and form a working group to organise the ongoing 40th Anniversary celebration. It was mentioned that with actual events attached, this might be a good opportunity for CAPA to gain some sponsorship.

We then selected three members of Council to be on the working group for determining the Board members from GSA, PARSAs, NATSIPAs were selected, with a recommendation for these to consider UWA as an addition). These three members would select three more, ensuring diversity on the working group.

Council paused to condemn the Government decision to put forward optional SSAF fees legislation. If SSAF becomes optional, than many student associations will cease to exist, leaving students underrepresented. SSAF also funds multiple other student services and amenities. The voluntary payment of SSAF means an inevitable reduction to student support, services, facilities and advocacy.

At this point I had to duck out to assist in tidying up the NewSpace foyer. I returned to CAPA and the Council thanking NUPSA for our hospitality and contribution to the ACM. NUPSA proudly funded a morning tea and the formal dinner at Sprout Dining, and it was an honour to host the national body and its delegates for the three days. CAPA personally thanked myself and the SRSO, and we were kindly gifted exclusive CAPA t-shirts. NUPSA and Council acknowledge the years of service of NATSIPA's outgoing President, and wish her the best of luck.

NUPSA would like to thank CAPA and all delegates, especially those who supported us and our volunteers throughout the ACM. We congratulate all new and returning office bearers, and greatly look forward to all that you bring to 2019!