

Monash Postgraduate Association Inc.
Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Amendment
(Prohibiting Academic Cheating Services) Bill 2019
Submission

FOREWORD

The Monash Postgraduate Association Inc. (“MPA”) is a not-for-profit incorporated association funded out of a portion of the Student Services Amenities Fee (SSAF)¹ paid by Monash University graduate students. The MPA is a recognised association under Part 9 of the *Monash University (Council) Regulations* and is the designated body to provide advice and advocacy for all postgraduate students enrolled through the Australian campuses of the University. MPA has in the vicinity of 28,000 constituents.

In order to fulfil its legislative obligations Monash University enters into a Funding Agreement (“FA”) with the MPA. The basis of the FA is an agreed and a legally compliant framework for expenditure by the University for the MPA to provide (among other services) an advocacy service, which includes supporting graduate students through discipline proceedings such as for breaches of academic integrity.²

Submissions

The MPA fully supports the CAPA Submission titled “Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Amendment (Prohibiting Academic Cheating Services) Bill 2019 June 2019”. The immediate purpose of this paper is to supplement, not repeat the said submission by providing the MPA’s unique perspective.

Since 2016 the MPA advocacy service has noted an increase in graduate students needing welfare. The cases in question are of students in dire financial need, who are ineligible for any of the University’s student loan schemes. Advocates saw 73 cases from the start of 2016 to March 2019. This equates to 2.5% of the total advocacy caseload for the same period or 1 in 40 students. An overwhelming majority of students were international.

It has been the MPA’s experience that students feel shame when admitting to hardship and poverty and as such they do not readily disclose their circumstances. It is often the case that MPA advocates need to drill down into a student’s circumstances before the hardship is

¹ The SSAF is a compulsory amenities fee. The MPA receives 40% of the SSAF paid by postgraduates.

² As per section 19.38(4) HESA examples (b) & (c)

admitted. This is very typical of international students' general reluctance to disclose information of a personal nature.

The MPA appreciates this is not a paper on student poverty. However, the MPA has found there is a direct correlation between a student's financial circumstances and their likelihood to engage in risk-taking behaviour such as subscribing to or using the services offering academic cheating; the higher the financial distress, the higher the chance of resorting to contract cheating.

From 2016 to the present, the MPA has supported 501 graduate students through discipline proceedings. Of those 482 involved allegations of plagiarism or some form of cheating which can broadly be classified as contract cheating. This accounts for 15.6% of the total cases seen by the MPA from 2016, with an overwhelming majority being international students. It should be noted not all allegations were proven.

Typical reasons

In all discipline cases, and for mitigation purposes, the MPA advocates encourage the students against whom allegations have been made, to explain their personal circumstances. The common thread in all but a few cases are the following:

1. I can't afford to repeat the unit;
2. I have already failed the unit before, my family cannot pay for me to stay in Australia any longer;
3. My family borrowed a lot of money for me to come to Monash University. I have found the unit difficult and did not want to fail;
4. I thought editing was allowed so I had to use it because I can't pay my tuition fees if I repeat;
5. This is my last unit, I just had to pass. I can't afford to pay any more rent or delay my graduation.

It can be said that financial reasons were not the sole reasons students reported when charged with contract cheating. There is also a lot of confusion around what 'editing' actually means and what level is permitted. However almost every case had an element of financial hardship or pressure as a significant decision-making factor.

Recommendations

That all legislation takes a remedial and restorative view when it comes to students accessing contract cheating services.

For further information please contact the MPA Senior Advocate, Zuzana Quinn.

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