Q2 2024 Political Representative Report

Liam Patrick White

Political Representative

Submitted: 26/06/24

Essential: 2,389

Total: 2,981

1. **General Duties of all Executive Officers** 
   1. **The appointed term for all OUSA Executive Officers shall commence from the 1st of January and will terminate on the 31st of December of that same year.**

Okay fantastic to note. It’s a bit late for me to comment on now. Put the dates in your calendar “31st of December, day I get fired.”

* 1. **Where reasonable, all Executive Officers are expected to assist as volunteers for OUSA events and functions, including, but not limited to:**

Yep.

* + 1. **Assisting at the OUSA Tent City and other activities during Summer School, Orientation and Re-Orientation; and;**

To the best of my knowledge... this isn’t overly relevant to Q2. Alongside other members of the Executive I did help man the executive table at the University Open Day. Although I would hardly describe this as a raging success, I think people were more interested in the mentos and noodles on offer than our smiling and chirpy faces.

* + 1. **Assisting with elections and referenda where appropriate.**

I attended all executive feedback meetings on the referendum and supported the Vice President where possible to deliver the referendum to students.

* 1. **It is expected that Executive Officers attend Executive meetings.**

I am a delight at executive meetings. I got told I asked good questions... I have yet to miss an executive meeting and am always prepped for meetings to the best of my ability.

* 1. **Where reasonable, all Executive Officers are to be available for national conferences, national and local campaigns, Executive training sessions and Executive planning sessions.**

At the beginning of the quarter, I attended the committee training workshop. In terms of Executive planning sessions, I scribed for our strategic planning meeting which set our values and goals as an executive. For national conferences and campaigns, I've been put in contact with Matthew Lee from Students for Fair Rent through the Residential Representative, further I have attended a preliminary meeting with the Coalition Against Fast-Track and will bring the question of OUSA membership before the executive at out next meeting.

* 1. **All Executive officers shall:**
     1. **Keep up to date with the Finance and Strategy Officer's Executive budget, bringing to the Finance and Strategy Officer any spending proposals, keeping track of their spending and ensuring they do not exceed budgeted expenditure;**

I do not have any current spending proposals. Maybe OUSA should buy Rob Roys... But hey that’s just one man’s opinion.

* + 1. **Educate themselves on needs and experiences relevant to historically marginalised demographic groups including intersectionality and promote and encourage all demographics to participate, where relevant, in clubs, societies, committees and OUSA events;**

Yes! I’m trying to build on my knowledge of what can be done to progress Māori, Pasifika and Queer concerns in my work within the OUSA and beyond.

* + 1. **Act in accordance with and uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi while exercising their duties;**

I think so! In my submission on the Fast-track bill I advocated for a written reference to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the appointment of iwi and hapū representatives on the panel of experts on fast-track applications to enhance Māori authority over resource consenting.

* + 1. **Where reasonable, attend events hosted by clubs related to historically marginalised demographic groups;**

I should do this! I’ve really been meaning to get to Te Rōpū Māori Reo Classes because I SIGNIFICANTLY need to improve my confidence, daily use and competence with my Reo.

* + 1. **Prioritise sustainability and minimization of environmental impacts in all aspects of their role and keep up to date with environmental issues;**

I also think I try to! Weirdly, I campaigned on cost-of-living and mental health outcomes but most of my political action has concerned environmental issues alongside the cost-of-living crisis in advocacy for lower bus fares for students and under-25s, support of an environmental fund valued at the two-million dollars in the ORC Long Term Plan.

* + 1. **Every quarter undertake five hours of voluntary service which contributes to the local community; and;**

I think I have but I can’t name anything that comes to mind.

* + 1. **Regularly check and respond to all communications.**

I’m pretty good on the response time. Upon sober reflection, I’m not sure I can quite live up to my 7-minute response time from last quarter, but I am trying.

1. **Duties of the Political Representative** 
   1. **13.1. Write a variety of submissions on behalf of the Association, including, but not limited to:**

Not to be rude, this is literally my job. You best believe I’ve written tons of submissions.

* + 1. **13.1.1. Student Related Local and national government documents:** 
       1. **Parliamentary bills;**

Fast-track Approvals Bill and Local Government Amendment Bill.

* + - 1. **Government projects/proposals;**

None have come up this quarter.

* + - 1. **Referenda;**

None have come up this quarter.

* + - 1. **Dunedin City Council Annual Plan; and;**

I assessed the DCC Annual Plan and decided that there was little relevant to students that would warrant a submission.

* + - 1. **Otago Regional Council Annual Plan;**

The ORC Long-term Plan kind of slayed and my submission on the LTP asked the ORC to do more.

* + - 1. **Otago Regional Council projects/proposals; and;**

I submitted on behalf of the OUSA to the Regional Council’s proposal to remove half-price fairs for under-25's. I coordinated a student lobbying effort, but the Council ultimately decided to withdraw funding for youth bus services.

* + - 1. **University of Otago reports, reviews, and consultative documents.**

I submitted on behalf of the OUSA to the University’s Free Speech Working Group which attempts to set a free speech policy to guide staff and students. I stressed the context dependent nature of free speech and the need to balance the University’s obligation to facilitate a safe and collegial environment and its need to act as an honest and sober critic to power and society.

* 1. **Submissions outlined in 13.1 must be:** 
     1. **Well researched, written in a clear and concise manner, and address the submission from the perspective representative of students;**

I don’t mean to pat myself on the back, but I think my submissions have been great this Quarter. While the submissions haven’t necessarily been “concise” they have been well researched and present the student opinion on these issues.

* + 1. **Written, where relevant, in conjunction with the Executive Officer whose role relates to the topic of the submission;**

Not really anyone relevant on submissions so far.

* + 1. **Where relevant, with input from Executive sub-committees which relate to the topic of the submission;**

Again, as far as I know there are no relevant sub-committees on our submissions.

* + 1. **Approved by the Executive before the submission is submitted; and;**

... I was operating under some tight time constraints this semester, particularly on the Fast-track approvals bill and was unable to get executive approval of the submission until after the fact however I did provide a rough summary of what the submission would entail. On our other submissions I got approval before submission. So ironically, I fast tracked the fast-track submission.

* + 1. **Relevant to the strategic plan.**

I think my submissions are relevant to the strategic plan both through the value of “advocacy” principles of “climate consciousness,” “Te Tiriti o Waitangi,” and strategic objectives of furthering the “student voice and advocacy,” and “student experience.”

* + 1. **Written in conjunction with NZUSA, where relevant and appropriate.**

I would love to if I could. I’ll be honest I’m not even sure if NZUSA is still a thing, but good God it needs to get back on its feet.

* 1. **Be a member of appropriate internal committees of the Association, including, but not limited to;**

I’m part of the Finance Expenditure and Strategy Committee.

* + 1. **Submissions Committee.**

I think I am the only member of the Submissions Committee. I find it more effective to bring the submission to the Executive Committee, talk through the general points of the submission I plan to make and then go away, write the submission and take executive feedback before getting it approval at an Executive meeting.

* 1. **Where relevant, assist other Otago student groups and members of the Association in writing submissions and support the student body and Clubs and Societies in political action at the Political Representative's discretion.**

I really tried to priorities meeting all the major student political groups around campus. I reached out to the Otago Campus Greens, Southern Young Labour, Otago University Young Nationals and Students for Environmental Action to see where they and OUSA could coordinate for the advocacy of student issues. Also just want to give a shout out to the Criminology Society for proactively starting a petition against the Government’s Youth Bootcamps policy.

I never actually got a response from the Young Nats but just wanted to let them know and out them publicly (in a report that no one reads) that I am still open to coordinating if they want!

* 1. **Chair meetings of the Submissions Committee ensuring that all committee members are advised of meeting times, that the agenda is prepared and circulated beforehand and ensuring that the standing orders of the committee are adhered to.**

Again, not really running with the Submissions committee.

* 1. **Take direction from the Submissions Committee on matters of local and national government.**

Again, not really running with the Submissions committee.

* 1. **Work in conjunction with the President and the Finance and Strategy Officer to raise student issues and lobby for improved outcomes on student issues with, including, but not limited to:**

I’ve been working closely with my more important exec members, but I think we could all probably admit that we need to do some more public lobbying efforts.

* + 1. **Ministers of Parliament;**

My emphasis in Q1 was directed at members of the government and my concerns around their current policies. Not to name any names (because legally I’m not sure if I can) but I got some good responses, who recognized the importance of students' issues and some who didn’t and called me “Laim” and “Luke.” My reaction to this is detailed below.

* + 1. **Local government officials;**

Cr Alan Somerville and Cr Elliot Weir and I worked together to ensure student consultation on the Regional Council’s Long Term-plan. I have also contacted staff at the DCC to support my advocacy efforts for next semester who are offering great technical expertise.

* + 1. **Spokespeople of national level political parties; and;**

Uhhhhhhh... I haven’t reached out to any political party Presidents if that’s what this is asking.

* + 1. **Relevant figures at the University of Otago.**

I think I’m doing this? I’m trying to push university officials to do more to address the state of student accommodation in Dunedin. To my surprise they have been extremely supportive and accommodating of my ideas. Also as previously mentioned I submitted a report on the University’s Free Speech Policy.

* 1. **Hold consultative student meetings to gain feedback on submissions and to inform the Executive.**

I did this for the Long-term plan and Fast-track Bill.

* 1. **Maintain a good working relationship with the Administrative Vice-President, proactively bringing issues of relevance to their attention, meeting on a regular basis.**

Emily is going to rip me out in the room for this. To anyone reading this outside the OUSA Exec, the reporting member leaves the room to allow the Executive to discuss the members quarterly report. So, the Executive team is going to read this part without me being there to defend myself, so I’m preemptively defending myself.

So, I assumed we didn’t need to meet. Like I thought it was just a constitutional requirement that we would put down on paper so we could say that we had organized to meet. Emily didn’t seem stressed that we weren’t meeting so I wasn’t either! Turns out I was wrong and needed to report to Emily regularly, and she had no idea what I was doing. Oops. But I will rectify this! I will over engage with Emily in Q3!

* 1. **In an election year coordinate politics week and election campaigns.**

Hehe! I have decided that there won’t be an OUSA politics week for students. I think OUSA (and by extension my) resources are better utilized by focusing on our advocacy efforts rather than facilitating a debate.

Also going to put this here so someone reminds me, please someone remind me to talk to the Critic about the possibility of writing a piece about “what has the Government done for you this year?”

I am trying to draft a three-year plan for OUSA’s political campaign for the current election cycle.

* 1. **Perform the general duties of all Executive Officers.**

Refer to previous section. Dummy.

* 1. **Where practical, work not less than ten hours per week.**

My average weekly hours for this quarter were 10.83. Then there was the crazy week during the Fast-track submission where I did 30 hours which was wild.

To be honest, I think the hour guides are dumb. If I have the motivation and desire to go over my hours who the goddamn hell is going to stop me. I love my job and it’s slowly becoming my whole personality. Nothing can stop me from delivering for Otago students.

1. **Attendance and Involvement in OUSA and University Committees**
   1. **OUSA**
      1. **Submissions Committee**

Again, the Submission Committee won’t be getting off the ground and I have no intention of reviving it. I am considering exploring alternative arrangements to the Submissions process at OUSA such as a broader political committee.

* + 1. **Finances, Expenditure and Strategy Committee**

I was also late to the first meeting and was not notified of the second, so I missed it. So, it’s not a great hit rate with me and FESC. However, despite this I’m still excited to engage with the committee and the full extent of its work.

* 1. **University**
     1. **Humanities Academic Committee**

Just generally trying to support the best school in the University to deliver academically sound and student-conscious papers. My focus has been trying to reduce unnecessary assessments and expectations on students.

* + 1. **Humanities Divisional Board**

Refer to previous answer.

* + 1. **Humanities Divisional Leadership Group**

Refer to previous answer.

* + 1. **Teaching and Timetabling Committee**

Dude, I love the Teaching and Timetabling Committee. It’s an interesting committee that sits high in the University management system and yet every time I go, I learn so much about the different parts of university operations and corporatism.

1. **Goals and Progress – Not essential reading**

In my last quarterly report, I identified the following three goals;

1. Fighting for students and the political issues that they care about: cost of living, the environment, mental health and supporting diversity throughout our community.
2. Attempting to reinvigorate passion in student politics.
3. Advocating for students at all levels of politics across all political parties.

I believe I have made good progress on the first goal. All submissions this year have had a significant emphasis on the environment and cost-of-living crisis. The OUSA has supported environmental protections both locally in the ORC’s Long-term plan and in its opposition of an unchecked Fast-track approvals process.

Further on the cost-of-living crisis, OUSA opposition to the removal of half-price bus fares for under 25s would have supported the environment and the wallets of many students who just want to commute on those beautiful Orbus Electric Buses. For the rest of my time as political rep, I want to focus on the state of student housing and accommodation in Dunedin. Too many students are paying too much for flats that fail to support students to support their ability to study and live healthily. The good people at the Students for Fair Rent movement have raised the issue of student accommodation and we should seek to champion their cause.

I still believe that mental health challenges are still significant for students and I’m hoping that easing the financial stress of the cost-of-living crisis and demonstrating that the OUSA is an organization that is both willing and able to provide support to those in need will ease the mental health crisis amongst Otago students.

On supporting diversity in our community, more work needs to be done. I have sought to keep Te Tiriti o Waitangi as a central focus in OUSA submissions this year, because of boring policy but more importantly because it establishes the Crowns obligations to Māori that it continuously fails to uphold. However, I can acknowledge that this is not good enough. I have not done enough to support diversity in our community and hope to improve on this in Quarter 3.

On my second goal, I underestimated how difficult this would be in a non-election year. My focus in Q2 was deeply policy based. However, this has meant that I have neglected my goal to reinvigorate passion for student politics. I think students have a lot to be upset about but lack the means to vocalize their concerns. My time as Political rep so far has shown me that the OUSA, thanks to its elected mandate from students, legacy and reputation can be that mouthpiece.

On goal three, to be honest I think we’ve stayed reasonably nonpartisan in our approach to politics this year. The OUSA will continue to advocate for smart, student focused policy regardless of who proposes it.

Weirdly, this job has made me way more optimistic on the value of grass roots politics? Which is weird considering pretty much everything I have suggested this year has been shot down. My previously political attitude would have been described with the adage “it’s the hope that kills you.” Yet even as Dunedin continues to get darker and drearier as we drag into winter, everyone at the OUSA continues to give it another go after another meeting gone wrong or political bullet fired from the government. Maybe it is the hope that kills you and I’ll choke on my own words. Ask me again in next report.