Strengthening University Governance:
Expert Council on University Governance

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Council of Australian
Postgraduate Associations Inc.

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The Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations Inc. (CAPA) acknowledge and celebrate the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on whose lands we meet and work. We formally recognise the Elders, families and forebears of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and acknowledge they are the traditional custodians of the land, and have been so for millennia.

We acknowledge that the land on which we work is stolen land and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have never ceded their sovereignty on these lands and treaties are yet to be negotiated. As unionists, we pledge our ongoing solidarity with the traditional owners, and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, in their struggle for recognition of sovereignty, historical truths and justice.

This Pre-Budget Submission was compiled with the assistance of the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) and their affiliated member organisations.

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Introduction

This is a submission of the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA). We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Expert Council on Governance to 'provide expert and technical governance advice to the Federal and State/Territory Education Ministers about how to improve university governance and performance' and to 'assist Ministers in strengthening university governance and ensuring universities are safe and welcoming places to work and study in'. We believe this is a positive outcome of this recommendation from the Universities Accord Review.

CAPA is the peak body representing the interests of the over 480,000 postgraduate students in Australia. CAPA represents both coursework and research across domestic and international postgraduates. The Council is comprised of 28 university and campus-based postgraduate associations, and collaborates closely with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Postgraduate Association (NATSIPA). CAPA carries out its mission through policy, research, and advocacy, communicating the interests and issues of postgraduate students to higher education stakeholders and Federal and State/Territory governments, Opposition parties, and minor parties.

Recommendations

1. Priority Areas 1, 4, 5 and 7: The majority of university governing body membership comprise the university community, via democratically elected staff, students and alumni.

2. Priority Areas 1, 4, 5 and 7: The proportion of democratically elected staff representatives should constitute no less than 20% of university governing body membership.

3. Priority Areas 1, 4, 5 and 7: The governing bodies to have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation.

4. Priority Area 2: That university governance be re-oriented away from top-down efficiency, to improve the academic independence of structures and processes.

5. Priority Area 2: That university governance incorporates the inefficient task of robust scholarship and debate.

6. Priority Area 2: Members of the governing body should be able to consult with their constituents on key institutional issues raised at the governing body, where reasonable and necessary.

Recommendations

7. Priority Area 3: Protections put in place to ensure that governing body members can exercise robust scholarship and debate in the management and stewardship of a higher education institution.

8. Priority Areas 2 and 6: Mandated postgraduate (coursework) and HDR participation in all university decision making bodies.

9. Priority Areas 2 and 6: Higher Education Providers to ensure equitable proportion of newly-legislated minimum 40% of the SSAF to independent postgraduate student-led organisations that represent postgraduate students.

10. Priority Areas 2 and 6: The proportion of SSAF given to independent undergraduate and postgraduate associations should be based on the FTE proportion of students enrolled.

11. Priority Areas 2 and 6: The National Student Ombudsman to develop processes for the equitable allocation of SSAF.

12. Priority Area 9: Universities allocate dedicated operational funding to student organisations to ensure adequate independent legal and advocacy services are available to students.

Recommendations

13. Priority Area 9: The creation of a national framework for how universities should work with students as partners in corporate and academic governance.

14. Priority Area 9: Institution provided induction programs, governance training, and ongoing support mechanisms for student representatives.

15. Priority Area 10: All Executive remuneration be reported publicly, and executive remuneration levels capped at the salaries of the relevant state premiers, or public sector entities of similar complexity.

16. CAPA is offered the opportunity to nominate a postgraduate expert to the Council on University Governance.

The Role of Australian Universities

The need to balance academic-led research and teaching with financial constraints is a major source of tension in the higher education sector. Recently, the topic of efficiency has embroiled government debate due to the controversial 'Department of Government Efficiency' in the United States of America. In the university context, we must ask ourselves, what is a university for? Are Universities a fourth layer of government, a service provider, educational institution or research hub?

John Henry Newman articulated the 'Idea of a University' (Newman J H. The Idea of the University. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1852), which serves as a central institution for the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge, welcoming students from diverse backgrounds and disciplines. Critically, University provides a structured environment for intellectual exchange, fostering communication and engagement through direct academic discourse. Yet what makes universities unique are scholarly debate and collaborative learning - universities are enriched by contributions from numerous educational institutions, enabling rigorous inquiry, critical analysis, and the refinement of discoveries. In university, errors are identified and addressed, not punished. This engagement establishes a robust intellectual foundation, allowing students and academics alike to thrive in an environment dedicated to the progression of thought.

Similarly, in the Report of the Committee on Australian Universities (The Murray Report) released in 1957, the purpose of universities in Australia are (Murray, 1957): (1) To educate: It is the function of the University to offer not merely a technical or specialist training out, a full and true education, befitting a free man, and, the citizen of a free country.

(2) To research: But there is one kind of research which is in general best done in universities and the greater part of which in recent generations has in fact been done in universities. It is obvious that most of the basic secrets of nature have been unravelled by men who were moved simply by intellectual curiosity, who wanted to discover new knowledge for its own sake.

(3) And to uphold intellectual integrity: They are, or they should be, the guardians of intellectual standards, and intellectual integrity in the community. Scholars and scientists who spend their lives in the search for knowledge should, at least in their own spheres of inquiry, be proof against the waves of emotion and prejudice which make the ordinary man, and public opinion, subject from time to time, to illusion and self-deceit.

In 1810, Wilhelm von Humboldt outlined the founding principles for Western universities: "unity of research and teaching, freedom of teaching and academic self-governance (Humboldt, 1903)." The first principle highlighted the importance of integrating research with teaching, and the power that intellectual exchange beings in an educational setting. The second principle, outlined that academic staff should have the freedom to teach in alignment with their scholarly perspectives and evidence, ensuring the integrity of educational instruction. The third principle, academic self-governance, has emerged as a foundational element of this vision: the need to safeguard academic work from governmental influence (Boulton, 2011).

Yet, effective university governance must balance academic independence with necessary structural reforms to ensure that the institution is delivering for the public: the funders. Despite higher education remaining under state jurisdiction, "the great expansion of student numbers that has occurred since the [second world] war plus rising costs plus the fact that the Commonwealth collects the bulk of the public revenue, have together led to the Commonwealth becoming the main financial provider for all universities (Partridge, 1965)."

While administrative oversight is essential for key functions such as teaching frameworks, research support, technology transfer, and professional services, universities must also create a culture of intellectual freedom, creativity, and open inquiry. Autonomous higher education institutions also provide benefits to their surrounding areas. A recent OECD report indicates that, in 35 countries from 1992 to 2014, 50% of all inventive activities occurred within 30 kilometres of research universities (OECD, 2019). It is this culture which is essential to public engagement, innovation and creating societal value.

However, efficient governance via top-down management structures, may diminish the university's traditional role as a centre for diverse scholarship and comprehensive education, and potentially undermine the balance between research, teaching, and broader academic functions. Moreover, an overly simplified governance structure may compromise the essence of a university as a space for independent thought and scholarly exchange. Ultimately, the key values of our university, intellectual freedom, innovation, and open inquiry are inherently inefficient.

Therefore, CAPA recommends, to address priority area 2 in the terms of reference:

- **That university governance be re-oriented away from top-down efficiency, to improve the academic independence of structures and processes .**
- **That university governance incorporates the inefficient task of robust scholarship and debate, to reflect consultation and engagement with the university community and have appropriate oversight and reporting to and by the governing body.**

Governance in Australian Universities

The following contains excerpts taken from CAPA's Submission from the Senate Inquiry into the quality of governance at higher education providers, 2025:

When the Whitlam Government abolished tuition fees for students at universities and technical colleges on January 1st 1974, the higher education sector was radically different from today, in both size and scope. The transformational policies of the Whitlam and later Hawke/Keating Governments to introduce quality higher education to the average Australian, simultaneously transformed their culture and governance models. The Whitlam era in Australia, which spanned the early 1970s, marked a significant expansion of public higher education, with the government's commitment to providing universal access to university education (Savage, 2018). However, this era of public investment and social welfare was succeeded with policies that prioritised the commercialisation and corporatisation of higher education (Martin-Sardesai et al., 2021). The increased marketisation within higher education sector, with universities being urged to adopt commercial models and generate more income through various means – including the commercialisation of intellectual property and the commodification of education – has resulted in a shift away from the traditional values of academic freedom, critical thinking, and the pursuit of knowledge for the public good, towards a focus on producing graduates who can contribute to the workforce and generate revenue for their institutions (Levidow, 2002; Olssen, 2015).

In the late 1980's the Dawkin's review of the higher education system stated that "effective management at the institutional level will be the key to achieving many of the Government's objectives for the unified national system: growth in areas of national need; an effective partnership with other parties to the education and training process, including employers; improvements to equity and access to higher education; and efficiency of operation (Dawkins J (1988)).
The changes included (Meek, 2003):

- the introduction of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme
- the Relative Funding Model which funded universities at the same amount per student but with weighting for different disciplines
- an increased emphasis on national competitive grants for research

- measures designed to encourage universities to earn income from other sources, including earning funding from commercialising research results and being given permission to charge fees for international students.
- Significant reduction of the number of elected staff and student members on university governing bodies

The introduction of these changes have driven higher education enrolments from 393,734 in 1987 to 957,176 in 2005, yet the proportion of funding from the Federal Government fell from 85 per cent in 1987 to 41 per cent in 2003 (Guthrie & Lucas, 2022). External influence, such as changes in government policies, funding schemes or new leadership, steer universities in line with the regulatory changes. It is therefore unsurprising that the increased regulatory focus on corporate university governance, such as financial performance, high-level strategies and the measurement of student success, were seen as a necessary response to an increasingly challenging funding landscape (Guthrie, 2017).

These structural changes are described as New Public Management (NPM) reforms (Jonathan & Hoque, 2025) and have significantly impacted public universities worldwide, leading to a shift towards a more market-oriented approach and commercialisation of higher education. This shift has created tension between traditional values in the higher education sector and commercial imperatives, fostering a crisis of conflicting goals and expectations. As a result, universities are now tasked to navigate the complex terrain of maintaining their role as public service providers while adopting business-like practices, such as strict budgeting and financial accountability (Jonathan & Hoque, 2025). This duality has led to debates around universities' mission and operations, particularly as they balance public responsibilities with financial sustainability.

Ritzer (1996) draws comparisons of university operations under NPM reforms with shopping malls and theme parks; universities are transformed into quasi-markets that offer excitement and colour to lure student-consumers. Similarly, Modell (2005) argues that stakeholders in the public sector have transformed into 'consumers' instead of 'citizens'; his study highlights the way performance measures were implemented via a "quasi-market" system in Sweden universities, which transformed students into consumers, rather than purely learners in the education system.

The commercialised operational model has transformed universities to use competing dimensions of organisational public-ness (public values and firm-logic) when managing universities through business-like accountability mechanisms (Jonathan & Hoque, 2025).

(11)

CAPA agrees that accountability mechanisms are critical to good governance and the financial sustainability of our universities. However, (12) the governance of universities and registered companies contain a variety of important differences. (12) For example, higher educational institutions do not have discreet owners. Likewise, registered companies utilise general meetings open to the stakeholders as a means to make important company wide decisions, and delegate the day-to-day governance to the Board of Directors, whereas universities do not hold a general meeting of their stakeholders (staff, students and graduates). Instead, university legislation (mostly state-level legislation) delegates all the powers of a university to their governing body, the University Council or Senate. The governing body has complete responsibility for oversight over the university's management, strategic planning, educational, financial, and commercial duties, risks and liabilities. This governing body is assisted by entities generally known as Academic Boards which are delegated the duty of teaching and learning quality assurance, whilst the day-to-day management of the university is delegated to the Vice-Chancellor.

Increasingly, the university community has been disempowered from participating in the governance of public universities. The Higher Education Support Act 2003 (Cth) dictates that there must be a majority of external independent members who are neither enrolled as a student nor employed by the higher education provider - decoupling the broader university community from decision-making processes. Indeed, the University of Melbourne remains the last institution to retain the 'professoriate' model of academic governance, whereas the remainder have adopted an academic governance model based on NPM (Table 1)."

Table 1. Composition of Academic Boards and Academic Senates at Group of Eight institutions.

Institution	Total	Officers	Management	Appointed Members	Elected Academics	Professional Staff (13)	Students
Australian National University	54	2	20	5	23	2	2
Monash University	96	2	31	27	31	0	5
University of Adelaide	38	2	18	0	12	2	4
University of NSW	66	3	22	2	28	0	11
University Queensland	118	2	63	1	45	1	6
University of Sydney	141	2	37	20	66	0	16
University of Western Australia	79	3	28	0	34	8	6
University of Melbourne	~1000	3	31	950 (Professors)	0	2	5

Consequently, the disconnect between the university community and the decision making bodies of our public universities creates a risk to our higher education sector with regards to transparency and educational outcomes. Notably, decreased student satisfaction, and reductive workforce planning (Guthrie & Lucas, 2022; Duffy, 2020). This is demonstrated by the average students-to-staff ratio among the top 100 ranked universities being 5.22 students to 1 academic, whereas the average ratio among Australian public universities is six times higher, at 30.5 to 1 (Pellizzon, 2022). Moreover, a significant proportion of university teaching is now done by low-cost casuals instead of academics (Guthrie & Lucas, 2022). Therefore, it is clear that efficient governance of universities does not always correlate with improved university outcomes. Critically, this disconnection hampers the ability of the university council's to improve structures and processes to reflect the university community. Ultimately, this status quo is at odds with the principles of Western academia, i.e. unity of research and teaching, freedom of teaching and academic self-governance. There can only be unity of research and teaching and freedom of teaching if those involved in teaching, research and learning are in the governing body of the institution.

Therefore, CAPA recommend to address priority areas 1, 3 and 7 of the Terms of Reference:

- **The majority of university governing body membership comprise the university community, via democratically elected staff, students and alumni.**
- **The proportion of democratically elected staff representatives should constitute no less than 20% of university governing body membership.**
- **The governing bodies to have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation.**
- **Members of the governing body should be able to consult with their constituents on key institutional issues raised at the governing body, where** (14) **reasonable and necessary.**
- **Protections are put in place to ensure that governing body members can exercise robust scholarship and debate in the management and stewardship of a higher education institution.**

Independent Student Representation in University Governance

The following contains excerpts taken from CAPA's Submission from the Senate Inquiry into the quality of governance at higher education providers, 2025:

Since the Dawkin's review in the late 1980's, the number of students and academics involved in corporate university governance has decreased significantly. Since 2004 the Australian National Governance Protocols for higher education in Australia and in 2012, the The Voluntary Best Practice for the Governance of Australian Universities were introduced. These standards, considered best practice for corporate university governance, brought about changes to the governance arrangements of universities, limiting the size of governing bodies to 22 members. Moreover, the protocols mandated at least two members having financial expertise, one having commercial expertise and the majority being external independent members of the university community (De Silva Lokuwaduge & Armstrong, 2015). However, it has since been shown that reduced board size does not improve financial, research or teaching performance, and that increased governing body independence results in reduced impact from the governing body on both research and teaching performances (De Silva Lokuwaduge & Armstrong, 2015). However, it has been shown that increased participation of internal university stakeholders in governing committees improves research and financial performance, supporting the argument that participation of different stakeholders in strategic decision-making provides critical expert knowledge.

Student unions play a vital role in fostering student engagement and partnership within a higher education context; representative bodies serve as passages between the student population and the university administration, enabling students' voice in the governance and decision-making processes that shape their educational experience (Kennedy & Pek, 2022; Mende & Hammett, 2020). One of the foundational purposes of student unions is to promote civic development amongst students. Through services including student advocacy, activism, and community engagement, student unions cultivate a sense of civic responsibility and empower students to become active citizens (Wray-Lake et al., 2023);

(Kennedy & Pek 2022). This collaborative approach enhances universities' responsiveness to student needs, as well as promotes a sense of ownership through a student-centred design via the student body (Brown McNair et al., 2022).

However, many universities, such as The University of Melbourne, La Trobe University, Deakin University, RMIT University, Swinburne University of Technology, The University of Adelaide, and others, still lack a dedicated postgraduate student on their governing body, let alone postgraduate participation in committees of their governing body. This is further exacerbated by the lack of dedicated funding for independent postgraduate student organisations. The resulting lack of postgraduate representation entrenches the "overwhelmingly undergraduate character of Australian institutions", despite "one of the chief tasks on which the universities are now concentrating is the development of postgraduate education (Partridge, 1965)."

Postgraduate coursework and higher degree by research (HDR) students are critical members of the university community, and future academics. Postgraduate students not only bring knowledge from their undergraduate studies, but are generally much older than their undergraduate counterparts (Investing in PhD Candidates in Australia - Universities Australia 2024). Furthermore, many of these students are the future academics employed at these universities and benefit from universities with properly functioning governance structures now and into the future. Indeed, approximately 20% of casual staff are postgraduate students, indicating a broad involvement in the teaching, learning and research activities of the university community (Akinboye & Eesuola, 2015; Lillis & Feeney, 2020).

Student representation, funded predominantly through the Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF), is vital for fostering strong campus communities and enhancing student wellbeing. CAPA and NATSIPA welcome the Federal legislation mandating a minimum 40% SSAF allocation to independent student-led organisations is essential to safeguard their autonomy, enable freedom of political expression, and protect students' right to voice concerns. Adequate funding supports initiatives that enhance student retention, address equity for at-risk groups (e.g., low-SES, rural, and regional students), and foster open debate on societal challenges.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, postgraduate student unions demonstrated their expertise and value by providing feedback on COVID-19 safety, the transition to online learning and supporting both domestic and international students. Despite this, many universities allocate only a small fraction of SSAF to postgraduate student unions, significantly limiting their capacity to train representatives, employ staff for organisational stability, and sustain their operations.

Postgraduate student associations face a particularly severe crisis, exacerbated by funding cuts due to declining international student numbers, international student caps, and financial pressures following the pandemic (Ryan, J. 2024). Many postgraduate associations risk losing their independence when forced to merge with undergraduate student bodies. At many universities this is seen as a positive gain in efficiency, as it reduces the number of student representatives to consult or inform of decisions. Yet, ultimately, this locks postgraduates out of existing processes to engage in university governance, further entrenching the position of undergraduate/general student unions. Critically, investing in postgraduate organisations ensures adequate supply of well-equipped postgraduate students to participate in university governance. Particularly, as postgraduate coursework and HDR candidates often do not engage in the highly politicised general student unions.

Therefore, CAPA recommends, to address priority area 2 and 6 in the terms of reference:

- **Higher Education Providers ensure equitable proportion of newly-legislated minimum 40% of the SSAF to independent postgraduate student-led organisations that represent postgraduate students.**
- **The proportion of SSAF given to independent undergraduate and postgraduate associations should be based on the FTE proportion of students enrolled.**
- **The National Student Ombudsman develop processes for the equitable allocation of SSAF.**

Students as Partners in University Governance

The following contains excerpts taken from CAPA's Submission from the Senate Inquiry into the quality of governance at higher education providers, 2025:

Growing evidence suggests that collaborative efforts between staff and students enhance the relevance, efficacy, quality, and satisfaction of university programs for all parties involved (Mercer-Maptsone 2019). Student partnerships foster a relationship-rich institutional culture where connection and engagement are pivotal to the educational experience. To meaningfully engage students, universities must view them as equal partners in governance processes, rather than merely as customers receiving a service (Cole & Worthington, 2016; Brooks & Sela, 2016).
Student partnership is defined as a "collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways..." (Mercer-Mapstone 2017). This relationship is grounded in principles of respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility, positioning students and staff as active collaborators. While not limited to teaching and learning, this practice has been widely researched due to consistent findings that close interactions between staff and students are crucial for student learning, engagement, and satisfaction in education (Table 2).

Currently, the TEQSA Higher Education Standards mandate that students must participate in academic governance, however, there are no such stipulations for corporate governance.

Therefore, CAPA recommend to address priority area 6 of the Terms of Reference by:
- **Mandating postgraduate (coursework) and HDR participation in all university decision making bodies.**

Table 2: Percentage of studies reporting positive outcomes of student partnership for students and staff (Mercer-Mapstone, 2017)

Positive Outcomes	forStudents	forStaff
Increased student engagement, motivation, or ownership for learning	56%	
Increased student confidence or self-efficacy	45%	
Increased understanding of the other's experience (e.g., students understanding staff experiences or vice-versa)	39%	28%
Enhanced relationship or trust between staff and students	37%	43%
Increased understanding of one's own learning or teaching (e.g., meta-cognitive knowledge, self-evaluation, self-awareness)	35%	3%
Raised awareness of graduate attributes, employability skills or career development	32%	
Increased sense of belonging to university, discipline or community	31%	
Improved curriculum content, materials or discipline learning (actual or perceived)	29%	31%
Positively shifted identity as a student, learner, person or professional	28%	14%
New beliefs about teaching and learning that improve practice		23%
Enhanced student-student relationships	22%	
Positively shifted traditional power dynamics between students and academics	19%	15%
Re-conceptualisation of teaching as a collaborative process to foster learning		19%
Improved learning outside of discipline, including critical skill development	17%	
Engaged or empowered under-represented students	9%	
Increased motivation for teaching, research, and participation in partnerships		9%
Teaching found to be more enjoyable or rewarding		9%
Improved academic performance (assignments or grades)	6%	
Programmatic changes or changes to teaching (e.g., more inclusive teaching practice)		6%
Networking, building critical relationships or improved career prospects	3%	5%
Inspired by student partners		3%
Increased or improved communication		3%

Framework for Student Participation in University Governance

The following has excerpts taken from CAPA's Submission from the Senate Inquiry into the quality of governance at higher education providers, 2025:

Currently there is no unified model for how universities should engage constructively with members of their community, such as students. Consequently, many students who do engage with their university find the experience overwhelming, due to lack of training for in-depth matters, or feel that student engagement is tokenistic, whereby students are informed of matters rather than included in the decision making process. Ultimately, student engagement practices may best be described as a continuum (Table 3) with the ultimate goal for students to be partners in university governance, and in control of their own student organisations.

Table 3: The 'Student Engagement Continuum' developed by Student Voice Australia

Stage	Inform	Consult	Involve	Partner	Control
Goal	Provide students with balance and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem and solution.	Obtain student feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	Work directly with students throughout processes to ensure their concerns are adequately addressed.	Partner with students in each aspect of the initiative.	Students design and lead initiatives and are in control of the decision making.

CAPA and NATSIPA highlight the need to partner with students in each aspect of an initiative, from identification to implementation. Indeed, consultation falls on the lower end of the engagement spectrum and can sometimes be perceived as tokenistic, or lacking authenticity. Our members have highlighted instances of malicious timing of meetings, late distribution of papers, complicated bureaucratic committee structures and a general lack of information on what the scope and powers of committees may be.

"I'm not exactly sure what I am supposed to do. I've received no handover because there was no previous representative for my school. I am supposed to write a report every month though I haven't been given guidelines. There hasn't been much information flow through from students so I'm not even sure what to tell the board" - Anonymous University of Adelaide Postgraduate Student

To foster a culture of student engagement, institutions should ideally prioritise collaboration and empowerment over mere information sharing and consultation. In the case of university governance, this means including students at all levels of the decision making organs of the institution.

"Working on reviewing academic policy as an equal partner from the conception of the policy review, to the approval by the academic board, was a rewarding experience. My drafting, comments and ideas were taken seriously and in many cases reflected in the final policy." - Jesse Gardner-Russell, Academic Board Member, University of Melbourne and current HDR candidate.

Implementation of student partnerships across disciplines, policy and practice changes is essential to creating effective learning communities. A university-wide approach ensures that students are not included at the tail-end of projects, or consulted just days before a policy change is to be tabled. Integrating student engagement into the culture and ethos of the institution, at its best fosters a culture where both students and staff are more thoughtful, engaged, and collegial as they navigate their work and life together on campus.

Critically, when students are included in academic and corporate governance apparatus, the institution should be providing adequate training, inductions and investment into the students, so that they can effectively contribute as partners to the academic and corporate governance. They should also be provided adequate ongoing supervision to ensure that they are appropriately engaging with the student cohort or university structures as a whole. Inclusion of students in the governance process is pivotal in creating an academic atmosphere where students are recognised as equal stakeholders with agency over their educational pathways, fostering an environment conducive to higher-quality educational environment based on inclusion and progression (Brown McNair et al., 2022).

"When I was a member of the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences academic board it felt like I had a real impact. I was appointed because of my role as the Health and Medical Sciences club president and was given an induction by the board. We identified issues in the program at the time, most notably a course that forced mid-year entry students in the Clinical Trials major to study for 3.5 years rather than the usual 3. I felt as though I had a real impact and was treated as an equal" - Maxim Buckley, former Adelaide Health and Medical Sciences Association president and current University of Adelaide HDR student

The proactive engagement of students and student unions provides robust opportunities for authentic student representation, which influences institutional policies and curricula based on diverse student inputs.

Finally, handover needs to be monitored between student representatives to provide a smooth transition. Often, postgraduate students who do engage with university governance are simultaneously juggling many competing priorities for their studies and work. This places the burden on the student to dedicate limited resources to building their own capabilities in university governance, when university management themselves take years to hone their skills and understanding of university structures. Therefore, the lack of investment into student participation undermines the participation and threatens to tokenise engagement.

Therefore, CAPA recommends, to address priority area 9 in the terms of reference:
- **The creation of a national framework for how universities should work with students as partners in corporate and academic governance.**
- **Institution provided induction programs, governance training, and ongoing support mechanisms for student representatives.**
- **Universities allocate dedicated operational funding to student organisations to ensure adequate independent legal and advocacy services are available to students.**

Remuneration Setting

The following has excerpts taken from CAPA's Submission from the There for people not for profit bill, 2025:

The result of the decades-long shift to NPM practices in our universities is the change in executive pay and university structure. Critically, our members report a damaging rise in 'rolling-restructures' of frontline teaching, research and professional staff. Whilst managerial positions are increasingly remunerated. Remuneration for an Australian member of parliament was set at $233,660 in 2024 (Office of Parliamentary Counsel, 2024). To align with the additional demands required by the senior leadership, the Federal Treasurer is afforded an additional 87.5% on top of this base salary, the Deputy Prime Minister 105%, and the Prime Minister 160% (Office of Parliamentary Counsel, 2024). Yet according to publicly available information, Australia's Prime Minister is paid ~$390,000 less than the average Australian Public University Vice Chancellor, who is responsible for 1 of 37 public universities in Australia.

Of the thirty seven public Australian universities, six appear in the global top one hundred universities in 2025 according to Times Higher Education. Only one, the University of Melbourne appears in the top fifty(#39). The University of Melbourne's Vice Chancellor, receives an annual income greater than the heads of the University of Oxford (#1), the University of Cambridge (#5), the University of Toronto (#21), the University of Edinburgh (#29), and the Karolinska Institutet (#49) (Table 1). The same can be said for the Vice Chancellors of Monash University (#58), UNSW Sydney (#83), the Queensland University of Technology (#201-250), Flinders University (#301-350), and the University of South Australia (#301-350) (Table 1). Of the international universities surveyed for this submission, only Harvard University's (#3) President (equivalent to the Vice Chancellor in the United States) made significantly more than the majority of Australian university Vice Chancellors (Table 4).

Therefore, CAPA recommends, to address priority area 10 in the terms of reference:
- **All Executive remuneration be reported publicly, and executive remuneration levels are capped at the salaries of the relevant state premiers, or public sector entities of similar complexity.**

Table 4: International and domestic examples of VC (or equivalent) salary.

Institution	Salary (AUD)	Times Higher Education Ranking 2025
The University of Oxford (UK)	~865,674	1
Harvard University (US)	~2,072,969	3
University of Cambridge (UK)	~1,185,602	5
University of Toronto (Can)	~537,000	21
University of Edinburgh (UK)	~867,011	29
Karolinska Institutet (EU)	~287,316	49
	Average: 969,262	
	Median: 866,342.5	
Australian Institutions	Salary (AUD)	Times Higher Education Ranking 2025
University of Melbourne	1,492,500	39
Monash University	1,250,000	58
University of Sydney	1,100,000	61
Australian National University	484,000	73
The University of Queensland	1,162,500	77
UNSW Sydney	1,322,500	83
University of Adelaide	1,052,500	128
The University of Western Australia	904,000	149
University of Technology Sydney	905,000	154
Macquarie University	1,055,000	178
Deakin University	1,050,000	201-250
Queensland University of Technology	1,235,000	201-250
University of Wollongong	1,045,000	201-250
Curtin University	1,035,000	251-300
La Trobe University	965,000	251-300
RMIT	1,005,000	251-300
Swinburne University of Technology	1,045,000	251-300
University of Newcastle	975,000	251-300
University of Tasmania	1,115,000	251-300
Flinders University	1,225,000	301-350
Griffith University	974,000	301-350
University of South Australia	1,235,000	301-350
Western Sydney University	1,065,000	301-350
Edith Cowan University	955,000	351-400
University of Southern Queensland	697,500	351-400
Australian Catholic University	1,045,000	401-500
Charles Darwin University	652,500	401-500
Federation University Australia	895,000	401-500
James Cook University	847,500	401-500
Murdoch University	865,000	401-500
University of Canberra		401-500
Victoria University	845,000	401-500
Central Queensland University	817,500	501-600
Southern Cross University	847,500	501-600
University of the Sunshine Coast	945,000	601-800
Charles Sturt University	837,500	801-1000
The University of Notre Dame Australia		1201-1500
	Go8 average: 1,096,000	Difference to international: 126,738
	Go8 median: 1,131,250	Difference to international: 264,907.5
	Overall average: 998,485.71	Difference to international: 29.223.71
	Overall median: 1,005,000	Difference to international: 138,657.5

Conclusion

CAPA agrees that the governance arrangements of Australian universities has been inadequate. However, we wish to express our concerns that the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA), and postgraduate voices have been left out of the Expert Council on University Governance.

Our Council represents over 480,000 postgraduate students in Australia. Critically, postgraduate students represent both a significant component of the current university workforce and will comprise the majority of the future academic and professional university workforce. Indeed, according to the NTEU (Barns, 2023), postgraduate students comprise 20% of insecurely employed university staff, and that there are 20,000 PhD-qualified 'job-ready' academics in insecure work. Accordingly, it is therefore unsurprising that the Royal Society estimates that only 3.5% of students that complete a PhD secure a permanent research position at a university.

CAPA believes the postgraduate constituents we represent are a significant stakeholder directly impacted by universities underpaying staff and failing their responsibilities as employers, and we can provide an essential, expert perspective to the Council.

Importantly, our team consists of highly experienced leaders from across the nation, with over a decade of combined university governance knowledge, ranging from University Senates/Councils, Academic Boards, Academic Board committees, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reconciliation, SASH governance, Anti-Racism frameworks, Student Services strategies and International Student policies. Recently, CAPA worked closely with the Department of Education to develop the Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education. Moreover, we assisted the department in advocating for the National Student Ombudsman at the Victorian Universities round table discussing the action plan.

Therefore, we recommend that **CAPA be offered the opportunity to nominate a postgraduate expert to the Council on University Governance.**

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