



PARSA
ANU *postgraduate &*
research students'
association

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Postgraduate and Research Students' Association (PARSA) 2019 Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Board Report 14 June 2019

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This report provides a snapshot of PARSA’s activities since our last AGM in May 2018.

Please note that PARSA’s financial year runs as a calendar year, January – December

Please note that PARSA’s Annual Election occurred in August 2018, with the current Postgraduate Representative Committee and Board term commencing in October 2018.

Role of the board

Broadly speaking, the board is concerned with ensuring PARSA meets the objects outlined in the Constitution, that being:

2.1. The objects for which the Association is established are for the direct support of and to promote the welfare and further the interests of enrolled ANU postgraduate and research students both within and outside the ANU:

2.1.2 To achieve:

2.1.2.1 A mutually supportive ANU postgraduate and research student community;

2.1.2.2 Effective policy and practices that support the diverse needs of ANU postgraduate and research students;

2.1.2.3 A well-informed ANU postgraduate and research student body regarding issues that may affect them in their university life;

2.1.2.4 Improvements in the university life of ANU postgraduate and research students that enhance academic outcomes;

2.1.2.5 Solutions to problems or disputes ANU postgraduate and research students may have within the context of their university life.

2.1.3 To afford a recognised means of representation for said ANU postgraduate and research students, and a recognised means of communication between ANU postgraduate and research students and the University authorities;

But at all times recognising that the Association may be constrained to pursue only some of those objects to exclusion of others from time to time or pursue some objects with differing priorities.

This is achieved through two broad areas of focus for the board:

1. Ensuring **accountability** and proper governance of the organisation, primarily through receiving reports, reviewing performance and working through the President as the CEO of PARSA to ensure organisational objectives are satisfactorily achieved.
2. Considering and acting upon the **strategic needs** of the organisation to ensure its continued existence and relevance to members into the future.

Both of these areas of focus are conducted in reference to the Strategic Plan.

Governance overview

With the introduction of the new Constitution, adopted in June last year, and coming into effect in October, as well as the launch of PARSA's inaugural Strategic Plan in 2018, the Governance of PARSA has changed dramatically.

This time last year PARSA's board was comprised of around 30 members: that being all those student representatives who were elected into Portfolio Officer and College Representative positions, as well as the Executive. Currently the board has a total of 9 members, out of a potential 11 positions, 2 of which are optional to be filled.

The practical difference this has made to organising meetings and ensuring that all board members have an opportunity to discuss and debate key governance issues, has been immense and can not be understated. Where the previous governance arrangements were cumbersome and did not open up appropriate opportunity for robust debate, the current governance arrangements have corrected these shortfalls.

From a governance perspective, PARSA as an organisation continues to perform effectively through delivering essential services and support to our members, and being a strong advocate for student welfare and rights. Further information on the activities of the Association will be presented at the AGM by the President.

Whilst the board has had several challenges this year, it has been able to meet its obligations in ensuring accountability of the organisation and identifying areas of focus for the future – those being opportunities and challenges that must be addressed. Through a focus on bedding down the new governance arrangements this year, the current board is ensuring that the tools to bring about increased governance effectiveness for the future will be realised.

Key business of the board

- Maintaining a functional board
- Constitutional amendments
- Effective governance of PARSA

Maintaining a functional board

Creating a new board structure has created some challenges for maintaining a functional board and it is fair to say that the board has had challenges in maintaining an appropriate amount of members, and ensuring that the board meets the diversity requirements stipulated in the Constitution, that is, having gender representation and representation from international and domestic students. This has not been for a lack of trying, and indeed the board has worked hard to ensure that it now has the appropriate composition of members who are actively engaged and contributing.

These issues are most likely related to the "false start" of sorts that the board had, with only 5 of the 9 positions having nominations in the last election. Along with the President, who is an ex-officio member of the board, that being, appointed to the board because of their position, the board had the minimum 6 board members required for quorum. Of the original 5 members elected, only 3 remain. Given this the board conducted two recruitment rounds this year: an open round where 3 members were appointed, and an international student specific round where 2 members were appointed to the board, bring the current board total (including President) to 9.

Whilst the board is fully operational at present given this, it does raise a matter for the board as to educating and succession planning to ensure the next board can hit the ground running, and invest their time in governing the affairs of the Association, as opposed to having to concentrate on ensuring a functional board.

Constitutional amendments

As will be discussed during the 2019 AGM, the Board has identified some areas for improvement in the new constitution, most notably relating to procedures in the Constitution that govern removal of Directors (i.e. board members including the President), Officers of the Association (i.e. student representatives) and ordinary members. Where the previous Constitution effectively had no way to remove elected student representatives, the new and currently operating Constitution does have provision for this. The proposed amendments focus on refining the process to ensure principles of procedural fairness and natural justice are emphasised, thus ensuring to the greatest extent possible, fair and just outcomes. This has seen a change to the distribution of power in the process and the bodies involved. Where previously the board was too heavily involved in the process, the process is now more decentralised between the Executive, Board and Disputes Committee.

To support these changes, the board has more clearly stipulated an appeals process which clearly illustrates the role of the Disputes Committee as the appeals body.

Some small editorial changes have also been made as well as the formal removal of the transitional clause which was to be removed following the election period last year.

Effective governance of PARSA

Given the somewhat choppy start to the board itself, and the more substantial change to the governance of the Association, it is fair to say and reasonable to expect that ensuring smooth and effective governance of the organisation is a work in progress.

At a basic level this is ensuring key documents and information are finalised, such as the Governance Charter, as well as an emphasis on planning for the year and supporting board members – all of which are areas of focus, as discussed below.

Some of these are ongoing findings, such as the need to establish role descriptions, a delegations framework, have clarity as to where decision making sits and timings to ensure that the board has the opportunity to input and be across key work of the Association, without it holding up the business of the Association.

These are a work in progress and it is the aim of the current board to have much of these basic needs ironed out and in a format that supports the new Board when it commences in October.

Future areas of focus for the Board

As mentioned above, the Board has identified several areas for improvement to support its own functioning, and the governance of PARSA. Amongst these are:

- Governance Charter
- Financial Management
- Risk Management Project
- Induction and support for board members
- Succession planning for the board

Governance Charter

The Governance Charter is essentially the one-stop shop for all critical information on PARSA Governance and is an essential handbook for the board. It contains basic information on the organisation, principles regarding how the board functions and expectations of board members, and contains all regulations that the board has created under the constitution.

The Governance Charter, having been adopted in a basic form at the start of this board's term, has key gaps that need to be filled to ensure it is a more robust handbook. The aim being to supply this to a future board to ensure a smooth transition.

Amongst these key gaps are the creation, or review, of Regulations such as the Stipend and Honoraria Regulation and Disciplining of the President. The Board will continue to work on these with a deadline of the end of the upcoming election cycle – likely late August/early September.

Financial Management

It has become clear this year that there is a significant amount of work that PARSA must undertake, both at a governance and operational level, to ensure proper financial management.

Part of this stems from a variety of historical issues, as has been highlighted this year in the audit report and the accompanying explanatory statement. Whilst there are many reasonable explanations for the overspend from 2018, there are many other smaller issues that continue to be uncovered. These can range from End of Year Statements not being lodged with the Australian Taxation Office from several years ago, to needing to conclude outstanding grant monies and inconsistencies with capturing GST, the latter of which supports a healthy bottom line for PARSA. These issues in themselves are not insurmountable and only pose low levels of risk to the organisation. However, cumulatively, the board has seen a broader issue with the financial management of the Association that needs addressing and is being reviewed through the development of sound financial policies.

On a positive note, the external audits for the Association continue to show positive results and an internal audit commissioned by PARSA last year, and undertaken by an external accounting firm, revealed minor errors which have since been resolved. PARSA has also taken several steps, and continues to refine policy and procedure which minimises the risk of fraud. PARSA have taken steps to transition to the Beyond Bank, which will ensure better returns on member funds, better customer service particularly in handover, and is consistent with our social values. PARSA have also undertaken a significant amount of work to diversify revenue through sponsorships, activities, and seeking alternative grants to SSAF to ensure the ongoing strength of the Association.

Risk Management Project

In 2018, PARSA and ANUSA were generously provided with a one-off amount from the ANU to undertake Risk Management Projects with the assistance of Deloitte.

The aim of the project was to understand, identify and treat risks to the Association. Part of the project is to create a greater organisational cultural awareness around Risk, as well as having key outcomes in the form of documents that could be practically used by the board, and by operational staff and student representatives, to manage risk. This project is ongoing but is in the final stages, and will be completed before the board transitions.

Induction and support for board members

Reflecting on the difficult start the board had in ensuring it was fully constituted and effectively functioning has revealed an opportunity to create a more rigorous and supportive induction, as well as ongoing support for board members.

While PARSA has successfully focused on training new student representatives who do the operational and advocacy work of the organisation, this same attention must now be provided to the board.

As such, one of the key projects for the remainder of the term will be considering how to properly induct new board members, as well as create a simple but effective induction pack for board members that commence throughout the year. Thought will also be given to ensuring opportunities over the year to ensure support.

Succession planning for the board

Again, reflecting on the start for the current term of the board, one of the tasks of the current board will be to grow understanding of the new PARSA structure and governance arrangements to ensure succession. Attracting new members to the board will also be supported through the induction package discussed above, as well as the ongoing support provided.