



ANU College of Law
The Australian National University
Canberra, ACT, 0200
<http://www.anulss.com>

20 April 2012

Submission to the Vice Chancellor on ANU Financial Repositioning

1. Background

On 26 March 2012, the Vice-Chancellor Professor Ian Young announced that a consultative process was to begin on a proposed \$40 million budget refinancing plan. The refinancing planning was centred around the reduction of \$25 million in staff expenses and \$15 million in the form of 'improved business practices'. The refinance is to be undertaken with a focus to increasing the ANU surplus and lowering the average staff wages expenses to the level of other Group of Eight Universities.¹

The ANU Law Students' Society (LSS) recognises the need to re-evaluate the University's financial direction and does not wish to make any comment in relation to the decision to reduce expenses. The object of this submission is to outline LSS concerns about the impact that implementation of the proposal may have on the College of Law, and as a result, the quality of legal education offered to law students at the ANU.

2. LSS Concerns

(a) Current Restrictions within the College of Law

Various circumstances particular to the College of Law raise concerns about the capacity of the College to maintain high quality teaching if subjected to significant cuts in academic staff.

- Enrolment numbers at the College have increased by 5% and 6% respectively over the last two years representing a significant increase on enrolment trends over the last six years. This demonstrates that the College of Law is one of the fastest growing colleges in terms of student numbers at the ANU. In this context of rapidly growing enrolment, the LSS is concerned about the capacity of the College to continue offering the same high standard of education if their staff levels were to be reduced.
- The recently high attrition rate of staff at the College of Law means that academic staff are already under immense pressure to balance teaching requirements with the university wide emphasis on research output. The LSS has considerable concerns about the ability of the

¹ ANU Strategy Review: <http://about.anu.edu.au/strategy-reviews/financial>.

College to maintain teaching standards whilst also maintaining appropriate staff workload if the number of academic staff is reduced.

- The current proposal suggests that as part of the initial phase of strategic reduction, cuts in staff expenses will occur as a percentage decrease in the total budget for “each College.”² The LSS is concerned about the broad application of budget cuts to all colleges, rather than targeted application to those in which staffing cuts are most necessary.
- The LSS is particularly concerned with the proposed “across the board” cuts should the strategic assessment fail. Indiscriminate staff reduction across all colleges has the potential to disproportionately impact the College of Law, which already operates at a low staff to student ratio.

(b) Electives and Tutorial Sizes

As a result of the circumstances outlined above, the LSS is concerned about several key areas which will potentially be affected by the proposed budget cuts.

- The LSS is concerned that reduction in available academic staff will result in the discontinuation of specialised elective courses which, given lower enrolment numbers, may no longer be sustainable under the proposed funding model. In particular, the LSS does not wish to see the merit of courses determined based upon financial considerations and the breadth and diversity of legal education at the ANU compromised.
- Tutorial class sizes within the College of Law are already considerably larger than those in other faculties and reduction in academic staff has the potential to further contribute to this problem. Tutorials provide the most direct means of interaction between staff and students and are integral in providing the opportunity for students to clarify, discuss and consolidate their learning. The LSS is concerned that any increase in tutorial class sizes has the potential to undermine the function of tutorials and the level of academic support offered to students.

Ultimately it is the hope of the LSS that the interests of students and particular circumstances of each College will be prime considerations in the implementation of the proposed budget cuts.



Chris Chynoweth
President
ANU Law Students' Society
e: lss@anu.edu.au
m: 0416 281 313



Antonija Kurbalija
Vice-President, Education
ANU Law Students' Society
e: lsseducation@anu.edu.au
m: 0402 719 838

² ANU Strategy Review: <http://about.anu.edu.au/strategy-reviews/financial>.