



**Monash Postgraduate Association (MPA) submission  
to the university regarding  
the transfer of postgraduate SSAF funds  
to the Clayton undergraduate student association (MSA).**

**June 2019**

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## Executive Summary

- The MPA proposed a change to the automatic transfer of postgraduate Student Services Amenities Fees (SSAF) to undergraduate organisations and commenced negotiations.
- The only outstanding funding agreement to be negotiated is that with the Clayton undergraduate student association (MSA).
- The MPA plays a critical role in the postgraduate experience. It is in the university's interests to ensure that the MPA is funded in parity with funding received by the undergraduate associations.
- 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 naturally occurring funding difference in SSAF distribution should not be exacerbated by additionally directing postgraduate funding away from the MPA to the MSA.
- When total incomes (SSAF plus all other income) are compared<sup>1</sup>, the MSA received \$217 per Clayton undergraduate and the MPA received \$91 per Clayton postgraduate in 2017.
- It would not make any sense to move funding from MPA, the lowest-funded association to MSA, the highest-funded association and in the process, risk adversely affecting the future delivery of MPA services and support to postgraduates.
- MSA services are largely irrelevant for 58% of the Clayton postgraduate population. MSA figures show that 98% of Clayton postgraduates have no interest in MSA activities, other than Clubs and Societies.
- It is clear that as MPA services expand<sup>2</sup> and postgraduates have the option to choose tailored services over generic services, they are doing so in large numbers.
- The MPA has been providing services to honours students for over 25 years, unfunded.
- The MSA has been receiving a large amount of postgraduate SSAF since 1999, without having to justify or account for that funding.
- Now that MSA have provided evidence of postgraduate use of their top three services it is clear that the MSA are grossly over-funded and the amount they have been receiving is out-of-proportion to the value they offer postgraduates.
- The proposed MPA funding model is one where each association retains its 40% portion of the SSAF and contributes to jointly fund activities and projects of mutual interest.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on total income declared by MSA and MPA in their respective 2017 audit reports.

<sup>2</sup> A sample of MPA services provided to Clayton-enrolled postgraduates is set out in Attachment 3.

## 1. Funding negotiation principles

In September 2017 the Monash Postgraduate Association (MPA) proposed a change to the automatic transfer of postgraduate Student Services Amenities Fees (SSAF) to undergraduate organisations and their services.

The proposal was based on the following principles:

- A. The MPA is recognized by Monash University as the representative body for all postgraduates on all Australian campuses.
- B. The Campus-Based Monash Student Organisations (CBMSOs)<sup>3</sup> 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 SSAF<sup>4</sup>, and that undergraduates should control undergraduate SSAF.
- D. All representational bodies have an obligation to direct their services and activities towards their own constituent bodies.

The paper proposed a radical change to the way in which the postgraduate SSAF had been distributed to the undergraduate associations for the previous four years. The history of the distribution of postgraduate SSAF is set out in Attachment 1.

The MPA expected the ensuing discussions to be challenging, but viewed the proposed changes as inevitable, given significant changes to the student population at Monash University and with it, a growing demand from the postgraduate body that their SSAF be used to provide postgraduate-specific services of direct benefit to them.

The MPA held discussions with all four undergraduate student associations. Negotiations with Caulfield, Parkville and Peninsula have been satisfactorily concluded. Importantly, those three associations acknowledged that the principle on which the MPA was basing its arguments was the same principle on which their own student associations were based; namely, that the relevant cohort of each student association wanted control over the expenditure of their own SSAF.

The only outstanding funding agreement to be negotiated is that with the Clayton undergraduate student association (MSA).

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<sup>3</sup> CBMSOs are the individual undergraduate student representative bodies on each campus = MSA (Clayton), MONSU (Caulfield), MONSU (Peninsula) and MPSU (Parkville).

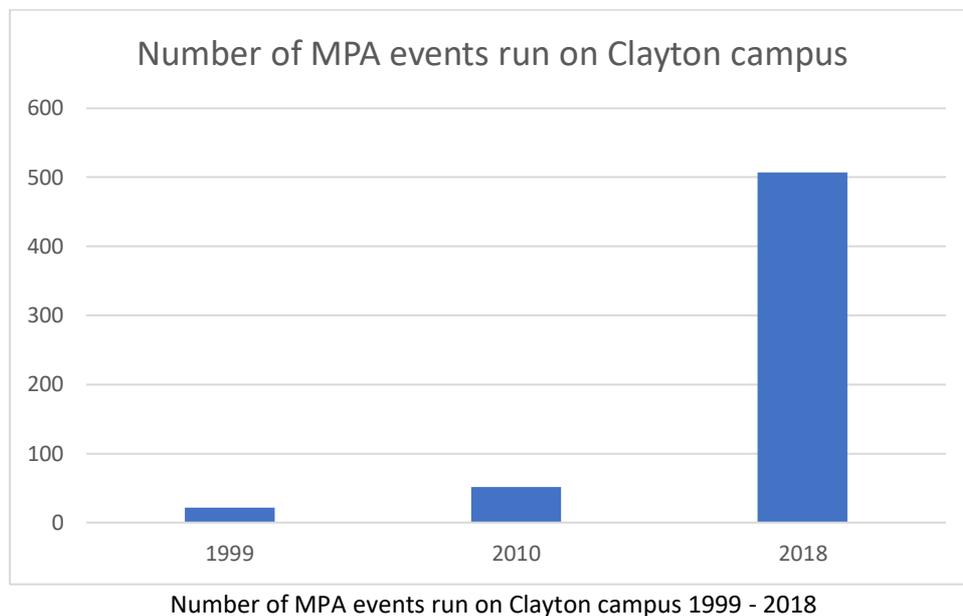
<sup>4</sup> All references to SSAF in this paper refer only to the 40% of SSAF allocated to the student associations for their use. The remaining 60% SSAF is retained by the university.

## 2. A university-wide view

Student association differences aside, if this issue were to be viewed from the perspective of the benefits to the wider university and its strategic goals, the following would need to be considered;

- The university wants to ensure that quality support services are delivered to all students in an equitable manner.
- The GPG load has grown significantly and the university plans to continue that growth, much of it now focused on Clayton campus.
- The GPG cohort bring in a significant income to the university so for both reputation and rankings, it is important to ensure that the postgraduate student experience is relevant, targeted and of a high quality.
- Unlike undergraduates, the GPG cohort have high expectations of their university experience and are increasingly critical consumers, willing to take action if that experience does not meet their expectations.

The MPA plays a critical role in the postgraduate experience. Postgraduates want tailored services and support, and the MPA is able to deliver those services. A sample of MPA services delivered to Clayton-enrolled postgraduates in 2018 is set out in Attachment 3.



It is in the university's interests to ensure that the MPA is funded in parity with funding received by the undergraduate associations.

### 3. The current distribution of postgraduate SSAF

The MPA receives 40% of the postgraduate SSAF. It has traditionally been expected that a portion of the postgraduate SSAF will be passed on to the undergraduate student associations.

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 and in the case of Clayton-enrolled postgraduates at MMC, AMREP and the Law Chambers, off-site.

It is therefore useful to look at the cost per student when comparing funding:

<b>Distribution of 2017 Clayton SSAF to MSA and MPA, expressed as dollars per student</b>		
<b>MSA</b>	<b>MPA (before transfer of p/g funds to MSA)</b>	<b>MPA (after transfer of \$70,000 p/g funds to MSA)</b>
\$108 per student	\$86 per student	\$80 per student

The MPA fully supports the distribution of SSAF according to postgraduate and undergraduate EFTSL<sup>5</sup>. However considering the shared desire of both the MPA and the MSA to deliver quality support services to the Clayton student population in an equitable manner, this naturally occurring funding difference should not be exacerbated by directing additional postgraduate funding away from the MPA to the MSA.

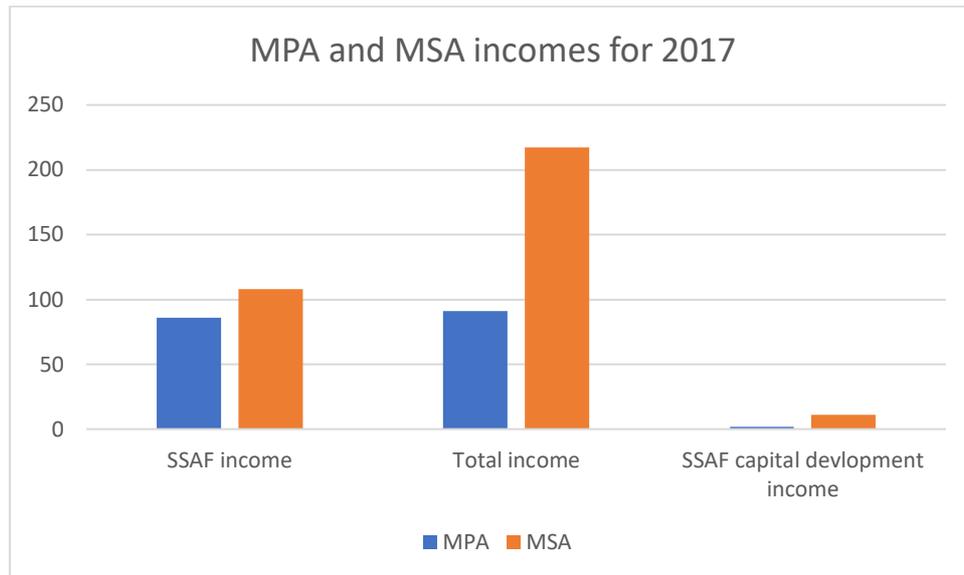
The MPA believes this natural difference in SSAF is more than enough to compensate the MSA for the small number of postgraduates who use their services. If the MSA were to be allocated the same amount per student as the MPA (\$86), they would have received an income of \$2,316,926 in 2017. MSA's actual income in 2017 was \$2,916,722, which equates to an additional \$599,796 received to compensate the MSA for provision of generic services to postgraduates. This works out at a compensation rate of \$848 per postgraduate-user of MSA services<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> EFTSL = Effective full-time student load, as opposed to the number of students

<sup>6</sup> Based on statistics provided by the MSA showing 707 postgraduates using MSA Clubs and Societies, being the most popular MSA service.

When total incomes (SSAF plus all other income) are compared<sup>7</sup>, the MSA received \$217 per Clayton undergraduate and the MPA received \$91 per Clayton postgraduate in 2017. When receipt of SSAF capital development funds<sup>8</sup> is included, the gap widens again, with MSA receiving significantly more funding than MPA in the 2017 round (MSA = \$304,000 and MPA = \$24,000) as well as the 2018 round (MSA=\$1,016,500 and MPA=\$98,000 for Clayton)<sup>9</sup>.



Comparison of 2017 incomes for the MPA and the MSA, expressed as \$ per student.

Taken together, these combined incomes demonstrate that the MSA is already very generously funded. It would not make any sense to move funding from MPA, the lowest-funded association to MSA, the highest-funded association and in the process, risk adversely affecting the future delivery of MPA services and support to postgraduates.

<sup>7</sup> Based on total income declared by MSA and MPA in their respective 2017 audit reports.

<sup>8</sup> Based on 2018 SSAF capital development funding distributed to MSA and MPA, excluding funding given to the various clubs/groups sitting under each association.

<sup>9</sup> See Attachment 2: SSAF capital development approved allocations to student associations, 2017 and 2018.

#### 4. The Clayton postgraduate cohort

The Clayton postgraduate population comprises several very different cohorts.

<b>Clayton postgraduate numbers 2018</b>			
13,391	GPG 9720	F/T 6731	On-campus 5592
			Off-campus 1139
		P/T 2989	On-campus 1572
			Off-campus 1417
	HDR 3671	F/T 2872	On-campus 2448
			Off-campus 424
		P/T 799	On-campus 606
			Off-campus 193

The MSA services are:

- not provided to off-campus or DE postgraduates; and
- delivered primarily during the day and therefore not available to part-time postgraduates, the majority of whom hold full-time employment; and
- not heavily used by HDRs (as evidenced by MSA’s own statistics).

Therefore MSA services are largely irrelevant for 58% of the Clayton postgraduate population. For the remaining 42% of the postgraduate population, MSA services are of little interest, with the exception of Clubs and Societies(C&S). The MSA claims C&S is being used by 707 postgraduates; the MPA accepts this figure and is willing to fund postgraduate participation. The MSA has provided data for only two other services:

- 2% of the Clayton postgraduate population (368) are involved with MSA Volunteering; and
- 2% of the Clayton postgraduate population (288) attend the MSA Wednesday sessions for free food.

These figures support the MPA’s contention that after C&S, postgraduate interest in MSA activities drops off rapidly.<sup>10</sup> However the MSA has extrapolated the level of postgraduate interest in C&S to all their remaining activities. They have then claimed that the cost of delivering that level of services to postgraduates is \$217,151.

The extrapolation of postgraduate interest in C&S to all MSA services is completely unsubstantiated by any evidence. On the contrary, MSA figures show that 98% of Clayton postgraduates have no interest in MSA activities, other than Clubs and Societies.

It is clear that as MPA services expand<sup>11</sup> and postgraduates have the option to choose tailored services over generic services, they are doing so in large numbers.

<sup>10</sup> Data from an MPA 2017 survey on SSAF distribution shows that Clayton postgraduate interest in MSA services drops dramatically after the top two services of ‘Clubs and Societies’ and ‘events with free food’ are nominated.

<sup>11</sup> A full list of MPA services provided to Clayton-enrolled postgraduates is set out in Attachment 3.

## **5. MPA services to Clayton-enrolled honours students**

The MPA has been providing services to honours students for over 25 years. Honours students, although designated as undergraduates, are treated as part of the research postgraduate community in most faculties. The MPA believes it would be inappropriate to exclude honours students from MPA-funded social events being delivered to the faculty HDR cohorts. Honours students have expressed their appreciation at this inclusion as they feel more comfortable socialising with postgraduate research students than with undergraduates.

The MPA provides the following services to honours students:

- Clayton-enrolled honours students are automatically included in the events run by the MPA at the various off-campus hospital sites (MMC, AMREP, Box Hill) because they are physically located off-campus with the HDRs. Events include seminars, lunches, weekly coffee clubs and HDR social nights.
- Honours students located on Clayton campus can apply for access to the MPA postgraduate lounges across all campuses, giving them not only 24/7 study spaces but access to daily and weekly pop-up events providing free food and entertainment.
- Postgraduate groups receiving grants from the MPA for social events, conference organising and seminars include among their members 269 Clayton-enrolled honours students.
- Advocacy, either at the request of the individual honours student or the MSA.

The MPA has never asked for funding from the MSA to cover the cost of this service delivery to honours students. The MPA has taken the position that it is the MPA's decision to provide services to students outside their constituency and therefore it is not appropriate to demand that the MSA pay for the delivery of services over which they have no control.

This is the same argument the MPA puts to the MSA regarding their provision of services to postgraduates; MSA are providing services to students outside their constituency and over which the MPA has no control, so it is unreasonable to expect the MPA to pay for these services. However, in the case of the MSA, they are presenting the bill for these services to the MPA and expecting MPA to pay for as many services as the MSA chooses to deliver.

## 6. Conclusion

The MSA has been receiving a large amount of postgraduate SSAF since 1999, without having to justify or account for that funding. This has been largely accepted by the university as an appropriate distribution, without any serious investigation into whether or not postgraduates are benefitting from this transfer of funding. During that time, the student population has transformed from being primarily undergraduate to 32% postgraduate but MSA services have continued to target young undergraduates by delivering large-scale generic services pitched to that cohort.

As Monash grows larger, we need to create smaller, tailored communities within that population to ensure our diverse cohorts are being supported in the appropriate manner, and their specific needs are being met. Postgraduates are requesting that more funding be directed to their specific needs and less funding be directed to the generic services run by the undergraduate student associations.

Now that MSA have provided evidence of postgraduate use of their top three services it is clear that the MSA are grossly over-funded and the amount they have been receiving is out-of-proportion to the value they offer postgraduates. It is time to review and update the funding arrangements.

The MPA is working towards a model where:

- 6.1 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; and
- 6.2 There would be no automatic transfer of funds between the CBMSOs and the MPA unless by mutual agreement for specific projects and services. Clubs and Societies would be one of those services on Clayton campus that the MPA would continue to fund on behalf of postgraduates.

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 MSA. Therefore as a gesture of goodwill the MPA seeks to slowly reduce the total amount of postgraduate SSAF being automatically allocated to MSA under the 2018-2020 agreement as follows: 2018 - \$70,000 (already paid); 2019 - \$60,000; and 2020 - \$50,000. This provides time for the MSA to plan and adjust gradually to the reduction of automatically-allocated postgraduate funds, without a significant impact on their services or staff.

MONSU Caulfield and Peninsula have agreed to this principle and the result is a much healthier relationship where a series of jointly-funded activities have already been agreed to for 2019. We hope to eventually achieve that same working relationship with the MSA.

## Attachment 1: A history of the distribution of postgraduate SSAF

### 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;
- 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 separate representational status of each organisation.

### Services

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 generic 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, those tailored services were preferred by postgraduates.

The rapidly growing postgraduate population believed that the provision and funding of services by the CBMSOs was being driven by an outdated model that no longer reflected what they wanted from their SSAF, and directed the MPA to reduce the amount of postgraduate SSAF going to the undergraduates.

The MPA continued to lobby the university to set in place a new funding model. In 2016 the university 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 agreed that the MPA would liaise directly with the CBMSOs regarding the transfer of any future postgraduate funding.

The MPA converted the payment of SSAF to the undergraduates from a percentage to a flat rate for the 2016 and 2017 payments. This equated to approximately \$70,000 going to MSA. For the 2018-20 funding agreements, the MPA commenced discussions with the undergraduates with the aim of reducing the amount of automatically-allocated postgraduate SSAF and increasing the amount of funding for jointly-funded projects with the undergraduate associations.

It is the amount of postgraduate funding that should be transferred to the undergraduates that is under negotiation.

Attachment 2: SSAF capital development approved allocations to student associations<sup>12</sup>, 2017 and 2018

<b>Campus</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2017</b>
Caulfield	MONSU \$60,000	MONSU \$10,000
	MPA \$100,000	MPA \$83,250
Clayton	MSA \$1,016,500	MSA \$304,000
	MPA \$98,000	MPA \$24,000
Parkville	MPSU \$75,500	MPSU \$15,000
	MPA \$24,500	MPA \$36,500
Peninsula	MONSU \$135,000	MONSU \$ 0
	MPA \$ 0	MPA \$ 0

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<sup>12</sup> Excludes allocations to individual clubs and societies associated with student associations

## Attachment 3: A sample of MPA services provided to Clayton-enrolled postgraduates in 2018

HDR social night Clayton (monthly)  
Yoga Clayton (weekly)  
Parents coffee catch up Clayton (weekly)  
Clayton Free Lunch – 8 per year  
Wine and Watercolour Clayton  
Soccer Clayton (weekly)  
Basketball (weekly)  
Badminton (weekly)  
EASTER egg hunt  
Trivia night  
Annual ball  
Shut-up and write for HDRs (weekly)  
Queer Movie Nights  
HDR Mentor Mid-Program Social  
HDR Publishing seminar  
E-exams drop in practice sessions  
PhD students meet with high school students to talk about research  
End-of year BBQ  
Christmas HDR social

### **Off-campus (Clayton-enrolled)**

AMREP HDR social (monthly)  
MMC Yoga (weekly)  
AMPREP Yoga X 6 sessions  
MMC Board game nights (monthly)  
AMREP Eat With an Expert (12)  
EASTER egg hunt (MMC, AMREP, LAW CHAMBERS)  
SPHPM chocolate biscuit afternoons (weekly)  
Law Chambers seminar

Queer MPA attends Comedy Fest  
Puffing Billy & Healesville Sanctuary  
Volunteering – monthly sessions at external charities (eg Food for change, Lighthouse café)  
Coursework Mentor Mid-Program Social  
Volunteering – internal to Monash (weekly)  
Crocs Play Date for postgraduate parents

Postgraduate study spaces with tea, coffee and snacks  
Newsletter  
Funding for groups  
Postgraduate group grants  
Conference-organiser and seminar grants  
Advocacy  
Support for reps on university committees  
Lobbying and submissions  
Representation/MPAEC