

2020 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM)

ANNUAL REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PGSA

Elizabeth Olsen, President

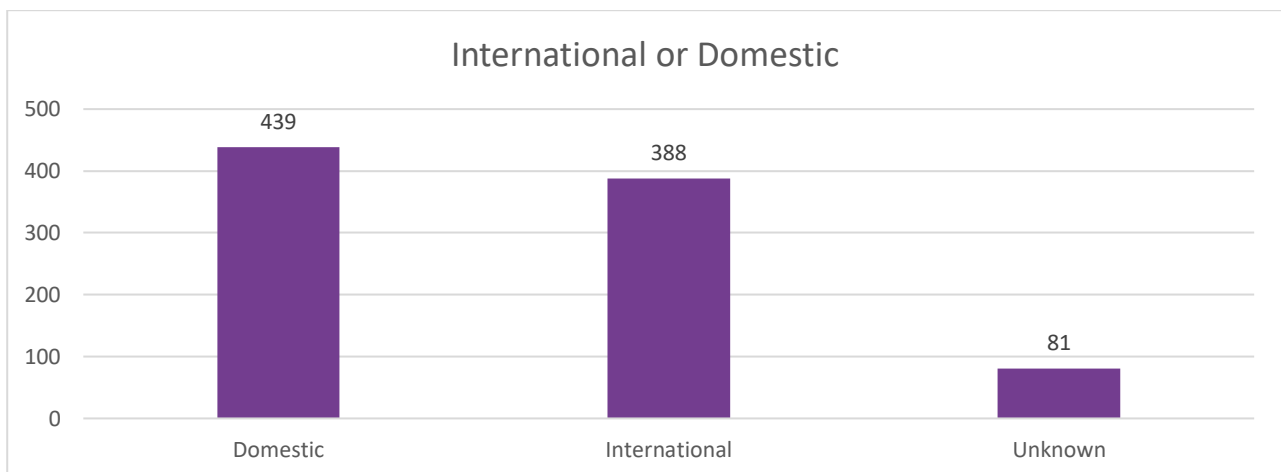
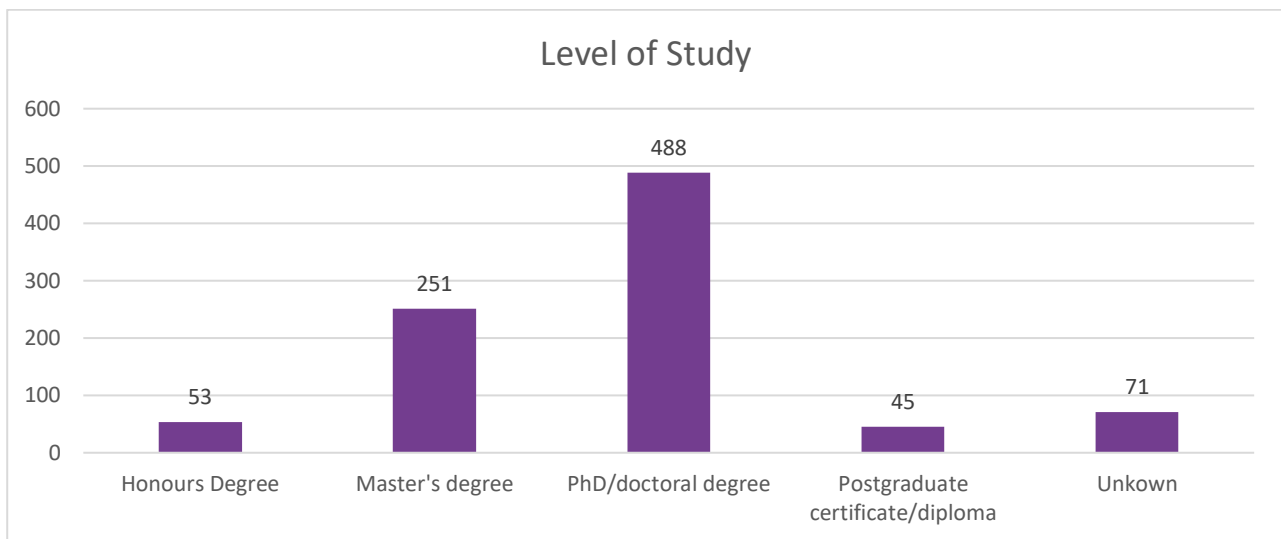
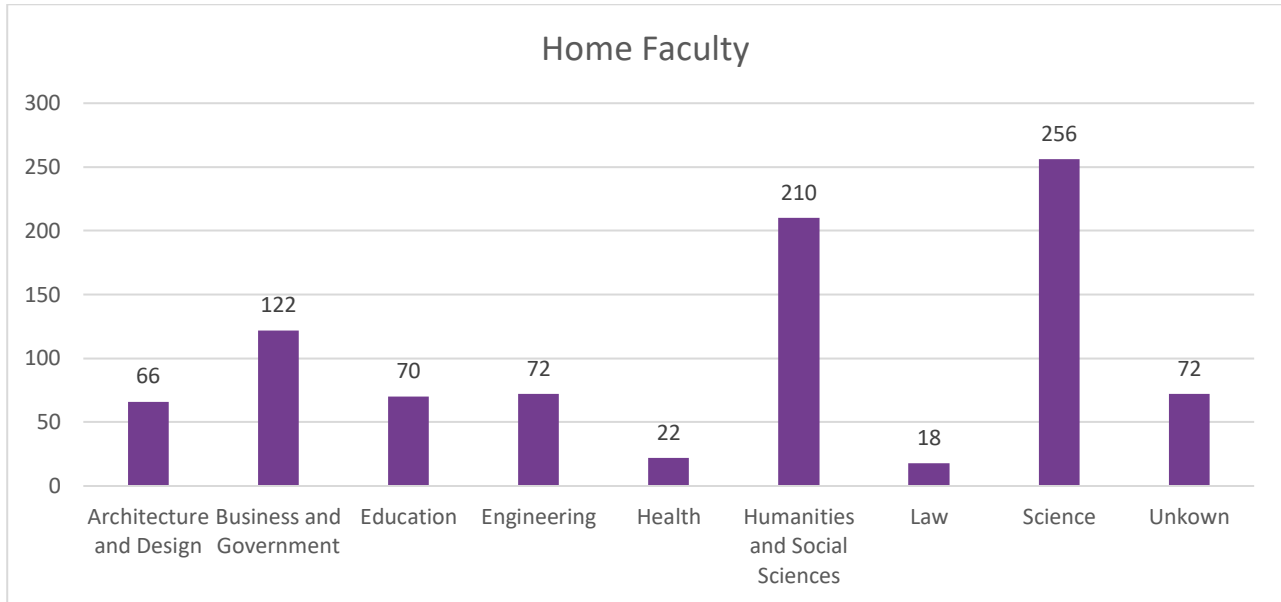
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ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

PGSA Membership

PGSA membership stands at **908** on 5 October 2020, an increase of 40 members since 30 March 2020.



PGSA Executive

The PGSA Executive is the core leadership team of our Association. Below is a list of members and officers of the Executive Board that served March to October 2020

President: Elizabeth Olsen
 Vice President, Community: Sam Crawley
 Vice President, Advocacy: Miniruwani Samarakoon
 Treasurer: Bernard Tawaih
 Communications: Sraddha Venkataraman
 Outreach (Te Aro): Glen Askey
 Outreach (Pipitea): Cody Rei-Anderson
 Outreach (Taught): Gregory Williams
 Other Executive members: Deanna Ayupova, Nancy Marquez, Michaela Harris, Christiana Torricelli
 Executive Assistant: Erella Sonnino

Resigning at the October Annual General Meeting are: Elizabeth Olsen, Sam Crawley, Glen Askey, Bernard Tawaih, and Gregory Williams

The PGSA is always on the lookout for keen people to join the Exec! We now have several vacant roles which we are eager to fill. If you are interested, please contact pgsa-president@vuw.ac.nz for more information.

PGSA Management and Administration

The Executive has adopted an open, collaborative style of work enabled by Microsoft Teams with a high degree of engagement across the whole executive. The achievements in this report are a result of the contributions from every member of the PGSA Executive who have worked with great commitment to deliver the PGSA's mission.

At the 2019 AGM we introduced the concept of including more roles amongst the Executive and specialising the Vice President functions. This change has been very effective. We now introduce two new roles in the PGSA executive: the Representation Officer and the Union Liaison Officer.

Communications

The PGSA currently uses Mailchimp to communicate with its members and compose the monthly newsletter (Informer). Mailchimp allows Executive members to more easily communicate with the membership. It also allows the newsletter to be significantly more adaptable and its editor, the Communications Officer, to have more autonomy over its content.

The work undertaken by our communications officer, Sraddha Venkataraman, to communicate with members via the website, email, and social media has been critical for the success of the PGSA in 2020.

Introduction of an honorarium for Executive Members

The PGSA has been allocated \$15,000 to reward executive members. This funding comes from the student services levy and may only be used for this purpose. The PGSA may decline to use this funding, but we have no option to use it another way. If we decline to use the funding it is returned to the general pool of levy funding.

The proposal is that we distribute the funding once every three months according to the following schedule:

	3 Monthly	Annual Total
President	\$562.50	\$2250
Vice President	\$500	\$2000

Treasurer	\$250	\$1000
Comms	\$175	\$700
Executive Member	\$75	\$300

With the remainder to be used on expenses related to the executive as well as for meals and social events for the executive.

GRANTS AND AWARDS

Academic Conference Grants

These awards are generously sponsored by Vice-Provost (Research) Professor Margaret Hyland.

We now have \$25,000 of funding available in this pool annually. The individual amount available for each award is **\$1000**.

In July 2020, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, eligibility was temporarily extended to include domestic and remote/virtual academic conferences. This will continue until further notice.

We have also brought in a Conference Organising Grant which will draw from the same pool of funding. The individual amount available for each award is **\$2000**.

Our grants have been undersubscribed in 2020 and most of our allocated funding has not been used.

Postgraduate Research Excellence Awards

The Research Excellence Awards are a **\$1500** award to one candidate from each Faculty, and a Maori Knowledge and Development award to a candidate from any Faculty whose research contributes to Maori Knowledge and Development.

The awards recognise research by VUW postgraduate students that: displays academic rigour, excellence, originality, or creativity; advances knowledge in the field or significantly contributes to knowledge; is communicated clearly, in a way that an educated but non-expert audience can understand; has a demonstrated impact within the scholarly, economic, or wider stakeholder communities.

From this year applications for the Postgraduate Research Excellence Award will be administered through Elements, the University's new profile and research management system, a significant improvement over prior administration systems.

This year we have 62 applicants, compared to 70 last year. Despite most applicants being submitted only on the last day, promotion should perhaps take place earlier. Applications close late September. This year promotion began in August, but should perhaps begin late July.

Winners of this year's awards will be announced at the **Victorias Awards** which will be held on **19 November** in the **Hunter Lounge**.

REPRESENTATION AND ADVOCACY

Student Representation

The PGSA represents postgraduate students on key Boards and Committees at the University from the Faculty level upwards. Representatives on these committees are drawn from the PGSA Executive and other postgraduate volunteers.

Representatives are a vital to our University community. The PGSA thanks all those who have contributed to the postgraduate community through service on a University Board or Committee this year.

The PGSA is always on the lookout for keen representatives! If you are interested in contributing to the student representation the PGSA coordinates by taking a seat on one of the many boards and committees at the University please check out the vacancies [here](#) or register your interest by emailing pgsa@vuw.ac.nz.

A priority in 2021 will be further developing communication between the PGSA Executive and the postgraduates who volunteer on boards and committees so that we can more effectively engage with the University. To this end we have established a new executive role: the Representation Officer who will meet regularly with committee reps and maintain communication with them via MS Teams and email.

Victoria Doctoral Scholarship

Since 2018 the PGSA has been campaigning for an increase to the Victoria Doctoral Scholarship, which we are pleased to announce has now come through!

Postgraduate Student Allowances

We are disappointed with the result of the 2020 budget in which postgraduate student allowances were still not restored. We note that this is a broken campaign promise from labour who promised this restoration in their 2017 campaign.

We will collaborate with NZUSA's campaign for universal student allowances.

Accommodation in Halls of Residence

The pandemic in 2020 exacerbated the already fraught student accommodation situation triggering a national [inquiry into student accommodation](#). For which the PGSA made a [submission](#).

The PGSA will continue to engage in this parliamentary process to advocate for national regulation for halls of residence – a form of accommodation which is excluded from the Residential Tenancies Act which protects most renters. We do not believe that the Residential Tenancies Act is appropriate for halls of residence, however it is clear that the current regulatory situation is inadequate.

We will work with VUWSA and NZUSA to advocate for students residing in halls of residence, particularly in relation to mature and international students – two often overlooked demographics in the design of halls.

Accommodation in Wellington

The PGSA contributed to and supported VUWSA's submission on the WCC draft spatial plan.

The WCC's draft spatial plan proposes increasing the density of the central city by increasing the building height limit and introducing a minimum height. For the inner suburbs they propose enabling opportunities to build new houses by reducing the extent of the existing 'Pre-1930 Character' protections and allowing more scope for building new, well-designed houses. For the outer suburbs they propose developing the suburban centres and enabling medium to high density housing focussed in and around suburban centres and main transport routes supported by public transport to reduce reliance on private vehicles.

Overall, the intent of the plan is to enable the development of between 25,000 and 32,000 new dwellings over the next 30 years.

VUWSA supported the WCC's draft spatial plan noting the need for more and better-quality housing, supporting the WCC's plan to reduce pre-1930 character protections to make way for new, better-quality, and denser accommodation.

Tutoring at VUW

During 2020 much effort has gone into union organising for Tutors at VUW including the establishment of a Tutors Network.

The Tutors Network will be the primary body at VUW advocating for tutors. For details on how to join this network please email pgsa@vuw.ac.nz.

The PGSA will maintain a strong connection with the Tutors Network particularly through the creation of the union liaison officer role on the exec.

Postgraduate Research Resource Agreement

The PGSA is negotiating a new direction for the minimum resources agreement to become a document which outlines the conversations which must take place for students to access resources, the type of resources that may be provided, and the expected quality of the spaces that research students will have access to.

Negotiations on this document have stalled due to the large advocacy load on the PGSA due to the pandemic.

The critical point for future negotiation is the management of desk space. Schools require enough flexibility to rationally allocate desk space, while research students require guarantees on their access to a desk. What is now needed is a sentence or two which will masterfully meet both needs.

COMMUNITY AND EVENTS

One of the main aims of the PGSA is fostering a thriving postgraduate community throughout the University. We achieve this mostly through our events.

Regular Events

We have continued to run our four regular events throughout the year: Breakfast Social, Writing To Finish, Postgrad Talks and Make & Mingle.

This year, we have expanded Breakfast Social to three times a month, with an additional event at Southern Cross bar to cater to the Te Aro campus. This is in addition to our existing events in Kelburn (Milk & Honey) and Pipitea (Vic Books). Breakfast Social has been well-attended throughout the year, with around 10-20 people showing up at each location. Attendees really appreciate the chance to meet up with colleagues, have a chat and (of course) a free tea or coffee.

Writing To Finish has continued to be another very popular event, which we have moved to running every month, and for the whole day (9-5) this year. Students spend the day writing, with breaks in between for snacks and pizza for lunch. Attendance has been good throughout the year.

Postgrad Talks is an event that gives students a chance to speak about their research in front of a friendly audience of fellow postgrads. We have run several Postgrad Talks throughout the year, several of them on Zoom. The events have done reasonably well in terms of attendance, although COVID-19 has definitely made it challenging to find speakers at times.

Make & Mingle is a laid back event, where people can spend an hour testing out their art skills and having a chat with other postgrads. As this event doesn't really work online, we have had to cancel several throughout the year. However, the ones we have run have gone well.

Overall, we have had great engagement with our regular events this year. As these events (with some minor tweaks) have been established for a while now, PGSA members know what to expect from them. This consistency has probably contributed to the continued success of these events.

Major Events

Due to COVID-19, we have been somewhat limited in the major events we have been able to run this year. Even if the country is at level 1, an outbreak can happen at any time. This makes planning larger events difficult, as all the organisation work might have to be “thrown away” if the government raises the alert level. We were still able to run some major events throughout the year.

3MT

This year’s Three Minute Thesis (3MT) competition was mostly run online. Entries were submitted as pre-recorded videos. Because of this change in format, we enlisted the help of Student Learning to make workshops available to prospective competitors, to help them with their presentation skills, and the technical aspects of submitting a video to the competition. These workshops were incredibly useful to students.

We received nearly 50 entries from across the University, which were judged in 5 heats by panels of academic staff. The winners and runners-up from each heat advanced to the final. Due to Wellington being at level 2 during the final, we had to limit numbers who were allowed to attend in person. However, we also allowed people to attend via Zoom. In total we had approximately 80-100 people attend the final either in person or on Zoom.

Theresa Pankhurst was the overall winner, and was entered into the Asia-Pacific Final run by University of Queensland. Theresa made it into the final eight from around 30 entries, which was a great effort!

The 3MT competition was, overall, very successful again this year. The competition was sponsored by Vice-Provost (Research) Professor Margaret Hyland supported by Wellington University International (which provided the best international student prize). We thank them both, as well as student learning who both supported our competitors and supplied capable judges.

Breakfast/Brunch at Milk & Honey

We had two catered Breakfast/Brunch events at Milk & Honey this year, as well as another Brunch just before Christmas last year. These are very popular events, where students are able to socialise with many other Postgrads, as well as have a free Breakfast or Brunch.

The mid-year event we had in July reached capacity for the area we had booked in M&H (140 people), which highlights how popular these are.

Researcher’s Ball

We had scheduled an alternative social event at Hunter Lounge for the mid-September. Unfortunately, due to Level 2 restrictions, we had to postpone this. It is now scheduled for the end of October.

Victorias Awards

The Awards are a highlight in the PGSA’s calendar and an opportunity to celebrate the excellence in the postgraduate community.

At the Victorias Awards we recognise the research achievements of postgraduate students with the Research Excellence Awards. We also recognise and celebrate the professional development of postgraduate students with the student teaching awards. We take the opportunity to recognise that it takes a village to support postgraduate students with the Supervisors awards, and the Professional Staff Awards. Finally we recognise the outstanding contribution to the postgraduate community with the Landers Postgraduate Award.

This year’s Victorias Awards will be held on 19 November in the Hunter Lounge – pandemic willing.