



**MATTHEW SCHEP**  
**POSTGRADUATE OFFICER**  
**3rd QUARTER REPORT 2019**  
**SUBMITTED 17-09-2019 AT 1:30PM**  
**2234 WORDS**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Despite coming into the role more than halfway through the year, I have enjoyed taking on the mantle of the Postgraduate Officer and the challenges and opportunities that it brings. Being a student representative opens so many doors to make a difference to the student experience, and I am working hard to make the most of the time that I have in this position.

My biggest project this quarter has been securing an MOU between OUSA and the Otago Postgraduate Association (OPA), to ensure sustainable long-term resourcing and systems for postgraduate support and initiatives. I have sat on a number of committees and liaised and worked with a number of university staff who operate in or adjacent to the postgraduate community, on issues such as tutor pay scales, hardship funds, and submission on government bills. I have been active around campus connecting with postgrad departments and linking different people and groups up with community and support spaces, and will be leading an event in October with OPA and the Graduate Research School (GRS) on postgrad student success and support. At the national level, I have worked with NZUSA on the campaign to restore the postgraduate student allowance.

I'd like to thank Dermot Frengley, my predecessor, for his incredible support in helping me transition into the role, and also the OPA Executive team, without whom so much of my successful work would not have been possible.

## **PART ONE: EXECUTIVE OFFICER POSITION DESCRIPTION DUTIES**

### 1.1 Promote via publications, promotions and campaigns, an environment within the Association and on campus which is supportive of postgraduate students.

My biggest push this semester is to find ways to connect postgraduate students between departments and foster a sense of postgrad community here on campus. The university doesn't have a culture of shared postgrad spaces like it does for undergraduate students, and postgraduate connection seems to mostly happen within departments. Postgrad students rarely leave their department silos to venture out and meet other postgrads, which is concerning to me because it means we aren't connecting on fighting the big issues together.

OUSA's postgrad focus is channelled through the one executive role, leaving postgrad students feeling unrepresented by their union and not bothering to engage with the organisation. It has been a challenge, but I have been working to connect the postgraduate dots around the university and increase our offering to postgrad students, and listen and respond to the various needs that exist.

The Otago Postgraduate Association, which I sit on the executive of in an ex-officio capacity and chair fortnightly meetings of, has been an invaluable connection point to work with and I have



secured an MOU between them and OUSA to establish OUSA funding for postgrad initiatives and a sustainable volunteering pool to allow whoever is in my role to run bigger projects. The agreement is only a couple of weeks old, and so the logistics are still being worked out, but by the end of the year we will have a dedicated postgraduate section on the OUSA website, and a steady stream of well-funded events and initiatives from the beginning of next year that meet the shared organisational goals of postgrad academic support, community connection, and professional development.

I have been working with Kerrin (Welfare Officer), the GRS, OPA, and other stakeholders on an event in early October in the Main Common Room to promote postgrad support and success on campus. It will have short presentations on topics such as imposter syndrome and finishing your PhD, drop-in stalls run by support groups, and a BBQ outside to feed and draw in postgrads. This was initially a project spearheaded by the Graduate Wellbeing Coach, with the plan to run it three times a year, but I took over the mantle recently and it will be jointly led by OUSA and OPA.

I have been running fortnightly postgrad morning teas at Clubs and Socs with OPA, in order to foster postgrad community. This has had a very low turnout this year, and so I am looking at ways to make it more attractive and to meet postgrad needs rather than just flog my own ideas. I have also been headlining and promoting the upcoming OPA AGM, in order to ensure the organisation remains strong as we continue to resource and support it.

### 1.2 Work with the University and the Student Support Centre to implement OUSA's policy on Postgraduate Student Representatives.

OUSA's policy on Postgraduate Student Representatives is currently inactive and overdue for renewal; I will bring this to the policy committee. Departments and divisions have their own systems for postgraduate student representation, and my work has been in liaising with these appointed individuals where appropriate, not in overseeing the management of university systems.

### 1.3 Be one of the Association's representatives on the University of Otago Senate.

I have been appointed to the University Senate, but we have not sat this quarter.

### 1.4 Where required, assist the Education Officer to administer aspects of the Departmental Postgraduate Student Representatives system including:

- 1.4.1 Maintaining regular contact with representatives from postgraduate classes or programmes via email or other means; and
- 1.4.2 Encouraging regular postgraduate class representative meetings, and attend these meetings whenever possible.

I have not been required to assist the Education Officer with the class reps system this quarter, but William and I have worked together on sorting out tutor pay discrepancies and more recently on collaborating with the university on a submission on the government's review of the Performance Based Research Fund. I have maintained contact with the PhD reps on the Graduate Research Student Liaison Committee, and check in regularly with the divisional reps on OPA.



At the beginning of my appointment to the role, I emailed every university department and learning centre, asking to be put in touch with their postgrad students so that I could drop in on them and see how they were doing, and a number got back to me. To date, I have visited six departments, one centre, the School of Arts postgrad committee, the international office, and the Māori postgrad network. One department raised some serious concerns with me two weeks ago, and so I have fronted an email conversation with their dean and associate dean, who have acknowledged my concerns but to date have not gotten back to me with a comprehensive response. This is an ongoing project.

1.5 Be a member of appropriate internal committees of the Association, including, but not limited to:

- 1.5.1 Postgraduate Committee;
- 1.5.2 Education Committee; and
- 1.5.3 Welfare Committee.

According to the MOU, the OPA executive can fulfil the functions of the Postgraduate Committee, and the executive meets fortnightly. I have attended every meeting since my appointment. I have attended one Welfare Committee meeting so far, and given my apologies to ones that I have missed. I am yet to be invited to join the Education Committee.

1.6 Chair monthly meetings of the Postgraduate Committee, ensuring that all committee members are advised of meeting times, that the agenda is prepared and circulated beforehand and ensuring that the standing orders of the committee are adhered to.

The OPA executive meets fortnightly and carries out this duty. I chair these meetings and collate the agenda, and assign action points.

1.7 Take direction from the Postgraduate Committee on all matters relevant to postgraduate members.

I consult with the OPA Executive on all substantive postgrad matters. We have an active Facebook chat where we flag things with each other outside of meeting times.

1.8 Normally be the Association's representative on the Board of Graduate Studies.

I have sat on the Board of Graduate Studies twice this quarter, and contributed well to discussion and debate.

1.9 Maintain a good working relationship with relevant OUSA staff, ensuring that information is shared on issues of relevance to postgraduate students.

I have liaised with Student Support to ensure that OUSA's support services are well advertised to postgrad students. I maintain regular contact with the Club Development Officer and the Recreation Manager to ensure good resourcing for postgrads, and I have worked with Marketing and Comms to ensure that campaigns and events are kept on students' radars. I sought support and advice from our CEO on the development of the MOU. Most importantly, I liaise with our



incredible Secretary, Donna, on lots of issues and initiatives as her advice and friendship are invaluable.

1.10 Facilitate a variety of student representation on postgraduate related University Committees.

I have been working with Academic Committees to improve the lack of Masters student representatives on the Graduate Research Student Liaison Committee, a committee that I sit on myself. I also sit on the Graduate Research Committee and the Animal Practice and Compliance Steering Group.

1.11 Maintain a good working relationship with the Director of Graduate Research Services and endeavour to meet with them on a monthly basis.

Rachel Spronken-Smith and I have a good working relationship and meet regularly. I bring issues to her attention and ask for advice on certain topics, and she helps me to navigate the maze that is the university network. I have had conversations with her about postgrad induction sessions, postgrad student email lists, and hardship funding for scholarship students on parental or illness leave. This last issue is an ongoing pressure point with the university, and Kerrin and I are working on establishing a meeting with Student Services to try to get some headway on it.

1.12 Maintain links with and assist affiliated Postgraduate bodies.

I am an ex-officio executive member of OPA, I chair their fortnightly meetings, and I work with them closely to ensure smooth operations, that their projects are strong and well-resourced, and to maintain robust links between them and OUSA. I have not reached out to any other campus-based postgraduate bodies, and I will endeavour to do this in the final quarter. Outside of Dunedin, I have worked with NZUSA and the Victoria Postgraduate Students' Association on the restoration of the Postgraduate Student Allowance.

1.13 Maintain a good working relationship with the Administrative Vice President, proactively bringing issues relevant to postgraduate students to their attention, and meeting with them on a weekly basis.

Georgia and I meet on a weekly basis and we go over my goals for the week and what I have been up to during the week prior. She ensures that I am well supported and resourced to meet these goals, and I look forward to these catch ups.

1.14 Perform the general duties of all Executive Officers.

See Part Two.

1.15 Where practical, work not less than ten hours per week.

I work twenty to thirty hours every week, other than the one week that I was ill, when I worked just my ten hours.



## **PART TWO: GENERAL DUTIES OF ALL EXECUTIVE MEMBERS**

Where reasonable, all Executive Officers are expected to assist as volunteers for OUSA events and functions, including, but not limited to:

- 2.1.1 Assisting at the OUSA Tent City marquee and other activities during Summer School, Orientation and Re-Orientation;
- 2.1.2 At an individual Executive Officer's discretion, be a safety contact during Orientation, Re-Orientation and other OUSA events throughout the year;
- 2.1.3 Collecting for the capping charity; and
- 2.1.4 Assisting with elections and referenda where appropriate, including but not limited to advertising the election and collecting votes.

I was elected after ReO Week so I have missed both orientations and capping shows. I assisted with the BBQ for the Valid Voter Campaign, have helped advertise and set up the Mayoral Forum and OUSA Election candidate debates, and am scheduled this week to help with the static voting booth in the Link for this election.

2.2 Where reasonable, all Executive Officers are to be available for Executive meetings, national conferences, national and local campaigns, Executive training sessions and Executive planning sessions.

I attended an R U OK training evening run by the Queer Support Coordinator, and have supported campaigns such as NZUSA's campaign to restore the postgrad allowance and OUSA's Valid Voter campaign.

2.3 All Executive Officers with control of budget lines, or who have been allocated a budget line, shall maintain detailed budgets and not exceed their budgeted expenditure.

The Executive Budget has contributed \$750 to the Supervisor of the Year Awards, which is run by the Graduate Research School; this contribution is up 25% from last year. Other than this, I have spent approximately \$50 on food and drink for the fortnightly postgrad morning tea drop in sessions.

2.4 All Executive Officers, where possible, shall maintain regular, publicised office hours, and are expected to regularly check and respond to all correspondence received.

I am available by phone and email most of the time, and so students or other stakeholders can contact me whenever they need to and we can organise a time that suits. I attend every fortnightly postgrad morning tea drop in session, so students can find me there if they want a regular time and space. I do not maintain consistent public office hours as my schedule makes this impractical and I do not feel it is a good use of my time.

2.5 All Executive Officers shall every quarter undertake five hours of voluntary service which contributes to the local community.



I have served the community as an executive member of both Dunedin Pride Incorporated and Generation Vote, working on queer community support and teaching civics education in high schools respectively. Between these initiatives I have far exceeded five hours this quarter.

### **PART THREE: ATTENDANCE AND INVOLVEMENT IN OUSA AND UNIVERSITY COMMITTEES**

I sit on a wide number of committees and boards this year and contributed to discussions and decisions in different areas of the university:

**University Senate** – Overarching university-wide decision-making body. Scheduled to meet monthly, has not met this quarter.

**Board of Graduate Studies** – Oversees the approval of new or amended postgraduate courses, and deals with strategic decisions regarding the university's postgraduate offering. Meets monthly, meetings are two hours or longer, we have sat twice this quarter.

**Graduate Research Committee** – Supports research postgraduate students and oversees university systems and processes that are a part of their university experience. Meets monthly, meetings are just over an hour, we have sat twice this quarter.

**Graduate Research Student Liaison Committee** – Facilitates dialogue between the university and postgraduate research students about issues faced by students. Meets four times a year, meetings are approximately two hours, has met once this quarter.

**Animal Practice and Compliance Steering Group** – Oversees the university's animal research practices, reviews policy, and advises on external communications. Meets four times a year, meetings are between one and two hours, has met once this quarter.

**OUSA Welfare Committee** – Meets fortnightly, I have attended one out of several meetings.

**OUSA Education Committee** – Unsure of meeting times, I have not been a part of this yet.

**OUSA Postgraduate Committee** – The OPA Executive functions as this committee. Meets fortnightly, meetings are an hour long.

### **PART FOUR: GOALS**

My goals for this semester were set at the end of July when I was elected.

#### **1. Improve communication between postgrad students and OUSA regarding services and opportunities.**

I have set up meetings with postgraduate students in their departments and provided support and advice, as well as information about what OUSA and OPA offer postgrad students. I have listened to concerns and ideas about what can be done better.

I have liaised with the Graduate Research School, the International Office, and departments to advertise upcoming postgraduate events and initiatives, and have secured presentation slots for OPA at postgrad induction sessions.

I am in the process of establishing a page on the OUSA website for postgraduate opportunities and information.





**2. Work with NZUSA to restore the postgraduate student allowance.**

I liaise with James Ranstead (NZUSA President) on the ongoing campaign on a regular basis, and have joined the NZUSA postgrad working group. I helped the team prepare for their select committee presentation last month by writing lobbying letters to MPs and preparing answers to expected questions.

**3. Set up an MOU between OUSA and OPA to address the gap between what postgraduate students need and what is being provided to them.**

I have recently secured an MOU, officially passed by both parties, that brings the two parties together to work on the shared goals of academic support, community connection, and professional development. This document lays out processes for funding, website space, event promotion, and committee representation, and will allow OUSA to achieve bigger wins for postgrad students and interests.

**PART FIVE: GENERAL**

There is no work that I have done for OUSA this quarter, other than general executive tasks and planning, that is not already contained within this report.