

University of Melbourne Student Union
Advocacy & Legal Student Advisory Group

MINUTES

2:00 pm, 16.08.2018

Meeting 1 of Semester 2

**Advocacy & Legal Divisional Office,
Level 4 Union House**

Chair: Phoebe Churches, Manager, Advocacy & Legal
Minutes: Michelle Almiron, Senior Advocate, Advocacy & Legal

1 Welcome and Procedural Matters

1.1 Apologies

Nadia Streistermanis, Isabelle Butler.

1.2 Attendance

Alanna Smith, Emily De Rango, Alice Smith, Geng Huang, Siyu (Eric) Liu, Reeanna Maloney, Donna Markwell, Vanessa Stanten, Phoebe Churches and Michelle Almiron.

1.3 Confirmation of previous minutes

Confirmed: Emily De Rango, Donna Markwell

2 A & L Service Reports

2.1 Advocacy case work

- PC: Last quarter, the service witnessed a decrease in the quality of faculty allegation letters sent out to students under investigation for misconduct. Superficially, these concerns may seem pedantic, but in fact getting these letters right is very important because it can affect the capacity of the student facing the allegation to respond adequately. It is a breach of procedural fairness if they cannot properly respond to allegations. Unfortunately, it may seem like these things with the University may be going backwards. PC has put together a paper entitled *Hit and Miss-Conduct*. It's still in draft – it's quite long. We are finding more and more examples of allegation notices that are problematic – we are focussing on things that we have noticed in volume. That paper will eventually be published. PC still trying to work out the best audience for the paper which will determine its format.
- DM: There has also been a focus on problematic faculty outcomes, particularly those related to false medical certificates.
- PC: There are some big issues with fraudulent documents with mainly Chinese students being caught up in scams. This has happened due to a combination of students not being aware of how things operated and the scam itself. We've noticed that the committees have been downgrading penalties. Most of the appeals have been downgraded to at least a suspension. Happy to see that because there were mitigating circumstances.

- EDR: What's been happening to the students who haven't appealed?
- PC: The first students who went through the process would've received the harsher penalty if they did not go through to the Ombudsman. Unfortunately, these students are still expelled whereas subsequent students with fewer mitigating circumstances have now received a downgrade in penalty on appeal. Unfortunately, there is not much that we can do but note it.

2.2 Legal case work

- RM: We have been quite busy. We're now receiving referrals, so this will be reflected in the stats. There seems to have been a spike in car accident related matters. Tenancy continues to outpace everything at a rapid rate. We are mainly being contacted for tenancy advice. There's been an increase in graduate students contacting us as well.
- EDR: What types of tenancy issues?
- RM: All types. A lot of subletting issues. There was an instance where the landlord had locked a student out of their house and when she approached us she was terrified. We advised the student to go to the police and ask STOP 1 for emergency accommodation. We also had students approach us about lease transfers by students not getting along with their housemates.
- EDR: Tell them not to rent to any of the commercial student providers of accommodation. Unilodge is shocking.
- PC: Might be good to look at a campaign against the worst offenders.
- RM: I've spoken to the lawyers at RMIT where they are finding the same issues. There might be an opportunity for a unified campaign about residential services. International Students just sign up for the accommodation offshore without having an opportunity to look at the accommodation and they get a nasty surprise when they turn up and see the reality.
- EMD: Long term the University will want to get organise temporary accommodation for international students. We're trying to get a we chat account, so we can communicate with international students, but the bureaucracy is difficult. It's been a 5-month process so far.
- RM: What we have noticed is that a lot of students are contacting us because of scams. International students are being targeted, particularly Chinese and Indian students.
- IB: For example, a fake authority figure contacts them and they're provided with some flimsy evidence that the person has been involved in criminal

behaviour or that their family has been involved in criminal behaviour and they are asked all amounts of money. It's a massive worldwide scam coming out of Taiwan. The problem is once students pay out the money it's very difficult to get back. Prevention is something we need to focus on.

- RM: I've been trying to get the word out there. We're presenting at the Clubs – anywhere we can get this information out to students through the Clubs, associations, Facebook groups. Prevention is the only way to stop it. The other one is fake consular officials or from the ATO that they'll be incarcerated. So, these scams are quite sophisticated. Fake ads online – giving money for tenancy online is another one.

2.3 Projects and initiatives

UMSU Advocacy Service:

- Mid-year review and planning afternoon
- PH: A student survey will be running in September to gain feedback about how the service is running. The advocacy service is reviewing how it worked in a team. Sometimes we need to streamline aspects. We haven't changed anything in the service model that was student facing. We've changed a few things, so we can cope better because the stats go up. We try to respond to students within 24 hours.
- DM: I've been on placement and made a video. Great feedback was given. We will be producing several videos.

Legal Service Financial Counsellor Pilot update

- VS: We've been concentrating on educational campaigns and individual case work matters. Some IT issues have hindered my progress.

3 Next Meeting

TBD

4 Close

2.45 pm

Membership:

Executive Officer & Chair: Phoebe Churches, Manager, Advocacy & Legal

2 representatives elected by and from the Education Committee;

2 representatives elected by and from the Welfare Committee;

2 representatives elected by and from the UMSU International Committee;

2 representatives from GSA;

Education (Academic Affairs) Officer(s);

Indigenous Officer(s);
Welfare Officer(s);
President, UMSU;
Secretary, UMSU;
President, UMSU International;
Vice-President (Education and Welfare), UMSU International; and
Members of the Student Representative Network.