



# EXECUTIVE HALF-YEAR REPORT



<b>NAME</b>	Joanna Li
<b>POSITION</b>	Engagement Vice President
<b>REPORT PERIOD</b>	Jan 1 <sup>st</sup> – July 12 <sup>th</sup>
<b>HOURS WORKED</b>	807
<b>HOURS REQUIRED</b>	560

## Introduction

Being VUWSA’s Engagement Vice President 2020 has been honestly one of the wildest rides of my life, but it’s also been one of the most transformational. I feel like I’ve learnt a lot and done a lot of growing.

This report details what I’ve been up to this year so far. It includes a lot of meetings (in person, and over Zoom!), a lot of emails, submission parties, being condescendingly talked down to by old white men, learning about what a leader means and how to build a team, and what kind of work, for me personally, not only fulfils me, but also sustains me. It has also been a lot of the rest of the executive yelling at me to learn how to ask for help and how to take a break/ not stay in the office too late. It’s been a lot of fun!



2020 has thrown a lot of curveballs at us so far, but I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else for the world. Bring on the second half of the year!

## Engagement VP's constitutional requirements

### **Goal 5: Activities**

- To support sporting, social and cultural activities for and by students; primarily through Clubs and Representative Groups.

### **Goal 6: Public Issues**

- To be the critic and conscience of the University and society, by promoting discussion and action on issues concerning students.

### **Goal 8: Accountability**

- To ensure accountability to, and representation of, members.

## Fundraiser for the Australian Bushfires

In January, I helped Tamatha Paul (current Wellington City Councilor) organise the fundraiser for the Australian Bushfires. I contacted the food-trucks, organised the floor plan in Civic Square, helped paint the signs for each stall, as well as the banner, and provided resourcing such as printing, cables, and I also aided with the volunteer scheduling. We ended up fundraising almost \$10,000, which was split across three causes (First Nations Fire Relief, WIRES Wildlife Rescue, and Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal).

## NZUSA Conference

I attended the NZUSA Conference at the beginning of February. It was great to be able to meet some of the other student executives from around the country, and learn about the Debt Free Futures campaign.

## Retreat

We had retreat in February as well, which served for some great team bonding time. It was also really good because it meant the Engagement Team could sit down and plan what we wanted for the year – namely, what we wanted to do with the 2020 General Elections (which I elaborate on further on in this report).



## O-Week 2020



Since mid-January, we've been planning for Orientation Week. This work included planning activation points for the executive to maximise engagement with the student community, sorting out the volunteers' roster for the night-time events, and the campus expos, as well as ensuring that a representative from VUWSA attended all of the welcomes for students.

I ensured that we had a consistent social media presence, in particular on Instagram Stories to promote our services during O-Week. I also organised the music playlist, and MCed the Welcome Festival for Halls of Residence on the Friday of O-Week, with Michael (our Welfare VP).

I attended all of the night-time events, most of the morning activation points, (Māori breakfasts, Pasifika breakfasts, Rainbow welcome, Refugee background welcome). This served as a great opportunity to meet our new students, learn about the services that the university provides, as well as spend some time actually getting out and talking about issues that students care about and their experiences, instead of just doing admin!





## Sex Week: The Sex Tape

Although Sex Week itself ended up being cancelled due to COVID-19, I was able to work with Julia and Charlie from Salient TV in the weeks leading up to it to produce the Sex Tape. The plan was to put a bed in the Hub, and get people to sit on the bed and answer a variety of questions. The questions ranged from spicy (“*What’s your favourite sex toy?*”) to informative (“*What’s the most important thing during sex?*”) to which most people answered either “good communication” or “getting consent”).

This was my first foray into a) sourcing a bedframe and mattress off Vic Deals, b) driving the VUWSA van to pick them both up, c) putting together a bed, and d) convincing random people in the Hub to participate in a slightly unconventional project, so it was a real experience, but SO much fun! I also worked with the Sexual Abuse Prevention Network (SAPN) to ensure that the video was all okay, and the messaging matched the values that we wanted to promote.

Big thanks to Julia and Charlie for all their work on it, it turned out AMAZING!!!!!! You can watch the Sex Tape here: <https://youtu.be/vVozCZbzah4>

## COVID-19

What kind of goddamn 2020 report would this be without a mention of good ol COVID?

COVID-19 started ramping up at the end of March. Once we went into Level 4 lockdown, most of our campaigns were put on hold as we turned our attention to more pressing issues both within the university, as well as wider student concerns.

## Social Media and Communications

At this point, our communications manager Hannah was on leave, for the foreseeable next four months, and we had Abby to fill her space. To give Abby some breathing space and settle into the role, I took over a lot of the social media side of things. This included:

- Condensing university emails into Facebook posts for readability.
- Making infographics on Canva summarising the changing situation, both according to announcements from the Ministry of Health, and the university.
- Updating the student community on what VUWSA was working on.
- Promoting different avenues of support that the university was providing (such as the Hardship Fund).

## Academic Concerns and Online Learning

Additionally, to support Taylah (Education Officer at the time), I also began attending the Vice-Provost Academic meetings with Deans and Associate Deans, to ensure that the transition from in-person, to online teaching was equitable for all. From the very beginning, we asked for two things from the university: consistency and communication. We were also conscious of stress-levels of students, concerns of students with disabilities, international students who may be doing online learning from different time zones, and students from different faculties who may find it more difficult to transition online than others. I also worked with Parminder (Equity Officer) to produce a resource of how to ensure that online learning was made accessible for all.



At the end of May, the University of Auckland and the University of Otago decided to apply a five-point grade increase to courses completed in the first half of the year. This led to students at VUW demanding the same. I provided some support (writing press releases, updating social media, condensing information into readable formats for the wider student community) to the members of the executive who were leading on this issue.

## Halls of Residence

At the end of April, the university decided to begin charging students for their rooms again, although they were still not allowed to return to the halls. This caused an uproar from the student community. I began to work with a group of first years in halls who had decided to conduct a Rent Strike in protest

of this. I also liaised with Tamatha Paul, Isabella Lenihan-Ikin, and various other groups and representatives to reverse this decision from the university.

This quickly became a national issue, with students from around New Zealand also coming forward to discuss their own experiences in halls of residence. It became evident that such issues were not one off, but instead stemmed from institutional issues in policy (or rather, the lack of policy), which had caused many problems in the past. Eventually, this led to the Inquiry into Student Accommodation, by the Education and Workforce Select Committee. I will discuss VUWSA's submission to this inquiry later on in this report.

## Wellington Student Volunteer Army (WSVA)

I was kept busy during Level 4 lockdown period with the work I was doing with the Wellington Student Volunteer Army as part of the organizing team. The WSVA completed errands for people who could not leave the house during lockdown, due to age or auto-immune disorder, and needed help for errands such as picking up medication or groceries. Eventually, we expanded our services to providing food parcels and free menstrual products as well, to alleviate financial pressure that COVID might have created.

The purpose of this initiative was to build community within Wellington – not simply to complete errands, but to build trust and connections, so that even in non-COVID times, people could ask for help when they needed it from people who lived nearby.



My responsibilities included:

- Ensuring that people have sufficient supplies to be able to carry out errands under COVID-19 health and safety guidelines (gloves, hand sanitiser, disinfectant spray, rubbish bags)
- Writing up proposals and submissions for funding, such as to the Ministry of Social Development, and managing the finances. We received a total of \$33,000 of funding!

- Manning the phone for people to be able to call in and make requests over the phone, if they did not access to the internet, or did not know how to navigate the submission form. I worked with Wellington City Council, and Wellington Region Emergency Management Office for this, as they often forwarded requests for help to me.
- Organising for VUWSA's menstrual products and community pantry services to be still made available through the WSVVA.
- Printing out flyers to advertise for this service.

Shoutout to the rest of the organizing team: Marlon Drake, Tamatha Paul, Raven Maeder, and Laura Jackson! Together, we mobilised over 600 volunteers, and completed over 200 requests for help, across Wellington, the Hutt Valley, and Porirua regions.

## 2020 General Elections campaign

At retreat, we decided that this campaign would be a two pronged campaign – one based on enrolling people to vote, and the other based on issues that we'd like students to think about when deciding who to vote for. We also brainstormed ideas of enrolling students that worked outside of the traditional bounds. This included: enrolling people at the weekend vegetable markets, enrolling people at gigs, and having enrollment parties.

We began our activations during OWeek, where we held sausage sizzles and asked students what issues they were most concerned about. In March, we then had our consulting potluck where we brought together the rep groups and talked about what change we'd like to see in the world, and how that would be influencing our choices of who to vote for in the 2020 General Elections. From these, we wrote up our policy demands, of what issues were important to students. These focused on four categories: mental health, cost of living and poverty, housing, and climate change.

The exec also debated whether it was important to take a stance on the two referendums that would be voted on this year. While VUWSA had already decided to take a stance on the Cannabis Legalisation and Control Bill (see the YES2020 section of this report), the issue of taking a stance on the End of Life Choice Act was more contentious. In the end, we decided to provide resources and educate, but not necessarily promote our vote for a certain way.





but also the specific nuances of the bill. You can watch a recording of this panel here: <https://youtu.be/y6vSDH5amTE>

I was also in charge of maintenance and updating the website (<https://www.yes2020.org/>). I updated the values-based messaging based off new research from JustSpeak, revamping the pledge page, and creating a resource page with different topics that discussions are likely to lead (such as justice, health, regulation, and economic benefits).

In the second half of the year, we hope to direct our attention to helping students have discussions with their communities. We will be working on values-based discussions and messaging, and creating discussion flowcharts to help them. Due to the uncertainty with COVID-19, it is likely that YES2020 will become a fully digital campaign. This means that our use of social media – namely Facebook and Instagram, will be more important than ever.

## Halls Committee

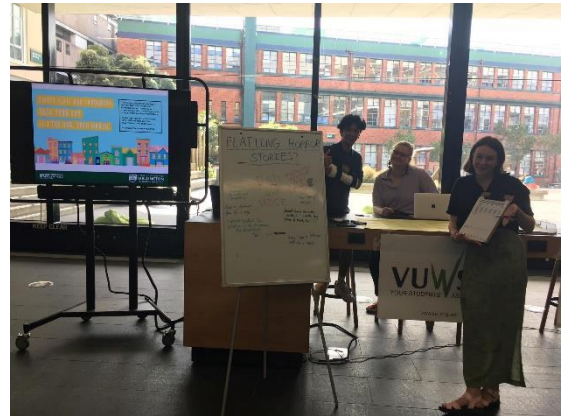
Michael, our Welfare VP and I decided this year that it would be good to revamp the Halls Committee, which was set up a few years ago, but neglected in 2019. Most noticeably, we wanted to move this committee back into the Welfare portfolio, so it became a group where issues within Halls could be raised and addressed. It would act primarily as a consulting group for VUWSA to feedback to the university, not a working group. We also hoped that it would provide students in halls of residence with a crash course in how the structures at university operated, so if an incident occurred or a complaint was made, they knew exactly how the university dealt with it, and where that complaint would go.

We updated the Terms of Reference for this committee, and made a proposal to Rainsforth Dix, the Director of Student and Campus Living. There are still several issues to iron out before we launch this. One of the biggest issues at the moment is that not all halls have a representation model already. This means that they don't have any way of deciding who within their residents will sit on the Halls Committee. We are working on a plan on how to fix this.

## Submissions

During the first half of the year, I worked on two key submissions: to the Residential Tenancies Act, and to the Inquiry into Student Accommodation. Both of these can be found on the VUWSA website.

Firstly, I supported Grace and Michael in writing their submission in favour of the amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act, as well as their oral submission to the Select Committee. I also ran a submission party for this, where we asked for students' flatting horror stories, and reasons why tighter legislation and protection was needed to ensure students had access to good housing.



I also wrote the submission to the Inquiry into Student Accommodation, with help from Erica, our advocate. This stemmed from the issues that arose in Halls during the COVID-19 period. In our submission, we included testimonies from students who had lived in halls and experiences from Residential Advisors. We also included VUWSA's historical experience of how issues within halls have been handled.

### **Stress Free Study Week/ Hand in Week**

Stress Free Study Week (SFSW) looked a little different this year, due to the university replacing exams with assessments, and to COVID health and safety precautions, we decided to only have fruit, cereal, coffee and tea available on a serve yourself basis during SFSW. Engagement was still high, which was good!

Other? Idk have some memes/ various photos from the year 😊

