

Creating a family-friendly university

A submission by the Monash Postgraduate Association (MPA)
October 2017

“If Monash wants to attract and retain top international talent, it needs to build a system to support early career researchers who often have childcare needs.”

Monash University PhD student



Executive Summary

Through the MPA student advocacy casework, fora and direct student feedback, a number of specific concerns have been identified by postgraduate carers over the last five years: access to affordable childcare; lack of occasional childcare; access to and cost of school holiday programs; opportunities for peer support and socialising with other parents; timing of tutorials, meetings and supervisor sessions in relation to school drop-off and pick-up times; lack of seating in lecture theatres to accommodate pregnant women; lack of child-friendly study spaces; lack of child-friendly play areas on campus; and a call for family-friendly accommodation on campus.

This paper examines each issue and makes a series of recommendations for consideration: rebates for childcare; the establishment of an occasional childcare centre on campus; a model for low cost school holiday programs to be run in conjunction with the Faculty of Education; playgroups and social events for families; preference given to carers when allocating tutorial and meeting times; install one seat in each lecture theatre to accommodate a pregnant student; establish one child-friendly bookable study space on each campus; build an outdoor playground on the perimeter of each campus (to be open to the wider community); and create on campus accommodation for families.

The MPA recognises the important work currently being undertaken in this area by the Campus Community Division and the Human Resources unit. Any actions taken by the university in this area would benefit not only postgraduates but all students and staff. These improvements would enhance gender equity in general across the university, standing alongside the university's commitment to the Athena SWAN¹ program, and Monash's excellent standing with WGEA².

For information on this report please contact the MPA on mpa@monash.edu

¹ A program designed to enhance gender equity across STEMM disciplines
<https://www.monash.edu/gender-equity/athena-swan/about-athena-swan-charter>

² Workplace Gender Equality Agency

Index

Introduction	4
1. Affordable childcare	5
2. Occasional childcare	6
3. School holiday programs	7
4. Opportunities for peer support, socializing and information exchange	8
5. Timing of tutorials, meetings and supervisor sessions	9
6. Seating in lecture theatres to accommodate pregnant women	9
7. Child-friendly study spaces	10
8. Child-friendly play areas on campus	11
9. Accommodation for postgraduates with family	11
Summary of recommendations	12
Appendix 1: Melbourne University childcare rebate program	13
Appendix 2: MPA/Faculty of Education proposal for a school holiday program	14
Appendix 3: IKEA playroom	15
Appendix 4: University initiatives for partners of international students	16
Appendix 5: Casework example from the MPA Advocacy service	17

*What is (even more) amazing to Australian parents struggling to meet childcare bills is that Finnish childcare is price controlled. Most families pay no more than about 15% of their incomes and it is absolutely free for those on low incomes...It is of no surprise then, that in 2007, Finland had **the lowest employment gender gap of the EU with just less than 4% difference in employment rates for women and men.** Australia's by contrast sits at around 14%.*

If Australia is serious about lifting the participation rates of women in this country ... we must fix our early education and childcare problem.

Lisa Bryant, Women's Agenda, February 2014

<https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/want-cheap-plentiful-quality-childcare-go-to-finland/>

Introduction

The Monash Postgraduate Association (MPA) recognizes the challenges faced by postgraduate students at Monash University, and in particular, the work-life-study balance for those who have responsibility for the care of young children (postgraduate carers). Postgraduate carers, commonly women, are often living on low incomes making the cost of childcare challenging.

The MPA recognises the important work currently being undertaken in this area by the Campus Community Division and the Human Resources unit. The MPA is keen to work with the university to ensure that our rapidly growing postgraduate cohort is provided with the support services they need. Identifying the barriers that prevent postgraduate carers from fully participating in postgraduate degrees is the first step in addressing those needs.

Through the MPA student advocacy casework, fora and direct student feedback, postgraduate carers have raised several concerns with the MPA over the past five years, all of which have been included in this submission. Where possible, the MPA has made a recommendation; some recommendations are small changes while others will require much more thought and planning before being considered for implementation.

While this submission concentrates on the needs of postgraduates, most of the recommendations would benefit all students and staff at Monash University. In addition, these improvements would enhance gender equity in general across the university, standing alongside the university's commitment to the Athena SWAN³ program, and Monash's excellent standing with WGEA⁴.

In an increasingly competitive market, sending a clear message that staff and students with childcare responsibilities are respected and supported will ensure that Monash becomes the university of choice for international postgraduates and world-class researchers.

Building on our gender balance, recruitment and retention of brilliant women academics, our inclusion in the SAGE pilot of Athena SWAN extends our capacity to enhance gender equity across STEMM disciplines.

*By working towards an Institutional Bronze Award in 2018, we will put the spotlight on **identifying and implementing practical strategies that will make a real difference towards achieving gender equity in STEMM.***

Monash University website

<https://www.monash.edu/gender-equity/athena-swan/about-athena-swan-charter>

³ A program designed to enhance gender equity across STEMM disciplines
<https://www.monash.edu/gender-equity/athena-swan/about-athena-swan-charter>

⁴ Workplace Gender Equality Agency

1. Affordable childcare

“Monash is such a great place to study but I spend nearly 80% of my stipend on childcare. The combined pressure of doctoral studies, parenting and having to take up part-time work to make ends meet- it is all a bit too much for me. For students with young children, it is not a level playing field. This disadvantage seeps into all aspects of our life including physical and mental health. I will be honest that I have found it very overwhelming and have had to seek support from counselling services.”

Monash University PhD student

The cost of externally-run day care is very high, ranging from \$80-\$140 per day. For a full-time postgraduate with one child in day care, this would be an average total cost of \$550 per week. A full-time PhD student on an RTPS (Research Training Program Stipend, formerly APA) receives an income of \$513 per week. With the Centrelink rebate included, the cost of childcare for this student would be reduced to \$405 per week, leaving \$108 per week for all other living expenses.

The situation for international students is even more dire. International students on temporary visas are not eligible to receive any federal funding through Centrelink to cover childcare costs⁵.

Not surprisingly, many postgraduates, both domestic and international, have reported to the MPA that childcare costs are a major source of stress. In a recent MPA survey of HDR students, “family responsibilities” was cited as the fourth most common reason for delays in completion.⁶ Postgraduates are often living on a low income and the cost of childcare is prohibitive. Financial assistance would be of tremendous support to postgraduate carers to assist them through to timely completion of their degrees.

Monash University runs several childcare centres that offer slightly discounted rates for students⁷, as do most other Victorian universities. However, in addition to discounted childcare centre services, Melbourne University provides a means-tested childcare rebate to both domestic and international students that can be used at any childcare centre. For details, see Appendix 1.

Recommendation 1: That a means-tested childcare rebate be made available to all domestic and international students, for use in any childcare centre.

⁵ Domestic students may be eligible to claim a Centrelink rebate for childcare, depending on their income. Most international students are not eligible for this rebate, unless they are studying at Monash University on a federal government funded scholarship, such as the Endeavour Award Scholarship or Australian Awards Scholarship.

⁶ Preliminary data from the Monash Postgraduate Association(MPA) HDR survey, October 2017

⁷ Monash University-run childcare centre charges vary slightly between centres, charges for students range from \$98 to \$113 per day, charges for staff from \$103 to \$113 per day and charges for non-Monash parents from \$108 to \$118 per day. The average cost of childcare in a Monash University-run childcare centre is \$105 per day for students.

2. Occasional childcare

“If the local YMCA/swimming pool can offer occasional care to allow parents to swim or attend the gym, surely Monash can offer occasional care (so, by the hour or day) to students needing childcare to attend a lecture or meetings. Whatever services provided to students should be made available also to staff, many of whom have kids.”

Monash University PhD student

Childcare services often have long waitlists and even when students are successful in securing a space for their child, they are required to commit to full days, and a regular weekly booking throughout the year to guarantee a place. This means that postgraduates must pay for the full year, even out-of-semester when they may have no commitments on campus.

Postgraduate carers often need short-term, ad-hoc care for their children; meeting with a supervisor; attending a lecture; attending a meeting; checking on lab experiments; studying a single semester. This type of care is not available through external or Monash University childcare centres.

With many postgraduate parents willing to volunteer their time to assist each other with childcare, an occasional childcare centre could be set up at Monash based on a co-operative model, with the university employing a single qualified supervisor overseeing the operation to ensure adherence to the government child safe standards and compliance with the relevant regulations and framework.⁸

An innovative way to look at the issue of very short-term childcare (1 – 2 hours) is to consider establishing an IKEA-style playroom on campus, where children can be left for short periods while parents attend a lecture or meeting on campus. See Appendix 3 for more information on the IKEA playroom.

Recommendation 2.1: That a study be conducted to ascertain the feasibility of establishing an occasional childcare centre on or adjacent to the Clayton campus.

Recommendation 2.2: That consideration be given to establishing an IKEA-style playroom for the purposes of short-term childcare.

Recommendation 2.3: That all university-run childcare centres offer half day bookings charged at the corresponding rate.

Recommendation 2.4: That all university-run childcare centres offer to hold childcare places for students during non-teaching periods without charge.

⁸ Care providers are regulated under *Education and Care Services National Law 2010* (Cwth) and the *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011*(Cwth) and must meet the requirements of the National Regulatory Framework.

3. School holiday programs

“Subsidised school holiday programs for postgrads with kids is a great idea. Kids have more school holidays than the 4 weeks leave PhD students can take per year.”

Monash University PhD student

For postgraduates with school-aged children, the school holiday periods present a dilemma. For coursework postgraduates, the school holidays are much longer than university breaks and do not always align. For research postgraduates on scholarships, the entitlement to a maximum of four weeks annual leave is insufficient to cover the school holiday periods, which total at least 12 weeks per year.

Monash University (through Camp Australia)⁹ and local councils offer school holiday programs that cost between \$58 - \$69 per child per day – for many postgraduates this is unaffordable.

In 2017, the Monash University International Student Engagement team (Campus Community Division) piloted a program that offered students access to two free days each holiday period (Easter, June and September) in a School Holiday Program run on Clayton campus by Camp Australia. This offer was extended to international students only, with the reasoning being that most international students are ineligible for the childcare rebate offered through Centrelink¹⁰.

The MPA was contacted by domestic postgraduates who argued that even with access to the Child Care Benefit and Rebate, their financial situation was equally as difficult, and that they should also have access to this offer.

The MPA recently approached the Faculty of Education to discuss the possibility of offering postgraduates enrolled in teaching courses the opportunity to assist in developing and delivering a school holiday program where students could accredit the hours devoted to the program as teaching placement hours. With some funding to trial the program, the MPA believes that free or low cost school holiday programs could be offered to Monash University students. Details of this proposal are set out in Appendix 3.

Recommendation 3: That funding be provided to enable a one year trial of the MPA/Faculty of Education school holiday program proposal on Clayton campus.

⁹ <https://www.campaustralia.com.au/HolidayClubs/Program/VCMonashUniversity/19213>

¹⁰ Most international students are not eligible for the childcare rebate, unless they are studying at Monash University on a federal government funded scholarship, such as the Endeavour Award Scholarship or Australian Awards Scholarship.

4. Opportunities for peer support, socialising and information exchange

Postgraduate carers can be particularly affected by isolation given their restricted access to social events due to family responsibilities. In response to requests from postgraduate carers for an opportunity to meet other postgraduate parents, the MPA has run social events such as coffee morning sessions. These sessions have attracted low numbers and proved difficult to sustain because of the very nature of running an event that requires postgraduates to find childcare in order to attend.

The solution is to run events where postgraduates can attend with their partners and children. Some events are already run specifically for families:

- The MPA run a day trip each semester that is designed for postgraduates to attend with their partners/families;
- The International Student Engagement team (ISE) run an annual family day that attracts over 300 participants, as well as a family information day each semester.

Postgraduate carers are keen to establish a playgroup and the MPA has run a casual playgroup in the past¹¹. However, with the increased regulation around child safe standards, the MPA is reluctant to enter into this area without assistance and support. Providing an opportunity for international postgraduates to meet local postgraduates, who could share information about local community support would be an effective way to successfully integrate international students into the university community. Peer support is very important to postgraduates' mental health. Happy, settled postgraduates are more likely to complete on time.

Partners of postgraduates can be extremely isolated, as can be partners of academics who are recruited from overseas. Establishing a network of postgraduates and academics who have children, and including the partners in this group would be socially beneficial for all the participants. In addition, assisting partners to integrate into the community is an important aspect of ensuring retention of both newly recruited postgraduates and academic staff.

Some information sessions are run by the university specifically for the partners of students, and these sessions also provide opportunities for social interaction:

- English Connect run sessions for the partners of students to improve their English;
- The ISE trialed two initiatives: information sessions on pregnancy for international students and their partners; and information sessions on finding work for partners of international students. See Appendix 4 for details.

Recommendation 4.1: That the university work with the MPA to establish a weekly playgroup for the children (and where applicable, partners) of postgraduates and academics.

Recommendation 4.2: That the university provide support for units such as the International Student Engagement team and English Connect to enhance their capacity to address the needs of students with families.

¹¹ In the late 1990's the MPA established and ran a postgraduate playgroup on Clayton campus. This service was later handed over to the then University Childcare services unit, moved to the hall of the Monash Uniting Church and renamed the Coonawarra Playgroup. The playgroup closed after the disestablishment of the university's Childcare Services unit.

5. Timing of tutorials, meetings and supervisor sessions

Postgraduate carers with responsibility for school drop-off and pick-up duties must attempt to work their “full-time” university day between the hours of 9.30am and 2.30pm. For coursework postgraduates, this may mean missing the occasional lecture. However, when it comes to tutorials, there are usually multiple sessions offered, so that postgraduates can choose whichever timing suits them. The difficulty for carers is that the tutorial times within 9am – 3pm are the most popular, and they sometimes miss out on enrolling themselves in these timeslots. See Appendix 5 for an MPA casework example.

It is within the faculty’s control to allow postgraduate carers priority for enrolling in tutorials. This is a small effort for the faculties, but would make a tremendous difference for postgraduate carers, who highly value and are reliant on tutorials for their education.

Similarly for research postgraduates, meetings with supervisors and faculty/school-run meetings for HDRs should be set within the school day hours where possible, when any postgraduate in that faculty or school group has school pick-up duties. This would also benefit staff who had those same responsibilities for their school-age children.

Recommendation 5.1: That faculties provide priority access to tutorial enrolments for postgraduates with carer duties.

Recommendation 5.2: That supervisors, schools and faculties run HDR-related meetings and sessions within the school day hours when postgraduates with carer duties are members of that HDR group.

6. Seating in lecture theatres to accommodate pregnant women

The MPA has received several complaints from pregnant women who were unable to fit into the seats in lecture theatres. The seating in lecture theatres is so tight that many students are forced to sit at an angle just to accommodate the length of their legs.

Heavily pregnant women are unable to fit into the space between the rows of seats and unable to unfold the desk. Pregnant women could be accommodated if at least one seat were built with additional space between the seat and the fold up desk. This desk could be added on to the end of any row of seats and used by other students in the absence of any pregnant students.

Recommendation 6: That one seat with a fold up desk to accommodate a pregnant woman be added to every existing lecture theatre and that such a seat be automatically incorporated into plans for new lecture theatres.

7. Child-friendly study spaces

In response to requests from postgraduates for a place to study where they could occasionally bring their children with them, the MPA established a child-friendly study room for postgraduate parents in the C2 postgraduate lounge on Caulfield campus. The room is bookable for up to four hours per visit, and is equipped with a range of toys for children and desk space to accommodate two postgraduates. The room is positioned within line of sight of the MPA office reception, accessible only by swipe access and available only during MPA office hours.

Since opening in March 2017, the room has been in regular use. The MPA hopes to replicate this arrangement when university planning begins for the refurbishment of the first floor, eastern end of the Clayton campus centre where the MPA Clayton office and postgraduate lounge area is located.

Recommendation 7: That a child-friendly study space be established on every Monash University campus.



The MPA study room for postgraduate parents, C2, Caulfield campus

8. Child-friendly play areas on campus

A number of postgraduates have noted that they sometimes have children with them on campus out of necessity, and would like to see an area established where they could take their children to play during their lunch break.

One suggestion is that a child-friendly outdoor area be established with play equipment. If this were to be built on the perimeter of the university grounds and opened to children from neighbouring communities, this would serve to support those staff and students with parental responsibilities, as well as support the university's efforts to engage with the local community.

Recommendation 8: That a child-friendly outdoor play area be established on every campus of Monash University¹².

9. Accommodation for postgraduates with partners and children

"In the long run, it will also help for postgraduate students to have affordable student housing for families. For instance, La Trobe university offers that and students with families are formed like communities as they are neighbours, supporting each other in caring responsibilities."

Monash University PhD student

While Monash has recently increased the number and quality of on campus accommodation, there is still no accommodation provided for postgraduates with partners or children. Postgraduates with families are directed by the Monash website to external housing agencies. Many international postgraduates accompanied by family members have indicated to the MPA that they would choose to live on or close to campus in university-provided housing, were Monash to offer that option.

La Trobe University specifically promotes online their family accommodation on campus:

*"La Trobe has accommodation options and access to childcare for students who are also parents. If you'd like to live on campus with your family, the self-contained fully-furnished apartments in Barnes Way and Waterdale Apartments are only a ten minute walk from the centre of campus. Available in two or three bedrooms, the apartment complex has a playground and is on a secure property with no through traffic."*¹³

Recommendation 9: That the university provide accommodation for couples and families, either on or near the main campuses.

¹² Peninsula campus would be a good place to start with this proposal as many Peninsula postgraduates have families. The kindergarten teacher at Windermere Early Learning Centre (Peninsula campus) takes the children for weekly excursions on to campus to the rock climbing wall, hockey field and library (outside of semester hours) and would welcome access to a playground. See website for details: <https://www.windermere.org.au/childcare/early-learning-centre>

¹³ <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/accommodation/on-campus/locations/mel/living-on-campus-with-children>

Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1: That a **means-tested childcare rebate** be made available to all domestic and international students, for use in any childcare centre.

Recommendation 2.1: That a study be conducted to ascertain the feasibility of **establishing an occasional childcare centre** on or adjacent to Clayton campus.

Recommendation 2.2: That consideration be given to **establishing an IKEA-style playroom** for the purposes of short-term childcare.

Recommendation 2.3: That all university-run **childcare centres offer half day bookings** charged at the corresponding rate.

Recommendation 2.4: That all university-run childcare **centres offer to hold childcare places** for students during non-teaching periods without charge.

Recommendation 3: That funding be provided to enable a **one year trial** of the MPA/Faculty of Education **school holiday program** proposal on Clayton campus.

Recommendation 4: That the university work with the MPA to **establish a weekly playgroup** for the children (and where applicable, partners) of postgraduates and academics.

Recommendation 4.2: That the university provide support for units such as the International Student Engagement team and English Connect to **enhance their capacity to address the needs of students with families.**

Recommendation 5.1: That faculties provide **priority access to tutorial enrolments** for postgraduates with carer duties.

Recommendation 5.2: That supervisors, schools and faculties **run HDR-related meetings and sessions within the school day hours** when postgraduates with carer duties are members of that HDR group.

Recommendation 6: That **one seat with a fold up desk to accommodate a pregnant woman be added to every existing lecture theatre** and that such a seat be automatically incorporated into plans for new lecture theatres.

Recommendation 7: That a **child-friendly study space be established** on every Monash University campus.

Recommendation 8: That a **child-friendly outdoor play area be established** on every campus of Monash University.

Recommendation 9: That the university **provide accommodation for couples and families**, either on or near the main campus.

Appendix 1. University of Melbourne childcare rebate program

University of Melbourne offers a means-tested rebate for domestic students, based on (and in addition to) the percentage rebate the student is eligible to receive from Centrelink. For example, a student receiving 90+% rebate from Centrelink would receive an additional rebate of \$9.22 per day from the university. The table below sets out the rebate provided by University of Melbourne.

Days	0.5	1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4	4.5	5	Rebate
90+% (20% rebate)	\$4.61	\$9.22	\$13.83	\$18.44	\$23.05	\$27.67	\$32.28	\$40.08	\$45.09	\$41.10	20%
80 - 89.99% (16% rebate)	\$4.04	\$8.08	\$12.12	\$16.16	\$20.02	\$24.24	\$28.28	\$34.62	\$38.94	\$36.07	16%
70 - 79.99% (12% rebate)	\$3.29	\$6.59	\$9.88	\$13.17	\$16.47	\$19.76	\$23.05	\$27.88	\$31.36	\$29.44	12%
60 - 69.99% (8% rebate)	\$2.37	\$4.74	\$7.11	\$9.48	\$11.86	\$14.23	\$16.60	\$19.86	\$22.34	\$21.28	8%
50 - 59.99% (4% rebate)	\$1.27	\$2.54	\$3.82	\$5.09	\$6.37	\$7.64	\$8.91	\$10.57	\$11.89	\$11.41	4%

University of Melbourne childcare centre rebate table for all domestic students.

International students (who are not eligible for the Centrelink rebate) complete an income assessment to receive a rebate of up to \$11 per day from the university's financial aid service on campus.

All rebates provided by University of Melbourne are able to be used at any childcare centre, not just the University-run centres.

University of Melbourne Children Services program

- \$450,000 of SSAF money is used to fund University of Melbourne's Children Services program. The full-time staff position is university funded.
- University of Melbourne childcare centres offer students a reduced rate for childcare (\$111 for students and \$120 for non-university) in addition to the Centrelink rebate.
- University of Melbourne childcare centres offer half day bookings for students.
- Students can take their children out at the end of semester 2 and space will be held until the following year without penalty.

Appendix 2: IKEA playroom

IKEA are one of the rare 'family friendly' shopping venues that really do try to make visiting IKEA fun for children and grown ups alike.

Starting with the car park you will see special 'pram friendly' car parks located very close to the entrance of the store. As you come through the revolving door entrance you will see the activity filled IKEA Playland – children just love this playroom which has a huge ball pit, a TV playing kids movies, a large wooden train play table and lots of art activities. For Health and Safety reasons there are restrictions and conditions of entry to this room which cover age (3 – 7) and numbers. Children must be toilet trained and remove shoes and socks before entering.

There can be a waiting time for Playland depending on the time of day – weekends and school holidays are extremely busy. There are tables and chairs with colouring in activities for the children while they wait. For the safety of the children the parent or guardian admitting the child must be the one to collect him or her. Children can stay and play in the playroom for up to an hour. Parents are given a pager which will beep when it's time to collect your child.

<https://playandgo.com.au/index.php/ikea-playland-restaurant/>



Appendix 3: MPA/Faculty of Education proposal for a school holiday program

The MPA approached the Faculty of Education to discuss the possibility of offering postgraduates enrolled in teaching courses the opportunity to assist in developing and delivering a school holiday program where students could accredit the hours devoted to the program as teaching placement hours. The Associate Dean offered her in-principle support for the program.

The aim would be to provide access to free or low-cost school holiday programs for full-time students.

Benefits to the university:

- Positions Monash University as a leader in supporting students with families
- Positions Monash University as a leader in recognising the importance of removing barriers for women wanting to access education
- Offers the opportunity for Faculty of Education students to experience working in a safe, industry-related professional setting.
- Offers the opportunity for Faculty of Education students to participate in potential research associated with the program.
- Reduces the burden on the Faculty of Education to secure placements for their students.

Benefits to postgraduate carers:

- Removes financial impediment to accessing childcare during the school holidays
- Relieves students from stress associated with combining childcare responsibilities with study and research

Requirements:

The trial one year program would require:

- Staff to develop the initial program (one-off cost);
- Staff to supervise the students on placement during the school holiday program periods (6 – 10 weeks annually);
- Staff to provide administrative assistance to ensure compliance
- Funding for any additional insurance cover that may be required (if any aspect of the program were to fall outside the university's current insurance policy cover);
- Funding for any internal space hire, facilities and/or activity charges.

Appendix 4: University initiatives for partners of international students.

Family information day for international students

The International Student Engagement team, Campus Community Division run a family information day each semester in week 4, for international students. The session includes speakers from various organisations including: City of Monash; Dixon House (community support centre); Monash Residential Services; Monash University Health Services; English Connect; and the Monash Postgraduate Association.

The session also offers an opportunity for the students to meet and socialise with each other.

Information session on pregnancy for international students

The International Student Engagement team, Campus Community Division ran trial information sessions on pregnancy for international students who were pregnant or planning to start a family.

The session ran once per semester in 2017 and included a series of expert speakers providing information on: the Australian medical system and how it works; local hospitals; medical insurance coverage for pregnancies; and the medical centre on campus.

Information session on finding work, for partners of international students

The International Student Engagement team and Career Connect, Campus Community Division ran trial information sessions on how to find work, specifically pitched to the partners of international students.

The session ran once per semester in 2017.

English language session for partners of students

English Connect, Campus Community Division, runs a free module for partners of HDRs that focuses on difficult aspects of workplace interactions and everyday life, including: workplace expectations in Australia; job applications; language and culture; education systems; talking to medical professionals; social conventions; entertaining at home; and seeing things around Melbourne.

<http://www.monash.edu/english-connect/home/courses/partners-module-2>

Appendix 5: Casework example from the MPA Advocacy service

In 2016 a group of parents from a faculty approached the MPA with a request that students with parenting responsibilities be given priority when the faculty allocated tutorial times. The postgraduates explained that they needed to fit their tutorials in with school drop-off and pick-up times, or they would be forced to miss the tutorial altogether. The students recognised the important educational value of the tutorials and were extremely distressed at the prospect of missing out on this opportunity.

The MPA advised the postgraduates to initially raise their concerns with the faculty. In response, the student group was told by faculty administrative staff to approach other students who had secured the midday tutorial timeslots and request to swap with them. Many of the (non-carer) students did not want to swap because they preferred a later start. The student group reported to the MPA that some postgraduate carers were offering to pay cash in order to secure the tutorial session they needed and that these transactions were allegedly occurring through Moodle.

The MPA Advocate contacted the faculty to negotiate on behalf of the postgraduates, but was unsuccessful in convincing the faculty to provide priority tutorial allocation to postgraduate carers. The faculty claimed that it would not be possible to provide such a service. The MPA staff later met with the university timetabling unit and established that tutorial allocation was something that could be done at a faculty-level, if the faculty chose to do so. The MPA was not able to resolve this particular issue with the faculty, so postgraduates were left in the position of having to negotiate with other students for tutorial timeslots.