

Postgraduate Funding of Generic Services discussion paper

September 2017

The Monash Postgraduate Association (MPA) is proposing a change to the automatic transfer of postgraduate Student Services Amenities Fees (SSAF) to undergraduate organisations and their services.

1. Principles

- A. The MPA is recognized by Monash University as the representative body for all postgraduates on all Australian campuses.
- B. The CBMSOs¹ are recognized by Monash University as the representative bodies for all undergraduates on their respective campuses.
- C. The MPA believes that postgraduates should control postgraduate SSAF², and that undergraduates should control undergraduate SSAF.
- D. The MPA believes that all representational bodies have an obligation to direct their services and activities towards their own constituent bodies.

2. History

Representation

In 2001, when University Council recognised the MPA as the representative body for all postgraduates on all campuses, by default all CBMSOs became recognised by the university as representing undergraduates only. This was eventually followed by the appropriate adjustments to all representative functions, for example:

- Advocacy – in 2008 it was agreed between the CBMSOs and the MPA that all postgraduates would be directed to the MPA, and all undergraduates would be directed to the CBMSOs;

¹ CBMSO = Campus-Based Monash Student Association = individual undergraduate student representative bodies on each campus = MSA (Clayton), MONSU (Caulfield), MONSU (Peninsula) and MPSU (Parkville).

² All references to SSAF refer only to the 40% of SSAF allocated to the student associations for their use. The remaining 60% SSAF is retained by the university.

- Funding – in 2013 the bulk of the postgraduate SSAF funding was redirected from the CBMSOs to the MPA, and all the undergraduate SSAF funding was retained by the CBMSOs;

while some representative functions that had always been in place continued:

- Appointment of students to university committees – all appointments to postgraduate representative positions continued to be nominated by the MPA, and all appointments to the undergraduate representative positions were nominated by the CBMSOs;
- University consultation – the MPA continued to be consulted by the university on all matters pertaining to postgraduates, and the CBMSOs to be consulted on matters pertaining to undergraduates.

The university acknowledged that CBMSOs were primarily concerned about the loss of SSAF funding likely to flow from the university's identification of CBMSOs as undergraduate-only representative bodies. In response, the university compensated CBMSOs (by topping up their funding) to ensure that no CBMSO experienced a reduction in funding when the majority of postgraduate SSAF was eventually transferred from the CBMSOs to the MPA in 2013.

In 2015, the university and the MPA entered into a funding agreement that explicitly stated that the university acknowledged the CBMSOs as representing undergraduate students only, which further formalised the representational status of each organisation.

Service provision

However the issue of service provision (as opposed to representation) remained a point of contention.

Until 2000, some CBMSOs such as MONSU Caulfield and Peninsula had been the sole student associations on their campuses. Those CBMSOs had, to that point, developed services that catered to the entire student body.

From 2001 to 2012, the majority of postgraduate funding (as well as undergraduate funding) continued to be directed to the CBMSOs. The CBMSOs used this funding to expand and build large generic services.

In 2013, the MPA successfully lobbied the university to have the majority of postgraduate SSAF directed to the MPA. The CBMSOs proposed that because postgraduates used their services, they should retain a significant portion of the postgraduate SSAF, in addition to their receipt of all undergraduate SSAF. In response to CBMSO demands and in the absence of any logical calculation being available, the Provost decided on an arbitrary amount (10% of the postgraduate SSAF allocation) to be withheld from the MPA and paid directly from the university to the CBMSOs. This payment was intended to ensure continued postgraduate access to generic services that were historically embedded in the CBMSOs.

However those services were becoming increasingly less relevant to postgraduates. It became clear that:

- until 2013, postgraduates chose to use CBMSO generic services because there were no other options; and
- once the MPA was in a financial position to respond to postgraduate demands, a broader range of services tailored specifically to the needs of postgraduates was developed; and
- as the MPA services became established, postgraduates began to choose these specialised services over those being offered by the CBMSOs. A good example is where many of the postgraduate-only clubs independently and voluntarily migrated from MSA to MPA, preferring to be funded under the MPA postgraduate group scheme. The postgraduates running these clubs were frustrated with the imposition of club regulations that were designed to suit undergraduate groups, and did not allow for typical postgraduate operations. In short, they were unhappy with being governed by an undergraduate committee that did not understand or respond to postgraduate needs; and
- postgraduates wanted a say in how the services available to them were delivered and governed and that this was not possible in relation to the services being delivered by the CBMSOs.

It became obvious that the provision and funding of services by the CBMSOs was being driven by an outdated model that no longer reflected what the rapidly growing postgraduate population wanted from their SSAF.

The MPA continued to lobby the university to set in place a new funding model. In 2016 it was agreed that the MPA would receive 40% of the postgraduate SSAF, in the same way that the CBMSOs received 40% of the undergraduate SSAF. It was also agreed that the MPA would liaise directly with the CBMSOs regarding the transfer of any postgraduate funding.

3. The current funding model

Under the current funding model:

- 40% of the undergraduate SSAF is allocated to the CBMSOs; and
- 40% of the postgraduate SSAF is allocated to the MPA; and
- \$161,000 of the postgraduate SSAF is allocated back to the CBMSOs by the MPA.

Were the full 40% of postgraduate SSAF retained by the MPA, postgraduates would still be funded at a much lower rate per head than undergraduates. This is because a larger percentage of the postgraduate population is part-time compared to the undergraduate population. Part-time postgraduates may pay less SSAF but they cost the same to support; sometimes service delivery cost to this cohort is higher because services need to be

delivered out of business hours. It is therefore useful to look at the cost per head when comparing funding.

Distribution of 2016 SSAF to student associations, expressed as dollars per head			
Campus	Undergraduate	Postgraduate (before transfer of funds to CBMSOs)	Postgraduate (after transfer of funds to CBMSOs)
Clayton	\$108	\$82	\$74
Caulfield	\$106	\$98	\$86
Peninsula	\$103	\$78	\$71

The MPA fully supports the distribution of SSAF according to EFTSL³. However considering the shared desire of both the MPA and the CBMSOs to deliver quality support services to the entire student population in an equitable manner, this naturally occurring funding difference should not be exacerbated by directing postgraduate funding away from the MPA to the CBMSOs.

4. A new funding model

The MPA remains committed to postgraduate funding distribution being driven by the postgraduate representative body, rather than by the undergraduate representative body decisions and service provision.

Monash is deliberately growing its postgraduate population and this is placing greater demands on the MPA as postgraduates continue to request expanded services from their representative body. Postgraduates want value for money and they are questioning why their SSAF funds should be directed to undergraduate-focussed and undergraduate-controlled activities.

In order for the MPA to comply with its recognised association status under Monash University regulations and the MPA constitution, the MPA is required to act in the best interests of postgraduates, and this includes maximising the benefits from the postgraduate SSAF expenditure. Postgraduates are requesting that more funding be directed to their specific needs and less funding be directed to services run by the undergraduate student associations.

In short, the MPA is working towards a model where:

- 4.1 The CBMSOs control the undergraduate SSAF and decide what services they want to provide and to whom those services are provided. Conversely, the MPA controls the postgraduate SSAF and decides what services they want to provide and to whom those services are provided. For example, the MPA currently provides services to Honours cohorts (undergraduates) because Honours students work alongside HDR groups within schools and at most of the off-campus hospital sites.

³ EFTSL = Effective full-time student load, as opposed to the number of students

The two groups also socialise together – it would make for a poor student experience and be an ineffective use of resources if Honours were to be excluded from the MPA faculty-based events and grant programs; the MPA has provided this service to the Honours students for over 25 years and will continue to do so. There has been no request by the MPA for funding from the CBMSOs for this service, because it is entirely the MPA's decision to provide services to a group outside their postgraduate constituency.

- 4.2 There would be no automatic transfer of funds between the CBMSOs and the MPA unless by mutual agreement for specific projects and services.
- 4.3 Postgraduate funds would be set aside by the MPA for joint projects with CBMSOs. The MPA is keen to work cooperatively and jointly with individual CBMSOs, to provide funding towards specific projects and services of mutual interest. Joint projects and services of mutual interest might include activities such as; a mentoring program between undergraduates and postgraduates; a campaign about parking; or lobbying on coursework policies.

However, the MPA acknowledges that this is a significant change to the current structure where a fixed amount of funding is automatically donated to the CBMSOs. Therefore the MPA has structured this funding agreement as an interim step to their proposed funding model, with the expectation that at the end of the three year Postgraduate Funding of Generic Services Agreement, CBMSOs would have adjusted their operations to accommodate the cessation of automatically-transferred postgraduate funds.

5. Interim Funding model 2018 - 2020

The MPA proposes:

- 5.1 to reduce the total amount of postgraduate SSAF being automatically allocated for undergraduate-driven activities each year over the three year period of this agreement (2018-2020) as follows: 2018 - \$150,000; 2019 - \$100,000; and 2020 \$50,000. This period provides three years for CBMSOs to plan and adjust gradually to the eventual cessation of automatically-allocated postgraduate funds in 2021, without a significant impact on their services or staff.
- 5.2 that the automatically allocated funds to be set aside each year for undergraduate use will be distributed between MONSU (Caulfield), MONSU (Peninsula) and MSA (Clayton) according to the University actual figures of the distribution of postgraduate EFTSL on each campus for the previous year.

- 5.3 that there will be no funding allocated to MPSU from 2018 onwards given their operations and activities are delivered solely to the undergraduate population on Parkville, and the MPA delivers all services to postgraduates⁴.
- 5.4 that the MPA provide for a fund for joint projects with all CBMSOs which will increase over the period of the agreement as follows: 2018 - \$10,000; 2019 - \$20,000; and 2020 - \$30,000. This initiative is designed to encourage cooperation between student associations, and it is intended that the MPA will continue to provide annual joint project funding notwithstanding termination of this agreement.

⁴ The MPA delivers activities via the MPA Parkville branch, the Parkville Postgraduate Association (PPA), as well as delivering services such as advocacy and representation via the central MPA branch.