



RUSU 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

RUSU
RMIT UNIVERSITY STUDENT UNION

A Message from the 2021 RUSU President



Welcome to the 2021 RUSU Annual General Meeting (AGM) and RUSU 2020 Annual Report.

Only a few weeks ago it was looking like campus life would start to look a little closer to 'normal' for semester 2 and RUSU had a fun filled semester of events planned for students. This included AGMs on each campus with free food and donuts and an AGM evening party for students.

Unfortunately, we find ourselves in lockdown number six, so we have no other option but to hold our AGM online. Despite Covid, we felt it was important to go ahead with our annual AGM. As an organisation run by students for students, we need to be accountable and transparent about what we spent and achieved in 2020.

Both 2020 and 2021 have been challenging times for students, who have been impacted by Covid.

It is important to acknowledge the continued resilience and strength students have shown over the last 18 months. Life has not been easy with having to learn online, not being able to engage in university life, loss of student employment opportunities and so much more.

As an international student myself I particularly want to highlight the difficulties that international students face due to Covid; both those studying in Australia and those students stuck overseas and studying from home. RUSU sees you and we are working hard to support you.

For all students, these difficult times can often be isolating and I want to take this opportunity to remind you that you are not alone.

Throughout 2020 and 2021 RUSU has been at our representative best, supporting students directly and convincing RMIT to make important changes to benefit students in these tough times. This is something to celebrate and inspire us as we look forward to an eventual return to campus.

A snapshot of key RUSU achievements and campaigns in 2020 is included in this Annual Report. I am particularly proud of the way that RUSU immediately pivoted to delivering our services and support to students remotely in March 2020, especially our student rights, welfare support and free meals and grocery vouchers. Our campaigns were effective and delivered what students needed; financial support (hardship grants), mental health support and important adjustments to academic processes including no fails on transcripts.

These accomplishments would not have been possible without our elected student representatives, RUSU staff, student volunteers and RUSU club leaders. On behalf of RUSU I would like to thank them for all of their dedication, support and hard work in 2020.

Akshay Jose

**President,
RMIT University Student Union**

RMIT University Student Union acknowledges the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nations on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University. RMIT University respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present.

RMIT University Student Union also acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and their Ancestors of the lands and waters across Australia where it conducts its business.

RUSU Highlights 2020: Health, Food & Welfare

23,000+

free meals for students...

11,190 Realfoods meals &
12,370 RUSU breakfast packs
provided to students living in student
accommodation during lockdown



\$30 Compass grocery vouchers
provided to students in
immediate need.

\$100,000

worth of grocery vouchers
supported almost 2,000 students.



3,500+

students

reached by Compass wellbeing
events including: Calm Zone,
Stress Less, R U Okay Day?



750

**fresh grocery
meal boxes**

to students through our
Compass Virtual Marketplace
and RUSU Healthy Breakfast
Boxes initiatives.



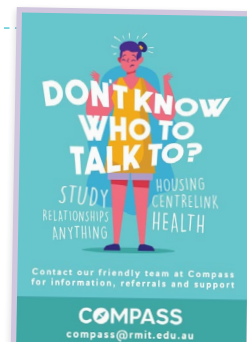
600

**\$30 UberEats
vouchers**

to HDR, Postgraduate and International
students and their families, through the
RUSU Eats initiative

2,200+

students supported
by Compass with mental
health advice and referral
to support services



34

**cooking &
gardening
videos**

to help support students in
preparing affordable, healthy
meals from home - produced
by RUSU and Realfoods

RUSU Highlights 2020: Advocacy & Representation

3,527

RUSU financial
members in 2020



28
elected
student
representatives
managed
RUSU



2469
students
voted in the
election,
which was
held online

RUSU trained volunteers
provided a student voice on

56

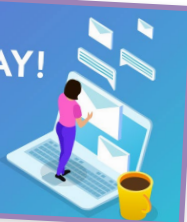
RMIT committee hearings

6 Student
Rights
Officers

employed across campuses,
with HDR specialist role

HAVE YOUR SAY!

Student experience
through the
COVID-19 Transition



1,984
students
responded

to the RUSU Student
Experience through
the COVID-19
Transition survey

RUSU Student
Rights Officers
resolved close to

900
student
rights
cases

**RUSU Student
Liaison Team**
triaged

student rights
enquiries from

1012
students

RUSU Highlights 2020: Student Life & Student Media

94 student clubs
affiliated to RUSU,
including 8 new clubs

RUSU Clubs
received **\$97,500**
in SSAF funded grants



RUSU clubs staff supported
80 clubs
to hold their AGMs and IGMs
(mostly online)

19
RMIT students &
clubs won
**Student Life
Awards**
(over \$11,000 in prizes)
91 nominations
received

6 RUSU
Orientation
Special Events
estimated 3,000
participants

59 RUSU
Club Orientation
Events funded

**International
Student
Facebook
community**
where students
could interact
and receive
important
information on
support
446 Members

**The RUSU
Volunteer Council,**
a leadership body
within the Volunteer
Program was
established in
Semester 1

RUSU Events

and our many
departments delivered a
range of online events
during lockdown:
movie nights, online
Trivia, workshops, awards
nights, games nights,
online dinners, home
deliveries and more.

6 Sit & Write Sessions
for HDR students and delivered
a 'Take the Night Off' Uber Eats
program specifically for
HDR students

197 students
inducted as RUSU
volunteers

107 students
received training such
as Food Safety & RSA

24 English
Conversation
Workshops
to support conversation and
peer connection (online)

**10 online
volunteer events**
helped keep our
volunteer community
together during
lockdown



Uni Frequency Radio Show

Mix of tunes and chat to give
some light relief to students -
a RUSU and SYN collaboration

Catalyst back issues digitised

A project made possible by
RMIT Library, RMIT Archives,
RUSU and Catalyst.

5 Catalyst
Magazine
Editions
(4 online)



488
RMITV active
members

RMITV pivoted to
remote productions
including the Isolation
film festival, Offbeat
and The Leak.

RUSU Campaigns 2020

In 2020 a strong representative voice was more important than ever, as students were severely impacted by Covid 19. Your elected representatives had your back, campaigning hard for financial, academic and mental health support for students.

RMIT students had a lot to tell us about what they were experiencing and what help they needed. Many of you reached out to our email and support services, contacted us through social media or connected with your student reps (those in Australia and those stuck off-shore) directly. You had your say in our Covid survey, our virtual Town Hall and Have Your Say Day events.

RUSU conducted a number of campaigns advocacy, outreach and capacity building activities in 2020. Despite being off-campus, our campaigns had both reach and impact.

Key initiatives included:

- ✓ Public submissions to government inquiries on issues impacting students (free tram zone, Religious Freedoms Bills)
- ✓ COVID-19 student survey (1,984 respondents), survey snapshot reach = 12.9k
- ✓ RUSU Town Hall discussion of issues impacting students (Zoom event reached capacity at 100 participants and a the livestream received 1.4k views)
- ✓ RUSU no library cuts' campaign reach = 14,874
- ✓ RUSU Have Your Say Day summary report reach = 2,025
- ✓ Fee Hikes and Funding Cuts explainer video reach = 6,110
- ✓ President's statement on Fee Hikes and Funding Cuts reach = 7,048
- ✓ President's Open Letter to Vice Chancellor reach = 15,704
- ✓ Statement from President re student job losses and impact of COVID-19 (May 2020) reach = 11,761
- ✓ RUSU Queer statement in response to Australian Christian Lobby gay conversion therapy online forum reach = 11,272
- ✓ Anti-racism statement by President in response to COVID-19 racial attacks (April 2020) reach = 6,621
- ✓ Information campaign about new policy of No Fails on Transcripts reach = 24,300 with 5,413 engagements.
- ✓ RUSU President's COVID-19 campaign update (28 March) reach = 15,0252, 17 March reach = 19.7k and 16 March reach = 40.7k
- ✓ RUSU President's change the census date campaign reach = over 28k



RUSU Campaigns 2020

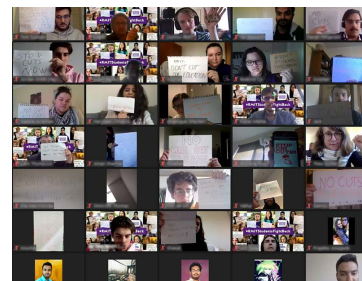
READ MORE about each RUSU Win at www.rusu.rmit.edu.au/campaigns20



RUSU SAYS NO TO LIBRARY CUTS



HAVE YOUR SAY DAY 2020 – ALL YOUR IDEAS & WHAT NEXT?



TOWN HALL - RMIT STUDENTS SAY NO TO UNI CUTS!



NO FAILS ON TRANSCRIPTS



FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS



COVID-19 SURVEY SNAPSHOT



FEE REDUCTION



FAIR ASSESSMENT



CENSUS DATE



FREE TRAMS



FREEDOM FROM DISCRIMINATION



2020 PRIORITIES

2020 RUSU Governance Update

The 2020 RUSU leadership team worked hard to ensure that RUSU was effectively and transparently governed, despite the challenges of prolonged lockdowns and lack of access to campus and in-person student events and meetings.

RUSU quickly pivoted to managing RUSU and providing our support services and activities remotely. RUSU SUC approved interim processes and regulations to enable us to function openly and democratically while working remotely. Key examples of this are:

- Student Union Council meetings held online via Teams.
- 2020 Annual General meeting delayed until August 2020 in the hope we would be back on campus and was then held online via Zoom.
- RUSU annual elections were held online and governed by temporary election regulations.

Key Governance Updates

Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission (ACNC)

RUSU is registered as a not-for-profit organisation with the ACNC. RUSU is required to report to the ACNC annually. This provides another layer of external accountability for RUSU's operations.

RUSU and RMIT Deed Agreement

The bulk of RUSU Funding is SSAF fees which are provided to RUSU through an Annual Funding Deed Agreement with RMIT. This Deed outlines governance and reporting requirements attached to the funding and RUSU's operations. RUSU complied with all of the requirement of the funding Deed in 2020.



RUSU Enterprise Agreement 2020

The RUSU Enterprise Agreement, which is the industrial agreement covering RUSU staff, was formally approved by Fair Work in September 2020.

RUSU Student Union Council – By Students – For Students

RUSU is governed by a team of 27 annually elected student representatives, who form the RUSU Student Union Council (SUC). Comprehensive formal induction and training was provided to the members of the SUC to ensure adequate financial literacy and an understanding of the legal responsibilities as members of the governing council.

The list of student representatives is included in the Financial Audit Report. Records of attendance at SUC meetings is available on the RUSU website at: <https://www.rusu.rmit.edu.au/sucattendance2020>

External Affiliations

RUSU continued to be affiliated to the National Union of Students (NUS) and the Council of Postgraduate Associations (CAPA). These peak student groups played an important role lobbying and advocating for students interests during 2020 especially focusing on the need for students to be supported due to the impacts of Covid.

RUSU Student Communications

With students studying from home for most of 2020, RUSU's communications became a vital part of how RUSU communicated with students and listened to students voices. In 2020 this included:

- Facebook – 24,927 page followers
- Instagram – 3,881 page followers
- RUSU e-newsletter – 6,093 subscribers, with an open rate of 25 per cent. 40 RUSU e newsletters sent during 2020 (weekly during term time)
- Online Campaigns - see also RUSU Campaigns report on page 4
- RUSU Website –113,667 visits throughout 2020

RUSU Email Advice – 1,585 students emailed the general RUSU asking questions, sharing ideas or seeking help. Thousands more students reached out through the Compass and student rights online support and many students emailed or messaged their elected student representatives directly. These questions, concerns and feedback shaped how RUSU represented and advocated for students in 2020.

RUSU Financial Update

Your student fees at work @ RUSU

RMIT University charges students an annual Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF). This fee is collected by RMIT University to fund student services and amenities of a non-academic nature. Funding is distributed between a range of service areas and providers at the University, including RUSU.

In 2020 RUSU received a total of **\$3,964,735** in SSAF fees through RMIT.

\$962,500 of the 2020 funding was in special SSAF Committee grants to provide a wide range of services and events run by students, for students (e.g. free food and grocery vouchers, student events, English conversation workshops, RUSU volunteer program, RMITV programs and training, orientation and specialist support for vocational education and postgraduate students.)

All RUSU SSAF funds were spent on the 19 areas permitted by the SSAF legislation (Allowable Items).

RUSU Funding & Income 2020

RUSU funding from RMIT for 2020 is made up of the following:

Base grant	\$3,002,235
SSAF Committee Grants	\$962,500
2020 TOTAL GRANT	\$3,964,735

2020 REVISED TOTAL SSAF FUNDING 2020 - \$3,964,735

Additional sources of RUSU income include: investment income, 2020 financial memberships, Realfoods Cafe income and event ticket sales.

The 2020 grant from RMIT was received as a lump sum payment in late January. This upfront payment enabled RUSU to maximise opportunities to generate additional income through strategic investments. RUSU continued to engage Advisersure as investment advisors to assist with the management of our investments in accordance with the approved RUSU Financial Investment Strategy.

Finance Summary 2020

Total Revenue in 2020:	\$4,494,571
Total Expenses in 2020:	\$4,284,270
Surplus:	\$210,301
Other comprehensive income for the year:*	(\$73,535)
Total comprehensive income/(loss):	\$136,766

* This figure represents the (Loss)/gain on the revaluation of financial assets at fair value through other comprehensive income.

The financial audit for financial year 1 January to 31 December 2020 was conducted by **independent auditors BDO** and will be presented at the Annual General Meeting on 19 August 2021.

2020 Financial Position

In 2020 RUSU ran at a surplus of \$136,766. There were several key factors that contributed to the surplus.

- **Covid 19** – impacted the way that RUSU delivered its programs in 2020. Some RUSU programs were cheaper to deliver remotely while others incurred additional expenses.
- **Governments Grants** – Unfortunately the University sector and RUSU (including RUSU Realfoods) were not eligible for JobKeeper. RUSU did however receive some Covid related government assistance through Business Cash Flow Boost Payments through the Australian Taxation Office.
- **Financial Markets** – were impacted by Covid 19. RUSU's investments however performed better than projected in our budget planning in 2020.



Table 1:
RUSU SSAF Grant expenditure on Allowable Items: 1 Jan–31 Dec 2020
(Base and Competitive Grants – for Government Acquittal)

Allowable Item	Item Description	Expenditure YTD
Giving students information to help them in their orientation;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation specific events 	\$61,842
Promoting the health or welfare of students;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities and events from advocacy and welfare departments: Queer, Women's, Postgraduate, Environment, Welfare, Education, Indigenous • Campaigns, events, honorariums, programs, marketing • All City Compass programs and staff 	\$533,362
Helping meet the specific needs of overseas students relating to their welfare, accommodation and employment;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities and events from International Department & International Support SSAF grant 	\$28,867
Helping students develop skills for study, by means other than undertaking courses of study in which they are enrolled;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Induction programs/student representative professional development • Volunteer program • Student Engagement Officer • Student Union Council elections • Secretariat honorariums • SSCC Grant • Student Life Awards 	\$405,630
Supporting the production and dissemination to students of media whose content is provided by students;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RMITV operations, honorariums, special projects, productions, training, website • RMIT Flagship Program (SSAF grant) • Catalyst magazine operations, student honorariums, publication • Communications/graphic design staff 	\$321,835
Providing food or drink to students on a campus of the higher education provider;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus-specific events and marketing (all campuses) • Healthy Breakfast SSAF grant • Realfoods remote program, cooking videos etc 	\$341,515
Supporting a sporting or other recreational activity by students;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major events and intervarsity recreational activities and competitions • Activities & Events collective including administration, student honorariums, marketing and staff support 	\$290,362
Supporting the administration of a club most of whose members are students;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration, grants, equipment and support to student run clubs and societies • Clubs & Societies staff and other support 	\$328,707
Advising on matters arising under the higher education provider's rules (however described);	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration and support staff members: Administration, Governance, Human Resources and Finance • 5 x information counter staff and operations (remote email/phone service during lockdown) 	\$813,020
Advocating students' interests in matters arising under the higher education provider's rules (however described);	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Rights Officers • Student advocacy materials, campaigns, research and training for staff and student representatives on committees 	\$759,945
	YTD SSAF Expenditure	\$3,885,085
	2020 SSAF Funds Received	\$3,964,735
	Amount of grant remaining	\$79,650*

***Note:** By agreement with RMIT, RUSU will retain this \$79,650 underspend from 2020 to spend in 2021 on RMIT Flagship & Training Program and Strong Student Voices Program.

Table 2:
2020 SSAF Committee Grant Financial Report: 1 Jan–31 Dec 2020

Program Title	Expenditure 1 Jan – 31 Dec
RUSU Volunteer Program (includes training)	\$178,434
RMITV flagship production and RMITV training	\$49,571
RUSU International Student Support - conversation classes and mixer events	\$13,121
Bundoora East Student Rights, Info Counter & Campus Boost	\$35,718
RUSU Orientation Package	\$61,847
RUSU Free Healthy Breakfasts	\$73,142
Postgrad Support Program (inc SRO)	\$45,601
RUSU Campus Life, Free Food and Events (City, Point Cook, Brunswick & Bundoora West)	\$106,825
RUSU VE Awareness & Support	\$27,477
Compass Bundoora & Brunswick (including grocery voucher program 2020)	\$256,322
RUSU Clubs Grants (SPEG grants)	\$21,451
RUSU Student Voices (SSCC Support & Student Life Awards)	\$13,341
TOTAL	\$882,850

