



EXECUTIVE HALF YEAR REPORT

NAME	Chennoah Walford
POSITION	Equity Officer
REPORT PERIOD	1 January – 30th June 2015
HOURS WORKED	264.25 (235.7 hours required)

Reporting on Priority Goals:

The Victoria University Students' Association (VUWSA) Equity Officer is tasked with ensuring that all students have equal access to services, support, academic success and participation opportunities at Victoria University. The Equity Officer has a strict focus on welfare issues that affect students within Victoria and the University Community. They maintain close relationships and work alongside specific groups on campus including Māori, Pasifika, women, queer, international and students with disabilities, generally through the Rep Group structure, to ensure equity, access and support.

Goal 3: Equity and Access: To promote equity for disadvantaged students in access to and within the University.

Goal three is the core business of the Equity Officer. Helping to build a student voice, which reflects VUW's diversity, and empowering *all* students to navigate the labyrinth that is university, have been my core focuses for the first half of the year.

In 2012 the VUWSA Constitution underwent significant reform; specific representative positions on the executive were removed (i.e. Queer Officer and Women's Officer) and the duties were aggregated within a newly established Equity Officer position. The benefit of the change has been a more streamlined executive capable of making quicker governance decisions, but as a result, there has been an increased risk of losing the voice of representation groups. The Equity Officer has become a key link between the VUWSA Executive and representative groups such as CanDo, Women's Group, UniQ and the VUWSA International Students Association (V-ISA).

As the Equity Officer I've maintained close working relationships with these organisations and facilitated a two-way relationship that has assisted the

VUWSA Executive to make better-informed decisions, considering a more wide range of points of view. Using what tools I have available as an officer on the VUWSA Executive, I have supported representative groups in growing their organisations, and have worked hard to build relationships between the groups and VUWSA, which are mutually beneficial and sustainable. It has been an incredibly gratifying process

VUW hosts a diverse community of students. It is important that the Equity Officer retains strong connections with representative groups for meaningful and intersectional advancement of equity issues to occur. The Equity Officer must: foster strong, ongoing relationships between representative groups and VUWSA; promote the growth and sustainability of equity groups; advocate for the increased voice of equity groups within university; and regularly recognise that the mana equity groups have as the spokespeople for their own issues.

The strengthening of diverse, representative voices has always been one of my main goals at VUWSA, and for the first half of this year I've identified this as a key priority.

In order to do this I have:

(a) Met with and consulted with representative groups and attended executive meetings where appropriate:

By facilitating a two-way dialogue with the VUWSA Executive and the representative groups I've done two things: Firstly, I've helped broadcast the issues facing VUWSA as an organisation to our key stakeholders; and secondly, by feeding that voice back to the VUWSA Executive as a governance team we're able to make more considered decisions after robust debate.



(b) Maintained an active VUWSA presence at representative group events:

I have maintained a strong presence at UniQ meetings; I have attended numerous coffee catch ups for Women's Group, film screenings, and other events.

I believe it's important that members of the student executive are interacting with students at the grassroots, in order to do this been available to equity groups and attended all of their meetings where ever possible. This has mean I've helped out at events and tasks, including helping to clean the Women's Room and helping at the Women's Group stall at Clubs Week, as well as their Rape Crisis Fundraising effort.

(c) Written Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) between VUWSA and: CanDo; UniQ; Women's Group; and The VUWSA International Students' Association:

My vision for the MoUs was two fold: firstly, to acknowledge the ongoing importance of the relationships with these representative

groups to VUWSA; and secondly, to acknowledge the invaluable contribution representative groups make to the VUW student voice. This is the first time any formal relationship as outlined within the MoUs have ever existed; I hope they will contribute to building the profile of the groups, as well as support ongoing positive and constructive relationships.

(d) Administrated representative group funding applications:

Making sure representative groups are adequately resourced has been key priority for me in the first half of the year. As significant organisations, secure funding is necessary to make long-term funding decisions. I have supported representative groups to secure both general funding for those organisations to perform core business operations, but additionally, I have supported representative groups to secure one-off funding for executive weeks (i.e. Pride Week).

Goal 6: Public Issues: To be the critic and conscience of the University and society, by promoting discussion and action on issues concerning students.

Universities are required by S182 of the Education Act 1989 to fulfill their role as the critic and conscious of society. Furthermore, it's the role of students' associations to act as the critic and conscious of *that* critic and conscious.

The whole VUWSA Executive is responsible for acting as the watchdog of VUW a critical role I've filled to the best of my ability. As a democratically elected member of the VUWSA governance board I recognise that if my personal opinions must be penultimate to the best interests of the student body.

I also believe that the representative groups themselves are best placed to speak about their personal circumstances. I've done everything in my power to awahi and support representative groups to have their personal voices amplified. Some measurable duties include:

- (a)** An active contribution to the core Thursdays in Black group, which has been meeting weekly in an effort to restart the campaign against the rape and violence of women; a campaign with a strong kaupapa of the student union movement. The Thursdays in Black team is working towards combating these issues on campuses locally and nationally.
- (b)** Engaged in awareness days and events (i.e. Pink Shirt Day and the Love Parade).
- (c)** Provided constructive criticism and suggestions within VUWSA for ways we can better represent students and be more equitable generally.



- (d) Engaged with VUW staff on issues of equity, where I have seen improvements to be made and where I have been asked to do so by representative groups.



Aside from my work toward goals specifically connected to the Equity Officer role, I have also worked toward goals of the wider Executive including;

Goal 2: Student Support: To advocate for adequate financial support, income and welfare for students in order to remove barriers to education:

- (a) Wrote an article published on Stuff on the 90c rise in Student Living Costs.

Goal 4: Services: To provide quality, cost effective services for the benefit of members, and, where appropriate, students.

When I wasn't on VUWSA one of the main things I really appreciated was the services VUWSA provided. Because of this, I spent many of my hours this half year manning stalls and helping to run welfare initiatives.



- (a) Helped to carry out Flu Shot clinics run by the VUWSA Welfare Team and Student Health.
- (b) Helped to carry out Stress Free Study Weeks, including shifts at Te Aro, Pipitea and Kelburn, and facilitating a Contribution by CanDo in bringing Lego to Kelburn Campus.

Goal 5: Activities: To support sporting, social and cultural activities for and by members and students, particularly through Clubs.

This half year I put considerable effort into supporting the VUWSA Events and Campaign team during orientation:



- (a) By carrying out shifts at o-week events such as the Savage Gig, Toga Party, the VUWSA stall, and Pasifika Orientation.

Goal 8: Accountability: To ensure accountability to, and representation of, members

Student representation is important to me on a really practical level. There are always ways VUWSA can consult more, with both students in general and with key partner organisations. This half year I have:

- (a) Advocated for more VUWSA led student consultation at all levels.
- (b) Supported the VUWSA students forums on the University Council changes and attended VUW run forums.
- (c) Attended as a spectator, open sessions of the University Council.

General Tasks and Initiatives

1. Easter Egg Hunt

Over the easter break I organised an Easter Egg hunt for students stuck at uni studying over the easter break.



2. Flu Shot Campaign

During the VUWSA FluShot clinics a national campaign was run, to debunk the idea that those with preexisting medical conditions cannot get flu shots. I had my flu shot for the campaign as a person with asthma.

I have engaged in representation at many levels this half year, within the university, representative groups, VUWSA and nationally.

Representation:

1. CanDo:

Attended CanDo executive meetings, met with the president regularly, provided support for CanDo events and activities, created an MoU between VUWSA and CanDo, and acted as the organisation's treasurer.

2. UniQ:

Attended executive meetings, met with the president regularly, provided support for UniQ events and activities including attending Lunch Spaces, administrated funding applications for general admin and Pride Week and created a MoU between VUWSA and UniQ.

3. VUWSA Women's Group:

Chaired the Women's Group AGM, attended executive meetings, met with the president regularly, provided support for Women's events and activities, administrated funding applications for general admin and Women's Week and created a MoU between VUWSA and Women's Group.

4. VUWSA International Students' Association (V-ISA):

Met with the president regularly, provided support for V-ISA events and activities, including promotion, administrated funding applications for general admin, helped set up a bank account without V-ISA needing to become a registered club, and created a MoU between VUWSA and V-ISA.

5. VUWSA Student Equity and Diversity

Attended the committee and contributed papers and discussion. I look forward to facilitating the next committee meeting.

6. Fortnightly Executive Meetings

I attended and actively contributed to almost VUWSA executive meetings so far this year, except for one which clashed with an online class test.

7. Welfare Team Meetings

I attend these meetings, which occurred semi regularly, to make sure the Welfare Team was acting cohesively, and members were aware of and providing support for each other's work.

8. Thursdays In Black

I have attended almost weekly Thursdays in Black meetings and actively helped progress the campaign by contributing to and reviewing documents, brainstorming and planning.



9. New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA)

I attended a national executive meeting for NZUSA this year. I feel it is important for me to understand the complex tertiary landscape and where a national student voice sat within that structure. This has given me perspective to advance my own portfolio within VUWSA going forward.

10. NZUSA Tertiary Women New Zealand (TWNZ)/Formerly Tertiary Women's Focus Group (TWFG):

Since attending a national NZUSA Tertiary Women's Focus Group meeting at the end of last year I have maintained a close working relationship with the National Women's Rights Officer (NWRO). Some activities we have done together include: production of campaign documents, ongoing support and advice for activities, connection to an active network of activists.

Personal strengths and weaknesses

Strengths

- 1. Relationship management and interpersonal skills:** I have really enjoyed building strong relationships with CanDo, UniQ, V-ISA and the Women's Group. My interactions with these representative groups have been the most important and rewarding part of my job this year.
- 2. Assertiveness:** I have provided consistent and constructive contributions to the VUWSA Executive. As an officer of the association, I have dual duties to manage: the specific duties required by my portfolio, and the fiduciary duties required to VUWSA. My full and lively participation in the holistic business of the student association is to the healthy functioning of the organisation.

Weaknesses

- 1. Time management:** Balancing academic, social, and professional commitments is always difficult. I've personally found working on VUWSA activities in the evening the easiest way to manage my obligations, but on reflection, I've realised I need to make a concerted effort to align my work schedule with VUWSA office hours to better engage with the VUWSA team.
- 2. Finishing projects:** As a member of the VUWSA Executive I have access to resources which allow me to support students at VUW, and as someone who struggles to say no, I find it difficult to focus my energy on projects from start to finish. As the calendar year progresses more projects are starting before I'm satisfied older ones have finished. The next half of the year I am to be more focused, making sure I achieve each task I set out to do, no matter how small.

Overall Rating

Helping to pave distinct representative group identities (CanDo, Women's Group, V-ISA and UniQ) and building sustainable relationships between them and VUWSA a huge task with no set path as to how to achieve this. At times

I've worried if it is possible for me to make a tangible impact in the functioning representative groups as distinct and autonomous groups. I've often worried if this is the right approach.

However, although a lot of what I've done this year has been wrapped up in emailing and advice, I maintain the belief that no Equity Officer can meaningfully speak for the diverse equity issues at VUW. Because I believe my role should be about the empowerment of others to have their own voices heard, I feel I've made a positive impact at VUWSA.