

University of Melbourne Student Union
Advocacy & Legal Student Advisory Group
CONFIRMED minutes 10:30am, 11.11.2015
Meeting 2 of Semester 2

Chair: Phoebe Churches, Advocacy & Legal

1 Welcome and Procedural Matters

Phoebe welcomed all those in attendance with a warm welcome to the new faces.

1.1 Apologies: Alanna Smith and Paul Hornsby

1.2 Attendance

Phoebe Churches, Emily De Rango, Akira Boardman, James Bashford, Nelly Montague, Donna Markwell, Greta Haywood and George Newman (Minutes).

1.3 Confirmation of previous minutes

Last meetings were confirmed without amendment

2 A & L Service Reports

2.1 Advocacy casework

Phoebe noted ongoing issues regarding the special consideration process. Phoebe further outlined that the most recent review of the special consideration policy and procedures should bring about some significant changes to the process – not least being a more centralised decision-making process. These changes will hopefully ensure more consistency and fairness in the process.

Phoebe noted that while changes to special consideration process often seem significant on paper, there remain slow changes with the implementation of policy changes. Changes to special consideration policies are often problematic in practice – and the split responsibilities in the new procedure seem to have some potential for problems.

Phoebe raised the issue of the increasing demand on the Advocacy service – as outlined in the statistics on page 6 of the Student Union Advocacy Service Report (July-September). Based on these indications, Phoebe and the General Manager UMSU drafted a proposal for the University's Advocacy Reference Group. This proposal recommended that unallocated SSAF should be directed towards an expansion of the Advocacy Service. The proposal was endorsed by all members of the Reference Group. Given the expectations for further increases in the Advocacy Service into the future, Phoebe indicated that a final decision would hopefully be made by the start of 2016.

The proposal recommended that funds be allocated for an additional 1.2 EFT advocate positions.

This means that the 0.8 position could become full time and an additional FT advocate position could be established. With 4 full time advocates, one position could be rotated to focus on policy research and to provide enhanced accessibility to support UMSU office-bearers and members of the Student Representative Network (SRN). It is proposed that one advocate is given 9 months casework time release – with the next advocate picking up prior to the next induction of new Office Bearers. James indicated that there may be issues with office space in the Union House building with any potential expansion of UMSU services.

Nellie raised the question of policy changes regarding academic and general misconduct. Phoebe spoke about how these policies appear to be moving in positive directions and possibly in accordance with the recommendations she made with in her recent paper 'Policy and Police'. Recommendations cited in this paper include increasing training for staff in misconduct procedures, diversifying the range of penalties available and broadening criteria upon which penalties are based.

Phoebe mentioned that she was in the process of drafting a guide for student reps regarding misconduct penalties and decision-making procedures for the upcoming training of new SRN members.

2.2 Legal case work

Greta reported that she had finalised the Community Legal Centre cross-check process (a kind of peer audit which community legal centres are required to undertake annually for risk management). Greta indicated that while the cross-check was mostly positive, it recommended that the implementation of a volunteer program should be a priority for the service.

Greta spoke about the steady increase in demand for the Legal Service in 2015 compared with 2014. Greta noted that more international students were using the service than domestic students now and that this was likely due to the recent talks she's given on migration issues. Greta also suggested that a contraction in the scope of migration in advice given by the University is responsible for the increased demand. Greta noted that the legal service is facing a major capacity problem as a result of the heavy demand. Phoebe mentioned in this context that the Legal Service Working Group had been established to conduct an organisational review of the service and is looking into various staffing proposals to both increase the capacity to provide a full service to students as well as to ensure its scalability should funding be reduced in the future. Another impetus for an organisational review of the service is the need to establish a properly resourced and supported volunteer program. This would increase capacity of the service but also requires an increase in the staff allocation of the Legal Service. A report for Students' Council on capacity building proposals will likely be completed by the end of the year.

James raised a question regarding Myki fines and the subsequent success rate of fine appeals. Greta responded that the Myki appeal system is particularly hard to negotiate. Despite this, Greta pointed out that the Legal Service has been relatively successfully in getting fines reviewed. Phoebe indicated that the deficiencies in the Myki review process are being looked at by the State Government and also the Ombudsman Victoria is conducting an own motion review of the penalties regime. Greta and Phoebe will be making submissions to the State

Government's review early next year.

Phoebe raised the issue of the apparent underpayment of student casuals in Union House tenancies. She noted that this issue had been raised with MUSUL in the past. However, given that student casuals are generally reluctant to complain, it has been difficult to gather substantial evidence on potential perpetrators. All meeting attendees expressed concern. Phoebe noted that UMSU International is also concerned about this issue.

A number of courses of action were discussed. James raised the idea that an accreditation sticker be given to individual tenants who undergo and pass a review of their wage processes. Phoebe recommended that steps be taken to ensure that MUSUL deals with the issue. Phoebe indicated that there is a need for MUSUL to outline to UMSU the steps they will take to guarantee that Fair Work obligations are being followed by their tenants. Nellie raised the idea that a motion be taken up at Student's Council on the issue.

The Advocacy & Legal SAG unanimously endorsed a proposal for MUSUL to take action on the tenancy issue.

3 Reports from Student Office Bearers

3.1 items of interest related to Advocacy or Legal services

Nellie spoke about the Exam Reference Group. Nellie mentioned that the group is currently made up for three people, one student and two others. The purpose of the group is to review the how exam processes affect students. For instance, an issue discussed in the group was the matter of paramedics forms sufficing as HPR forms in regarding to special consideration.

Nellie noted that a meeting for the Exam Reference Group is scheduled for mid-December. Discussions issue include the ban on watches in exam and the matter of students getting feedback from exams. Donna noted that if students were to get feedback from exams, this would help with the CUPC review/appeals process.

James noted that induction week for future Office Bearers began next week (Week beginning 16 Nov). James raised the question of whether Advocacy and Legal had any ideas for induction training. Phoebe responded that the services will have a dedicated timeslot in which to conduct induction training with Office Bearers.

4 Other Business

Emily spoke of current GSA moves to improve graduate student access to family-friendly study spaces.

In regards to graduates, Donna raised the issue of students who are granted special consideration then failed because there was deemed to be no appropriate adjustment by the subject coordinators. Donna further raised the issue of students looking for support for issues that don't fall under the purview of Advocacy Service. Donna suggested that a volunteer peer support type program be set up to serve this role, ideally in collaboration with the GSA.

Donna noted that Peer Support Program applications are still open.

5 **Next Meeting**

Thursday 3 March 2016

6 **Close**

Meeting closed at 12:10pm