



**PARSA**  
ANU *postgraduate &*  
*research students'*  
association

# **PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2016/17**

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This report provides a snapshot of PARSA’s activities since our last AGM in May 2016. Please note that PARSA’s financial year runs as a calendar year, January – December. Please note that PARSA’s Annual Election occurred in August 2016, at which point the current Postgraduate Representative Council was elected, and my term as President commenced.

## Operations

### Overview

PARSA has a 3-fold mandate (the ‘3 pillars of PARSA’):

1. Welfare – we provide free legal, financial and academic advice; crisis support through emergency and accommodation grants, and food vouchers
2. Advocacy – we represent postgraduates on a variety of ANU committees; we lead advocacy and campaign efforts on issues of importance to postgraduates
3. Community Building – we combat social isolation and bring our diverse community together through social, cultural, sporting and academic activities

As President, an area of focus has been reviewing what PARSA delivers and evaluating this in respect to our member's needs and wants, and with reference to our diverse community.

Overall I believe the operations of PARSA have increased in effectiveness, having received positive feedback from members as to changes in the events and activities we run. The emphasis on planning and ensuring value for money at events has strengthened through our Planning Day at the start of the year between staff and Officers, and the production of our Operational Plan.

There are many areas for improvement, such as internal policies and procedures, and handover documents, however the team this year continue to make great strides to implementing sustainable work practices that will allow successive representatives access to knowledge and information to better support their work, and increase the efficiency of the organisation.

### Budget (SSAF)

PARSA's allocated funding for its calendar year budget increased in 2017 from \$1,177,971 to \$1,339,006, an increase of approximately 12%, which represents the largest budget in the Association's history.

This figure excludes the \$250,000 for the Student Extracurricular Enrichment Fund (SEEF) that PARSA administers on behalf of the Associations and ANU.

An ongoing discussion at PARSA is how to ensure our financial viability into the future. As such we have had an emphasis on diversifying our revenue streams, namely through looking at sponsorships, and looking into potential investment options.

PARSA is also reviewing what discretionary money we have that is non-SSAF related, and therefore not bound by legislation requirements regarding its expenditure.

The ANU has also recently implemented a policy regarding historical SSAF reserves that PARSA must now comply with should it wish to spend these funds.

## Officer portfolios

PARSA has 8 Officer Portfolios:

- Communications
- Education
- Environment
- Equity
- Indigenous
- International
- Social
- Women

Following graduations in December 2016, three of these positions were left vacant, with a decision of the PRC to fill them through by-election which took place in March. The absence of these officers did impact PARSA's ability to make progress in the Communications, Environment and Indigenous portfolios. The Treasurer position was temporarily taken over by myself, following the graduation of the previous Treasurer, which added additional workload. With a full officer team, there has been a noticeable improvement in PARSA's performance and output, as well as a renewed vitality and enthusiasm for some more complex projects and advocacy discussions.

I am incredibly grateful for the wonderful Executive team, comprised of the Vice President, Treasurer and General Secretary, and all the Officers who work so hard to the benefit of the postgraduate community.

PARSA has delivered, and continues to delivery, a diversity of events and activities for our members. Much of our emphasis since election in August has been reviewing and rebuilding our offerings to ensure activities that engage and appeal to members, and thus far have received positive feedback.

Some examples include a revamped O-week for semester 1, as well as the addition of another week of events; 'Welcome Week.' This two-week program at the beginning of the year allowed us to better capture new and returning students. We also trialled new events that were focused on advocacy and education, and changing up our social events. Examples include the 'Your Future Self' series: PhD, a HDR induction which encouraged peer-to-peer learning as to what to expect from a PhD program. We also introduced the Postgraduate Welcome Evening, an opportunity for postgraduates to meet one another and ANU's Vice Chancellor, Brian Schmidt.

We revamped our fortnightly networking drinks, 'PARSA Unwind,' introducing the occasional themed night and working with University House to offer a diverse offering to this popular and regular event in the social calendar.

March saw Women's Week, a PARSA initiative now in its second year which delivered a variety of events to engage in issues concerning women in our community.

Recently PARSA had our first-ever Wellness Week, an update on the Mental Health and Wellness Week that we ran last year. Coming soon is Reconciliation Week which rounds out many of PARSA's branded weeks for the year.

We continue to run new and different activities for postgraduates, such as Sustainability and Global Cafés, and are looking to host targeted events such as Public Service Networking and HDR-support events.

## Staffing

PARSA is supported by a dedicated, and expanding, staff team.

PARSA introduced a General Manager in January 2016 to support operational oversight and additional support to the President. During 2016, we also had several changes to our staffing profile.

We welcomed a new Communications, Marketing and Events Co-ordinator and a dedicated part-time Financial Controller in July 2016.

In January 2017, we hired a dedicated, full-time Administrative Assistant to administer the Student Extra Curricular Enrichment Fund (SEEF) Grants, and support the admin, events, finance needs of the organisation. This replaced the Campus Life Officer role, which was a shared role with ANUSA that focused solely on SEEF.

We replaced our long-serving Student Assistance Officer this month, and next week PARSA will also see the introduction of a newly created post, the Advocacy and Engagement Officer, signalling an important shift in priority of the organisation - supporting advocacy efforts. This officer will support student representatives with training and ongoing support, as well as conduct research and campaigns planning.

In late 2016 PARSA and ANUSA adopted a joint Enterprise Agreement, a significant step to ensuring consistency regarding staff policy across both Associations.

## Improvement projects

PARSA has undergone many improvements in the last year, including the introduction of a multi-functional platform, MSL, that supports our website, grants administration, events, communications and survey efforts.

As part of this new platform we updated and revamped the PARSA website with an emphasis on up-to-date and accessible information.

We also launched the Student Hub in late 2016, complete with quiet study pods, meeting rooms, and ANU's **only** parent's room.

Internally we are looking at updated policies and procedures, and creating robust documentation to support the transition between officers. We are also creating a more sustainable and effective organisation through embedding structures that encourage collaboration, consultation and knowledge sharing. A good example of this is the writing-up of reports following large events, and the ongoing work of the PARSA Education Committee.

## Advocacy & Representation

A central pillar of PARSA's mandate is advocating for postgraduate issues. We achieve this in several ways, primarily through representation on University Committees, campaigns and direct advocacy.

Being a representative body for 11,000 members also brings challenges, therefore PARSA has prioritised the need to consult with postgraduate students to ensure our efforts are aligning with their primary concerns. We are trying to ensure more consultation and avenues for postgraduates to express concerns through:

- utilising a variety of communication channels, notably through improving our newsletter, starting PARSA Instagram, Snapchat and WeChat accounts.
- providing opportunities to contribute such as consultation sessions on topical issues (e.g. the Joint Colleges of Science session)
- Asking for feedback, such as our survey prior to our SSAF bid last year; our current Postgraduate Survey informing our strategic plan; and the Parents' Survey which will inform our parents campaign

### Representation

PARSA is represented on nearly every one of the numerous ANU Committees, from ANU's peak governance body, the ANU Council, through to the Child Care Committee and College Education Committees.

Whilst elected PARSA representatives are typically assigned to these various Committees we have also expanded our call for postgraduate student volunteers to be part of Committee opportunities, and provide feedback to the ANU (for example, the ANU Appeals Committee and feedback on the new ANU Bar).

Internally we have established the PARSA Education Committee which ensure discussion on topical education issues and policy at ANU. Chaired by PARSA's Education Officer, this committee comprises of the PARSA President and Vice President as well as all the College representatives.

### Advocacy projects

PARSA has prioritised advocacy efforts on a number of topics relevant to our members.

We continue our advocacy for Cultural, History and Language (CHL) students who have been effected by the School Review. PARSA also made submissions and representations during the School of Music review in order to ensure an emphasis on research and supporting postgraduate students was prioritised.

Some upcoming advocacy and campaign efforts involve parents on campus and making recommendations to the ANU as to how to make the University a more family-friendly place. PARSA has also taken an active role in the upcoming release of the Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Survey, due to be released 1 August 2017.

Recent announcements by the Federal Government have also raised concerns regarding international students, and working alongside CAPA, we are identifying current issues important to our members and developing solutions that we can take to ANU and the Federal Government.

## Governance & Strategic Direction

PARSA's is governed by the Postgraduate Representative Council (PRC), comprised of 31 elected student representatives, with the President as Chair of the Board.

In the past 12 months, significant improvements have been made to our governance processes, notably providing comprehensive agenda papers, and scheduling meetings well in advance to ensure quorum and allow members to have greater information as to happenings that affect PARSA.

There has also been a change in emphasis to considering PARSA's future direction with the introduction of strategic discussions, and decisions regarding PARSA resourcing. Amongst these was the unlocking of PARSA reserve funding for the Advocacy and Engagement Officer for a year trial period. Another key initiative is the PARSA Strategic Plan, which we have commenced with the assistance of *For Purpose*, a consultant specialising in the not-for-profit sector.

In terms of constitutional and regulatory reform, the PARSA OGM in late 2016 saw the successful passage of the constitutional changes related to the postgraduate representative on the ANU Council. This position will now be elected separately to the President position.

The PRC have also adopted several changes to the electoral regulations in order to tighten language around electoral offences and the election cycle more broadly. This has been done in collaboration with ANU's Governance team and previous Returning Officers.

As part of the PRC's interest in ensuring that our governance model is fit for purpose and best serving the organisation, PARSA has enlisted the support of a Governance expert to review our constitution and draft potential changes which we can then consult with our membership on, aiming to take these to an OGM in semester 2, 2017.

The PRC also reviewed the honoraria guidelines and amounts for Officers, which is now tied to the Higher Education Awards. As President, in consultation with the Executive, I have implemented monthly reporting by Officers which is mandatory in order to receive honoraria, and will be continuing to review and report on honoraria to the PRC.

## Stakeholder engagement & external environment

PARSA continues to maintain and strength our stakeholder engagement and partnerships with a variety of organisations on and off campus.

### Student Associations – ANUSA and Woroni

Last year PARSA commenced discussions with ANUSA which are close to conclusion regarding a Memorandum of Understanding between the Associations - the aim of which is to formalise our understanding primarily regarding shared staff, facilities and events, and put in place disputes resolution processes. This is in acknowledgement that whilst we serve different groups, working collaboratively benefits all students on campus.

ANUSA and PARSA have also successfully carried out a range of joint-branded weeks in a bid to increase efficiency and ensure value for money. Branded weeks that PARSA is delivering on behalf of the Associations include Women's Week, Wellness Week and Reconciliation Week.

We are also looking to formalise ties with other student organisations, such as Women in Leadership which PARSA auspices, as well as Woroni.

PARSA has also been collaborating with Woroni, ensuring content from postgraduate students and collaboration on events.

### ANU

PARSA Officers and staff regularly interact with many part of the ANU. Some of the key stakeholders include:

- Strategic Communications and Public Affairs team – Commencement address, Union Court farewell, safety on campus initiatives
- Residential Halls and Colleges, particularly postgraduate residencies
- ANU Library – ongoing discussions about training, extending library hours and amenities
- Alumni Relations and Philanthropy
- Research Skills and Training – who deliver PARSA-funded training such as Thesis Bootcamp, Shut Up & Write and 3MT
- Griffin Hall – regarding a future virtual hall for postgraduates
- Tjabal Indigenous Higher Education Centre – supporting Indigenous postgraduate students
- Counselling/Wellness – regarding safety on campus and student wellbeing



As President, I have regular meetings with members of Chancellery to ensure that concerns of postgraduates are presented and addressed at the highest level of the University, including:

- Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic)
- Pro Vice Chancellor (University Experience)
- Dean HDR

### Union Court Redevelopment (UCR) & Pop-up Village

The Union Court Redevelopment project, having commenced this year, has required a significant amount of time and input on behalf of PARSA members, notably the President and Vice President.

PARSA has been invited and actively involved in the planning of the Union Court Redevelopment. UCR is still on track to break ground in July 2017, with an expected completion date of January 2019.

As President, I have been involved with discussions as a member of Council; an observer on ANU's Finance Committee, Campus Planning Committee and Major Project Committee; as part of the Tenancy Selection Committee; and in Union Court Redevelopment Working Groups.

In the latter, this has largely focused on PARSA's new home – the Student Hub – which will be a prominent building in the new Union Court redevelopment. These discussions have involved the project managers, architects and builders. PARSA's Vice President has sat on the Project Steering Committee since the beginning of 2017, which has general oversight of the project.

In the 18-month project timeframe for the Redevelopment, a 'pop-up' or temporary village to house PARSA, ANUSA, and businesses from the ANU Union (namely the post office, food offerings etc.) is being finalised with an expected move date of June 2017. PARSA will be moving to this pop-up village and be in place for the start of Semester 2.

PARSA and ANUSA have both formally started consulting staff about this move, as required under the Enterprise Agreement.

There is also an understanding from the University that the awareness of the Redevelopment from students is low, and there is a need to increase this awareness. ANUSA and PARSA have collaborated with ANU to hold student sessions, and the PARSA PRC has been briefed by Project Managers and ask questions about the redevelopment.

There have been some points of contention arising due to the project, such as ANU Bar not being selected as the new bar provider in the Pop-up Village, and God's Café not coming over to the Pop-up Village. In both cases PARSA has endeavoured to ensure that the ANU has conducted processes with transparency and fairness to the businesses, and made decisions with the needs of students as paramount.

Other issues such as exam timetabling, extended teaching hours and class timetabling over the period of construction have seen PARSA work closely with the ANU to resolve these issues.

Whilst the ANU has listened to PARSA and ANUSA, who have been jointly advocating where necessary to the University, some of the communications surrounding the redevelopment have not been as quick or candid as we would like. A mutual decision between the ANUSA President and

myself has led to the creation of the 'Our Union Court' page which provides updates and information.

### Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA)

PARSA has historically maintained strong connections with CAPA, with former and current PARSA members holding CAPA positions. Recently, PARSA hosted the CAPA President who was in Canberra for the Federal Budget, and led a discussion with PARSA staff and student representatives regarding the outcomes of the budget, helping to inform future advocacy.

As Women's Officer for CAPA, I am currently leading, with support from PARSA and ANUSA Women's Officers, a response and recommendations to Australian Vice Chancellor's regarding the Universities Australia Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Survey, which will be released August 1, 2017.

### Council of International Students Australia (CISA)

PARSA is supporting CISA with their upcoming national conference, being held in Canberra during July. PARSA's International Officer is providing great support in logistics and event organisation and part of the CISA conference will take place at ANU.

Given international students comprise 40% of the postgraduate population, PARSA's continued connection with CISA is of paramount importance to ensure advocacy at a national level.

### External environment: Higher education

There have been several changes in the Higher Education sector as a result of Government policy and reforms that have impacted the ANU, and in particular postgraduate students.

Changes to the *Higher Education Standards Framework 2015* created the need for a swift response from the ANU to be compliant with changes from 1 January 2017.

High Education Standards Framework: <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2015L01639>

Outcomes of the Watt Review are informing strategic decision making by ANU in terms of:

- Industry, Business and Entrepreneurial linkages for PhD programs
- ANU strategically prioritising areas of research which would then correlate to potential PhD scholarship increases

PARSA continues to be involved in conversations about the future of the PhD and ensure a student voice is present.

Recently the announcement of the Liberal Government's Federal Budget and Higher Education policies have been the cause of some concern, including lowering the HECS HELP loan repayment threshold and changes to citizenship and students with Permanent Residence, as well as New Zealand students. There are also concerns with the increased cost to students that have been proposed.

PARSA is working closely with CAPA and CISA to address these concerns.