

Tertiary Education Legislation Amendment (There for Education, Not Profit) Bill 2025 Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations Submission

The Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute our perspective to the Tertiary Education Legislation Amendment (There for Education, Not Profit) Bill 2025.

CAPA is the peak body representing the interests of the over 480,000 postgraduate students in Australia. CAPA represents both coursework and research across domestic and international postgraduates. The Council is comprised of 28 university and campus-based postgraduate associations and collaborates closely with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Postgraduate Association (NATSIPA). CAPA carries out its mission through policy, research, and advocacy, communicating the interests and issues of postgraduate students to higher education stakeholders and Federal and State/Territory governments, Opposition parties, and minor parties.

Most, if not all, Australians are flawed when they learn of the exorbitant pay packets Australia's university Vice Chancellors receive. Operating as a mix of private and public enterprises, universities are frequently publicly criticised for circumventing what would be considered typical employment standards. Increased workforce casualisation, wage theft, and languishing education standards are all present while VC salaries appear to have no upper limit. Of the group of 8 university VCs, only two are reported to be paid below \$1 million per year. Only one, Professor Genevieve Bell of the Australian National University, receives less than the Prime Minister.

It is clear that VC salaries have spiralled out of control and must be reined in. As such, we are in support of the bill before the parliament entitled "There for Education, Not Profit" and provide the following evidence to support our stance.

Australia: The Lucky Country (if you're the head of a university)

The persistent argument made in many industries is that if you want to attract the best then you have to pay for the best. In fact, this is an argument frequently made for elected members of parliament. Often, these are highly trained or educated people who can make more in the private sector, however, they prioritise serving their community. As such, remuneration for a member of parliament was set at \$233,660 in 2024⁽¹⁾, a far from meagre wage for most of Australia. The federal treasurer is afforded an additional 87.5% on top of the base salary, the deputy prime minister 105%, and the prime minister 160%⁽¹⁾. Australia's elected leader and representative on the global stage is paid ~\$390,000 less than the average Australian University VC, who is responsible for 1 of 37 public universities in Australia. It's not unreasonable to think that there is a slight difference in the level of responsibility between these two offices that is not representative of income.

Australian VCs are not only out of the ordinary in Australia but also globally. Of the 37 public Australian universities, 6 appear in the global top 100 universities in 2025 according to Times Higher Education. Only 1, the University of Melbourne appears in the top 50 (#39). The University of Melbourne's VC Professor Emma Johnston receives an annual income greater than the heads of the University of Oxford (#1), the University of Cambridge (#5), the University of Toronto (#21), the University of Edinburgh (#29), and the Karolinska Institutet (#49) (Table 1). The same can be said for the VCs of Monash University (#58), UNSW Sydney (#83), the Queensland University of Technology (#201-250), Flinders University (#301-350), and the University of South Australia (#301-350) (Table 1). Of the international universities surveyed for this submission, only Harvard University's (#3) president (equivalent to the VC in the United States) made significantly more than the majority of Australian university VCs (Table 1).

Table 1: International and domestic examples of VC (or equivalent) salary:

Institution	Salary (AUD)	Times Higher Education Ranking 2025

The University of Oxford (UK)	~865,674	1
Harvard University (US)	~2,072,969	3
University of Cambridge (UK)	~1,185,602	5
University of Toronto (Can)	~537,000	21
University of Edinburgh (UK)	~867,011	29
Karolinska Institutet (EU)	~287,316	49
	Average: 969,262	
	Median: 866,342.5	
Australian Institutions	Salary (AUD)	Times Higher Education Ranking 2025
University of Melbourne	1,492,500	39
Monash University	1,250,000	58
University of Sydney	1,100,000	61
Australian National University	484,000	73
The University of Queensland	1,162,500	77
UNSW Sydney	1,322,500	83
University of Adelaide	1,052,500	128
The University of Western Australia	904,000	149
University of Technology Sydney	905,000	154
Macquarie University	1,055,000	178
Deakin University	1,050,000	201-250
Queensland University of Technology	1,235,000	201-250
University of Wollongong	1,045,000	201-250
Curtin University	1,035,000	251-300
La Trobe University	965,000	251-300

RMIT	1,005,000	251-300
Swinburne University of Technology	1,045,000	251-300
University of Newcastle	975,000	251-300
University of Tasmania	1,115,000	251-300
Flinders University	1,225,000	301-350
Griffith University	974,000	301-350
University of South Australia	1,235,000	301-350
Western Sydney University	1,065,000	301-350
Edith Cowan University	955,000	351-400
University of Southern Queensland	697,500	351-400
Australian Catholic University	1,045,000	401-500
Charles Darwin University	652,500	401-500
Federation University Australia	895,000	401-500
James Cook University	847,500	401-500
Murdoch University	865,000	401-500
University of Canberra		401-500
Victoria University	845,000	401-500
Central Queensland University	817,500	501-600
Southern Cross University	847,500	501-600
University of the Sunshine Coast	945,000	601-800
Charles Sturt University	837,500	801-1000
The University of Notre Dame Australia		1201-1500
	Go8 average: 1,096,000	Difference to international: 126,738
	Go8 median: 1,131,250	Difference to international: 264,907.5

	Overall average: 998,485.71	Difference to international: 29,223.71
	Overall median: 1,005,000	Difference to international: 138,657.5

To illustrate just how out of step the remuneration for Australian VCs is, we have compiled a list of items a person could buy in a year if they received the average VC salary (Table 2).

Table 2: What could be bought with one year's worth of the average Australian VC salary (\$1,004,721 AUD)

Item	Number afforded
Flat-white (\$5); with alternative milk (\$5.50)	200,944; 182,677
Avocado (\$2.50)	401,888
Big mahogany desk	241
Set of well-priced golf clubs (\$1,299)	773
Specialised S-works Tarmac SL8 (\$20,900)	48
Penfolds Grange (2000 vint.)	1,104
Secretary (Award rate - level 1, year 3, FT)	19
Business dinners with Peter Dutton (\$25,00 per ticket)	40
Geelong Grammar Tuition Fees (years 10-12, full-boarding, one year)	11
HDR students receiving the 2025 minimum stipend	30
Minimum wage employees (Pre-tax)	21
Australian Prime Ministers	1.7

To add insult to injury, student satisfaction doesn't even correlate with VC remuneration. In fact, it could be argued that lower VC pay results in improved student satisfaction.

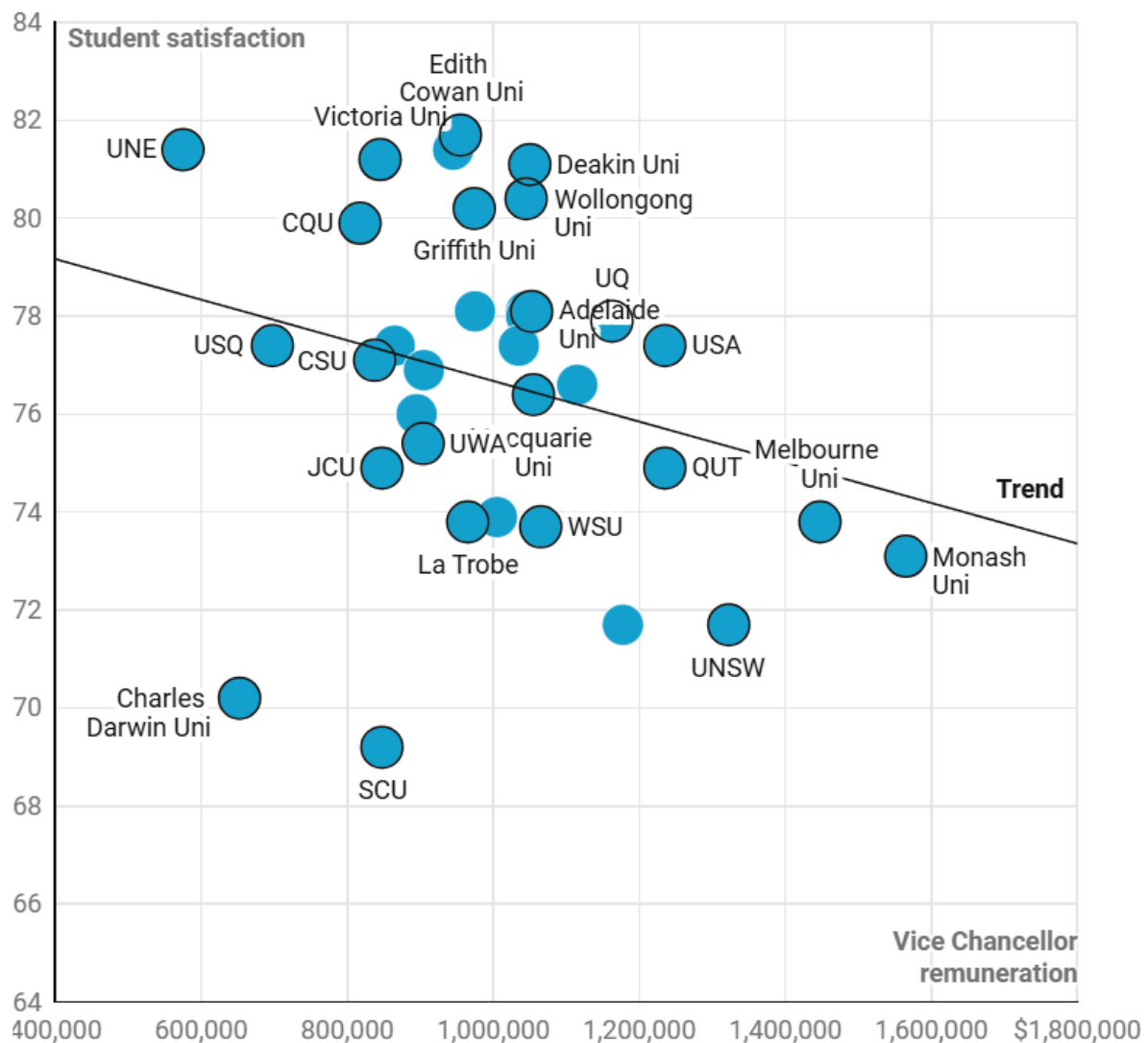


Figure 1 - 2023 student satisfaction compared to VC remuneration⁽²⁾

There is also no historical precedent for these wages. In 1985, when VC salaries were partially regulated by the Academic Salaries Tribunal, an Australian university VC would expect to make ~\$300,000 per year in 2024 dollars⁽²⁾. This is around one-third the average salary Australian VCs currently receive.

It is clear that something needs to be done to address these dramatic inequalities in pay in the university sector. Furthermore, VC salary as it currently stands leaves the door open for exorbitant senior administrative salaries. In a time where casualisation in the university sector is seemingly ever-increasing, VC salary packages run counter to this narrative. As

such, we welcome the recommendations of this bill and support its implementation for a more fair and equitable university sector.

References:

1. Office of Parliamentary Counsel, Remuneration Tribunal (Members of Parliament) Determination 2024, *The Australian Government*. 2024
<https://www.remtribunal.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-01/MP%202024%20-%20Compilation%20No.%202.pdf>
2. Thrower, J. The high pay for Vice-Chancellors does not deliver better outcomes for students, *The Australia Institute*. 2025
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