



PARSA

ANU *postgraduate &
research* students'
association

President's Report

Annual General Meeting (AGM) 2018

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This report provides a snapshot of PARSA’s activities since our last AGM in May 2017.
Please note that PARSA’s financial year runs as a calendar year, January – December
Please note that PARSA’s Annual Election occurred in August 2017, with the current Postgraduate Representative Council term commencing in September 2017.

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. We have also expanded this to include a new Indigenous Health Grant and Textbook Voucher grant.
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 and increasingly, a range of programs.

As President, I have a dual responsibility as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of PARSA – ensuring the effective operations of the organisation – and Chair of the Board – ensuring good governance, namely through strategic planning and oversight. Having held the role of President now for 18 months, having the privilege of serving two terms, I have seen PARSA evolve and grow substantially as an organisation. Whilst this has meant a significant period of transition for the organisation, which has greater some challenges, this period of growth and the new capacity that PARSA now has will serve the membership well into the future.

As an organisation we continue to invest in our three core pillars ensuring we can deliver our mandate to a high standard. This has primarily been achieved through human resources which are necessary for professionalism and stability in delivering a variety of activities and support services to members, as well as to support the work of student representatives who change each year.

In each of our pillars I am proud of the progress and work we have achieved. In welfare, we continue to deliver high quality student support through our excellent staff, have undertaking key communication initiatives to increase awareness of our services, and have created new grant schemes to better meet the needs of members. In advocacy, the introduction of the Advocacy and Engagement Officer has provided ongoing support to student representatives, allowed PARSA to undertake more regularly consult with students, and provided us with the capacity to produce evidence based reports and run campaigns that highlight student issues. In community building we have expanded how we engage with students, moving beyond events to programs, through investing in dedicated staff we continue to refine our offerings in this space with the aim of running activities that can appeal to our diverse community.

In addition to these core operational pillars PARSA continues to maintain strong stakeholder connections and, from a governance perspective, have undertaken an ambitious project that will position the organisation well for the future.

With growth and success comes challenges. We are still working on creating more effective structures internally to support our work being achieved more efficiently. We are also addressing legacy issues, such as clarifying our historical funds, and issues created as a result of our rapid growth, such as a lack of documented policy and procedures. Whilst there are challenges for the organisation, PARSA's student representatives and staff are committed and invested to supporting the organisation and ensuring future success. These are good issues to have – reflecting our growth

and the changes to the organisation which have been necessary to achieving our mandate to empower, support and advocate for postgraduate students.

Budget (Student Services and Amenities Fee - SSAF)

PARSA's annual bid for its calendar year budget increased for 2017 from \$1,177,971 to \$1,339,006, an increase of approximately 12%.

For 2018, PARSA was successful with a SSAF bid allocation of \$1,521,484, an increase of 13% above the 2017 allocation of \$1,339,006. This is the largest allocation in the Associations history.

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

It should be noted that PARSA will be utilising the mid-year SSAF process as an opportunity to bid for further funds as several key projects we bid for were not approved. For instance, Shut Up and Write was only funded for 6 months within the current budget allocation.

With the support of the board of PARSA, the PRC, PARSA has taken steps to ensure a sustainable financial future through revenue diversification. We are currently finalising an ethical investments policy, and investment options, to wisely grow and invest our reserve funding. We have also altered staffing positions, and hired new staff, to have a greater focus on growing revenue through sponsorships. This has been accompanied with increasing small revenue raising efforts through co-contributions from members for many of our events.

We are utilising our upcoming SSAF Agreement negotiations with the ANU to try and resolve several legacy issues. This includes such issues as: what money of our must be spent in accordance with SSAF, and what is non-SSAF (or, entirely discretionary money for PARSA). In 2018 we had an unexpected challenge with a new condition the ANU has imposed on our SSAF funding that of being unable to expend SSAF funds on alcohol. We continue to discuss this with the ANU in a bid to reverse this decision.

Executive and Officers

PARSA is comprised of 32 elected student representatives, of which the Executive and Officers fulfil core operational functions, working alongside staff.

PARSA has a 4 person Executive team who are primarily focused on the effective operations of PARSA. This Executive consists of:

- President
- Vice President
- General Secretary
- Treasurer

PARSA has 9 Officer Portfolios:

- Communications
- Education
- Environment

- Equity
- Higher Degree by Research (HDR)
- Indigenous
- International
- Social
- Women

There has been a greater degree of casual vacancies arising from graduations and resignations than has previously been the case. Whilst this has at times led to gaps in positions, and therefore capacity, the Executive and PRC have seen this as an opportunity to recruit a greater diversity of student representatives through an Expression of Interest process, rather than an election process that many can find confronting. Since the last election in August there were vacancies in the Treasurer and General Secretary positions, Communications Officer, International Officer, Education Officer and College representatives: Science, Arts and Social Science, Engineering and Computer Science, as well as three of the five General Representatives.

One of the greatest changes this year to Officer and Executive positions, which has seen substantial benefit, is increasing the hours of the Vice President. This has allowed for greater capacity within PARSA, being able to represent more effectively to the ANU, provide more support in the office and to Officers, and generally be of greater support to the President. Given the impact of key staffing changes the current Vice President, Zyl Hovenga-Wauchope, has done a tremendous job in filling key roles and driving the Association forward.

Another important change has been lowering the base required hours of Officers, and updating stipends according, to be more achievable. Previously Officers were expected to put in 10 hours of work a week which was not achievable. Under the new Stipend and Honoraria regulation Officers have a requirement of 5 hours per week and can then apply to an honoraria pool for recognition of hours worked above this. General Representatives and College Representatives who receive no stipend can also apply for the honoraria pool, thus incentivising student representatives who can contribute substantially to PARSA's efforts.

Staffing

PARSA is supported by a dedicated, and expanding staff team. 2018 has been a challenging time with some key staffing changes, in particular with the departure of the General Manager in March 2018 which led to a review of the role and amendments to create an Operations Manager that has recently been appointed. Both myself and the Vice President acted to fill this role until recruitment was finalised, a gap of approximately two months.

Following a successful SSAF bid for 2018, PARSA was able to make the Advocacy and Engagement Officer role permanent and also recruit for a dedicated part time SEEF Administrator to help with the significant workload this program creates.

PARSA has also changed the nature of our legal support arrangements. Previously we had a junior lawyer that was directly supervised by the shared Principal Lawyer of ANUSA and PARSA. Following the resignation of this position in late 2017 PARSA determined to recruit a stand-alone lawyer that would work alongside the Principal Lawyer for student casework, but be legal counsel for PARSA specifically. This is a great opportunity for PARSA to benefit from the knowledge and input of a lawyer being in our office.

Our latest recruitment is for a full time Events and Volunteer position which will take carriage of various community building activities and provide additional and necessary capacity to carry out the Associations goals.

In addition to these new roles we have reviewed and refocused some of our core roles, namely changing the Communications, Marketing and Events role to be focused on Communications and Sponsorships. Our aim is that by having a dedicated resource focused on generating revenue through sponsorships we will be working towards reducing our reliance on SSAF.

The other role that underwent review and change was our Administrative Assistant who we have given greater formal responsibility to for office support and administration, as well as programs. Now known and the Administration and Projects Officer this role oversees SEEF, SUAW, VC Leadership program and Skill Up programs.

The need for greater staff resourcing is crucial for PARSA to consistently deliver high quality services and support for our members. A few years ago PARSA had a small staff team consisting of an Office Administrator; Events, Marketing and Communications Officer; and a Student Assistance Officer. In 2018 we have a team consisting of:

- Operations Manager (full time)
- Lawyer (part time, 3 days)
- Student Assistance Officer (full time)
- Shared Student Assistance Officer (with ANUSA, full time shared load)
- Communications and Marketing Director (full time)
- Financial Controller (part time, 3 days)
- Advocacy and Engagement Officer (full time)
- Events and Volunteer Co-ordinator (full time)
- Administration and Projects Officer (full time)
- SEEF Administrator (part time, 2 days)
- Shut Up and Write facilitators (5 casual staff members)

The capacity that this team brings will be crucial for supporting all areas of PARSA's work– welfare, advocacy and community building – long into the future.

Welfare

PARSA continues to improve our front line service delivery through our Student Assistance and legal team. This has included the introduction of a PARSA-specific lawyer, and the continuation of a full time PARSA-specific student assistance, as well as a shared Student Assistance Officer, shared with ANUSA. PARSA staff work closely with ANUSA staff to ensure a high quality of support for students.

In 2018 we undertook a project to clearly communicate to students our support services. A specific project saw PARSA utilise ANU communication channels to inform students of the support we provided to students seeking accommodation. In part due to this, and in part due to particular issues around accommodation this year, we saw a seven-fold increase in our enquiries from students regarding accommodation. This also translated to an expenditure of 80% of our emergency accommodation grant budget equating to providing 182 nights of safe, secure and free accommodation at the YHA for postgraduate students at risk of homelessness. Whilst it is wonderful we could provide this level of support, we are working with the ANU to address systemic issues that have resulted in this level of support being necessary.

PARSA has also launched new initiatives including a Book Voucher grant to help with the cost of textbooks, and an Indigenous Health Grant to support the health and wellbeing of Indigenous postgraduate students. PARSA believes these grant options will provide meaningful support for postgraduates, particularly in addressing cost of living pressures.

We continue to refine our welfare offerings to ensure they are fit for purpose and addressing the current and emerging needs of postgraduates. Increasingly we are ensuring that the data gathered by our front line services is used to inform our advocacy and representations to the ANU. For instance, identifying trends specific to the academic year or of particular concern to students.

Advocacy & Representation

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

Being a representative body for over 11,000 members brings challenges in ensuring meaningful understanding of postgraduate issues. In the last year we have moved towards more evidence based advocacy and understandings of issues. This is fulfilled in a number of ways:

- Utilising the findings of PARSA's largest postgraduate survey, undertaken this time last year, as an evidence base for understanding postgraduate issues. This has been utilised to inform our strategic plan, and to support decision making around campaigns and other advocacy initiatives.
- Increasing consultation and feedback mechanisms on specific issues. Over the past 12 months, in addition to the postgraduate survey, we have sought feedback from student parents, on accommodation issues, the change to the 12 week semester and experiences of exams.
- Through opening up opportunities for student involvement. This can include filling casual vacancies through an expression of interest process, creating support committees such as the Queer Advisory Committee (QUAC) and looking for ways to create opportunities for

interested students to become involved in PARSA, such as opening positions to conferences or an online form to comment on our Constitutional reform.

- Through consultation with our elected student representatives particularly for immediate issues that require response
- Utilising other data where possible to support our arguments, such as the Student Barometer

Through these various measures PARSA is able to more accurately represent, and prioritise the needs of members to make meaningful change.

Representation

PARSA is represented on numerous ANU Committees, from ANU's peak governance body, the ANU Council, through to the Child Care Committee and College Education Committees. There are close to 50 committees where we aim to represent postgraduate student concerns.

Whilst elected PARSA student 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.

Internally we continue to utilise committees, to ensure awareness and robust policy positions on issues. For instance, the PARSA Education Committee, which includes all college representatives, the PARSA Education Officer, President and HDR Officer. This Committee meets monthly and is a useful tool for communication and consultation on important topics of academic policy at ANU.

Advocacy projects

Our ability to advocacy – whether through campaigns and through producing evidence based papers – has grown dramatically this year through the introduction of a new staff position, the Advocacy and Engagement Officer. This role provides support and assistance to all student representatives in a variety of ways, particularly through committee representation, undertaking surveys, producing reports, and importantly, designing and implementing campaigns. Were it not for this position we would not have had the capacity to run our Accommodation campaign, taking place over O-week this year, and launch our parents campaign (upcoming on May 7, ahead of Mother's Day). The ability for PARSA to grow our presence on these and other issues, and be able to make clear recommendations that are supported by evidence, is a key achievement for the year. Ensuring PARSA is seen as a credible authority on postgraduate issues will be essential for the success of ongoing advocacy, and positive changes for the community.

There are a number of key issues we also aim to focus on this year, in particular:

- Adequate resourcing for student services
- Safety on campus and respectful relationships, particularly in response to the Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment survey released last year
- International student rights
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Continuing to advocate on accommodation and a family-friendly ANU

PARSA also supports and works alongside our peaks, the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) and the Council of International Students Australia (CISA).

Community building

PARSA efforts to provide engaging and meaningful experiences to the postgraduate community has changed and expanded significantly. In particular through the introduction of more programs, and through necessary resourcing of our community building activities with the introduction of a dedicated Events and Volunteer Co-ordinator staff member.

In 2018 we continue to innovate and refine our offerings, often testing new ideas for events and activities for our diverse membership. Some key decisions this year include a move away from branded weeks, and rather aiming for consistent and reliable events that appeal to specific communities, and grow specific communities. The monthly Sustainability Cafes, Parents Playdate, and PARSA Monthly Movie are all key examples of successful events that utilise this model, as well as the fortnightly Unwind events. PARSA continues to deliver large events such as Women's Week, Reconciliation Week and Global Cafes, as well as our much loved trips: Surf, Snow and Mountains. Shortly we will be undertaking our inaugural Public Service Networking event and a Stargazing event at Stromlo – an example of testing new ideas and trying to appeal to different audiences.

We continue to focus much effort on inducting and welcoming new students through O-week events. We aim to have both social and informative events and continue to balance between continuing successful events, and trialling new events.

In 2018 we also introduced a Summer Program, to target students arriving before O-week, and those students still in Canberra or studying over the Summer break. The Summer program was well received particularly by families, the significant HDR cohort who study year round, and Canberra residents.

Our fortnightly networking drinks, 'PARSA Unwind' we trialled with different formats last year, such as themed nights which were of varying success. Unfortunately given constraints with space and cost at University House we elected to move Unwind to the Pop Up, and introduce a co-payment model. Whilst there was some initial concerns with this, the result has been a more relaxed and enjoyable environment and a consistently higher turnout of students.

In addition to events we are increasing moving into delivering programs. In 2018 PARSA will be delivering:

- Shut Up and Write – taking over from RST – delivering both informal coffee and formal SUAW sessions to support research students
- Vice Chancellor's Leadership Program
- Skill Up – to support employability during your time at ANU
- PARSA Soccer Competition - working with ANU Sport
- SEEF grants - on behalf of ANUSA and PARSA (accessible to all students)

These programs create opportunities to engage with different cohorts within our community. As this is a relatively new area of expertise for PARSA we have had some teething issues, but I firmly believe that our competence to deliver high quality programs will continue to grow and be of great benefit to members.

Governance

PARSA's is governed by the Postgraduate Representative Council (PRC), comprised of 32 elected student representatives, with the President as Chair of the Board.

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

The PRC have been engaged in delivering an ambitious and future-focused project, that of the reforming the PARSA Constitution. This has required considerable work to draft a new constitution, work through ideological issues and arrive at conclusions that will substantially alter the structure of PARSA. This is a very exciting project that I believe will position PARSA well for the future. The new constitution will be informally socialised at the AGM with a vote to approve it going to the membership at a SGM in June. Some of the key changes coming out of the review include:

- Differentiating between governance and operational functions of elected student representatives. There will now be a smaller, dedicated governance board separate to operational roles such as Officers.
- Decoupling the President as being CEO and Chair – these roles are now distinct
- Changing the composition and tenure of the board, such as the ability for students to serve longer terms on the board and the board to appoint external members to support specific skill sets
- Changes to current Officer positions such as: the addition of several Officer roles to PARSA, namely Queer, Disabilities and a Coursework Officer; moving the Treasurer position to be at a board level; and disestablishing the General Secretary and Communications Officer positions.
- Changes to create the ability to remove elected student representatives on grounds of misconduct or underperformance

The PRC have also focused on key issues as to the sustainability of PARSA, placing emphasis on revenue diversification through the creation of investment policy and sponsorship capacity at a staff level. We will also deliver our Strategic Plan this year which will support objective and member informed targets for PARSA.

The PRC's decision to unlock reserve funding for the Advocacy and Engagement Officer for a year trial period has been successful, with the position being funded through SSAF for 2018 and beyond.

PARSA will continue to focus on documentation to support good governance, and to support a transition to a new board arrangement. For instance, looking at regulations and guidelines to clearly articulate the intention of the board as regarding board appointments, grounds for removal of Officer bearers due to misconduct and underperformance, and many others.

We continue to refine election regulations with the input of previous Returning Officers. This year we also introduced, following a successful change to the constitution, a stipend and honoraria regulation. This provides clarity and clear guidelines as to student representative payments. This was only made possible through amending the constitution.

Stakeholder engagement & external environment

ANU Campus: Union Court Redevelopment (UCR)/ Kambri, Pop-up Village and flooding

With the Kambri (UCR) well underway and the Pop-up bringing new life into the ANU community, PARSA has largely been satisfied with the results of the redevelopment thus far. In saying this, there are ongoing issues regarding campus accessibility and the general experience for students over this time. In addition to the Kambri project, other projects happening at the same time have caused much disruption and unease. In particular redevelopment in the College of Law, College of Engineering and Computer Science, student accommodation on Daley Road, as well as the now demolished Pauline Griffin Building. Campus seems a buzz with construction noise and disruption, and whilst the ANU has taken some steps to mitigate disruption, campus can be quite a fraught environment.

PARSA's focus prior to the commencement of Kambri construction was on finalising the buildings in the precinct and ensuring adequate space for the essential services there. Since the construction has begun, focus has now shifted to the interiors of buildings and in particular focusing on PARSA's future office in the precinct, and inputting into the fitout of other buildings.

At this stage, we are still on track for Kambri to be up and running for O-week 2019, and for PARSA to be settled in its new home before this time.

The flooding earlier this year was quite disruptive and devastating for many members of our community, with many students in Toad Hall, and AD Hope building, being personally affected with loss of property and the stress of the experience. As a community we also suffered the loss of resources and space in Chifley. Post flood we continue to support affected students and look to see how we can now use the current situation as an opportunity to transform these vulnerable areas of infrastructure into useful spaces for the future.

Student Associations – ANUSA, Woroni, ANU Sport, Observer, Women in Leadership, Bossy

At the end of 2017 PARSA signed a Memorandum of Understanding with ANUSA. This was a significant step in articulating a commitment to collaboration, and high quality service provision, for the benefit of all students. The MOU formalises our understanding in regards to shared staff, facilities and events, and puts in place a disputes resolution processes such disagreements arise. This is in acknowledgement that whilst we serve different groups, working collaboratively benefits all students on campus.

Previously 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. For 2018 the Associations both agreed to scale back the amount of branded weeks, but still collaborate where possible. Weeks that PARSA is delivering on behalf of the Associations include Women's Week and Reconciliation Week with ANUSA delivering Sex and Consent Week and NAIDOC Week as part of the arrangement.

PARSA continues to support grassroots student organisations, formalising our support for Women in Leadership which PARSA auspices with an MOU, as well as partnering with Bossy magazine.

We continue to collaborate with ANU Sport through delivering free fitness classes and last year launched the popular PARSA Soccer competition, which we are looking to expand into other sports.

PARSA has also been collaborating with Woroni and Observer where possible to promote our content and campaigns. My particular thanks to Observer who have been willing to support us with live-streaming meetings to increase the reach and transparency of PARSA.

ANU

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

- Division of Student Life – including Careers, Student Experience, Counselling and Health, Access and Inclusion, Accommodation
- 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, 3MT and until 2018, Shut Up & Write
- Griffin Hall – which was set up Walter Wing, a virtual hall for postgraduates
- Tjabal Indigenous Higher Education Centre – supporting Indigenous postgraduate students
- Members of the ANU Executive and key ANU leaders – Vice Chancellor, Provost (as of 2018), Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic), Pro Vice Chancellor (University Experience), Chief Operations Officer, Dean Higher Degree Research, Registrar Student Life, Registrar Student Administration, College Deans

As President I have regular meetings with members of Chancellery in order to ensure that concerns of postgraduates are presented and addressed at the highest level of the University. In particular, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic); Pro Vice Chancellor (University Experience) and Dean HDR.

Maintaining strong relationships with the ANU, and in particular these areas, is essential to ensure we understanding form the university side, particular issues and thus, how we might address them. It is also important we maintain strong relationships in order to represent the needs of members and create positive change.

Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) and higher education sector

PARSA has historically maintained strong connections with CAPA, with former and current PARSA members holding CAPA positions. Currently two PARSA members hold positions with CAPA this year:

- Zoe Tulip one of PARSA's College of Science Representative who is the CAPA Media Officer
- Madhur Chhabra a PARSA member who is the CAPA Eastern Branch President

In 2017 PARSA maintained connection with CAPA in my role as CAPA Women's Officer. This gave PARSA great advantages given the alignment of work in this space regarding the Australian Human Rights Commission Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment report.

In 2018 we continue to see benefits of having PARSA representatives in CAPA as this allows for greater knowledge and connection with the work of the organisation. My thanks to Zoe and Madhur for their work and commitment.

PARSA's affiliation with CAPA brings benefits in that CAPA is primarily focused on understanding, and responding to, federal government policy. With the May budget close by and ongoing threats to university funding, a body focused on this is extremely valuable.

In saying this, it must be noted that at this time PARSA does have concerns as to CAPA's ongoing financial sustainability and general management of the organisation. We will seek to support CAPA into the future, but will also work with the organisation to ensure that our affiliation with CAPA remains of benefit, and value for money.

Council of International Students Australia (CISA)

ANU, namely with PARSA's support, co-hosted the CISA national conference in July 2017. This was quite an undertaking but of great benefit to the PARSA delegation who attended, and growing a strong connection with CISA. Arjun Mathilakath Madathil, former PARSA Communications Officer, was elected as the National Public Relations Officer and is doing much work to support CISA. My thanks to Arjun for his tireless work.

CISA has been quite active this year and present in critical conversations, such as around international student worker exploitation. CISA is also going through a period of transition and looking to ensure the sustainability and capacity of the organisation through staff positions – a big step for an entirely student run organisation.

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. To this end, a small PARSA delegation will be travelling to the CISA conference in Cairns in July.