

Interaction Protocols for MSA Staff and Elected Officials

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1. Purpose

- 1.1. Good governance and effective service delivery is dependent on the quality and effectiveness of the relationship between elected office bearers and staff of MSA. It requires a thorough understanding and adherence to the roles and responsibilities of elected officials and staff.

- 1.2. There are four key principles informing this policy:
 - a) Monash Students Association (MSA) believes that students should control student affairs
 - b) MSA aims to provide MSA workplace participants with a satisfying and safe workplace
 - c) MSA staff and elected officials must work together co-operatively to ensure that MSA provides active and effective representation, services and support to students
 - d) MSA staff will work with elected officials in a way which fosters elected officials' pride and personal satisfaction in their own work

2. Application of this policy

- 2.1. This policy applies to the following persons, collectively referred to in this policy as 'workplace participants':
 - a) all prospective and current full-time, part-time and casual employees of MSA;
 - b) all volunteers engaged by MSA or its associated entities;
 - c) all agents and contractors engaged from time to time by MSA
 - d) all office bearers and members of MSA bodies
- 2.2. This policy is not restricted to the workplace or work hours. The obligations in this policy are also applicable to any work related events or functions. A "work related event or function" means any event or function that is connected to MSA. These may include, for example:
 - a) on-campus MSA events,
 - b) conferences,
 - c) work lunches,
 - d) Christmas parties.
- 2.3. In relation to employees who are covered by the MSA Enterprise Agreement; where there is an inconsistency between this document and the MSA Enterprise Agreement, the terms of the Enterprise Agreement are to take precedence to the extent of the inconsistency.

3. Definitions

- 3.1. Elected officials shall mean office-bearers and members of MSA bodies
- 3.2. Staff shall mean all current full-time, part-time and casual employees of MSA and any agents or contractors engaged from time to time by MSA
- 3.3. MSC shall mean Monash Student Council

4. General Obligations

- 4.1. MSA acknowledges its general duty to provide and maintain for its staff, so far as practicable, a working environment that is safe and without health risks
- 4.2. Staff employed by MSA acknowledge that each staff member must take reasonable care of their own safety and the health and safety of others and must also cooperate with their supervisor and manager in respect of any action taken by MSA to comply with its obligations outlined above

- 4.3. MSA elected officials acknowledge that, in working with MSA staff to provide effective representation, services and support to students, they have an obligation to facilitate compliance with the responsibilities of MSA and its staff with regard to the provision of a working environment that is safe and without health risks

5. Reporting Lines, Directions and Workloads

5.1. General Comments

- 5.1.1. The Executive Officer, MSA is employed by the MSA to lead and direct the staff of MSA. Therefore elected officials primary point of communication should be through the Executive Officer, MSA.
- 5.1.2. Contact with other staff shall be in accordance with these protocols and other relevant MSA policies and procedures.
- 5.1.3. MSA staff are given direction only by other MSA staff (that is, by managers or supervisors). Elected officials provide directions to staff through the Executive Officer, MSA
- 5.1.4. However, some MSA staff work closely with elected officials, whether it be continually throughout their term by virtue of their role, or during a temporary period (e.g. during a major event or campaign), and elected officials may request that certain MSA staff undertake work for them on a day to day basis. For the most part this negotiation process should be very straightforward; however, where it is not working MSA staff and elected officials should refer to sections 10 & 11 of this document on the process for resolving problems
- 5.1.5. Sometimes there are too many tasks and not enough staffing hours. In this situation, MSA staff may need to consult their supervisor before accepting a job requested by an elected official. MSA staff and elected officials should try and work out a solution together, and refer the matter to Executive Officer, MSA or President, MSA if necessary

5.2. Expectations

- 5.2.1. All communication between elected officials and staff is expected to be respectful, courteous and professional.
- 5.2.2. MSA staff and elected officials who will be working closely together should meet and discuss how their relationship will work when they commence their respective positions
- 5.2.3. This initial meeting might include discussion of:
- a) What times both MSA staff and elected officials are available. This may include any long periods when either may be very busy or on leave
 - b) How often they should meet, whether regularly and/or on an ad hoc basis
 - c) Whether there are any ongoing projects or commitments initiated by the previous elected official

- d) What kinds of activities or projects the elected official may be interested in pursuing
 - e) The amount and kind of work the MSA staff member has previously done and is able to complete
 - f) What types of decisions the elected official would prefer to make and those they are happy to devolve to MSA staff
 - g) Whether the elected official is happy for MSA staff to engage directly with the University. This may include meeting with University staff with or without the elected official's prior knowledge
- 5.2.4. Except for the Executive officer, MSA, MSA staff may only be given formal directions by their direct supervisor or Executive Officer, MSA
- 5.2.5. Elected officials may request relevant MSA staff to perform specific tasks on a day to day basis. MSA staff will be as flexible as possible and will try and meet all reasonable requests
- 5.2.6. Where requests for performing tasks cannot be met by a MSA staff member, they may either try to negotiate a compromise or, if they judge that will unlikely succeed, discuss the matter with their supervisor
- 5.2.7. If elected officials are unhappy with the amount of work being provided to their area by MSA staff they should raise this with the President, MSA or Executive Officer, MSA

6. Decision Making

6.1. General Comments

- 6.1.1. A number of issues can arise in decision making processes that involve elected officials and MSA staff. For example, there can sometimes be issues about who has 'ownership' of an event, publication or program. These issues can be particularly important when an elected official changes part-way through a project

6.2. Expectations

- 6.2.1. MSA staff would only make a decision against the stated wish of the relevant elected official in rare circumstances, that is:
- a) If MSA staff are following a binding decision by an MSA body, pursuant to the MSA Constitution;
 - b) If there are legal obligations preventing MSA staff from completing the request; or
 - c) If there are other exceptional circumstances which the MSA staff member has discussed with their supervisor, in consultation with the President, MSA
- 6.2.2. MSA staff who have put a lot of work into a project or program should have their opinions on the project or program taken seriously by the relevant elected official

- 6.2.3. Elected officials should be aware that their predecessors may have had very different requirements or expectations of MSA staff members
- 6.2.4. When assuming decision making responsibilities after a project has commenced, elected officials should be aware that their predecessors may have had a very different requirements or expectations of MSA staff members. If elected officials wish to significantly change a project they should take the following into account:
 - a) That decisions they make about the direction of a project or the amount of MSA staff time spent on the project may have implications for other existing projects or work
 - b) That they must take some responsibility for any changes to MSA staff morale if work already done is to be discarded
 - c) That they may have to report to MSC and/or other bodies before making changes
- 6.2.5. Wherever possible, when a MSA staff members and elected official begin working together significantly on a project, program or series of things, responsibility for decision making should be negotiated between the staff member and elected official
- 6.2.6. Elected officials who do not meet reasonable deadlines for consultation cannot expect to make final decisions on organising programs or projects

7. Representation & Political Activity

7.1. Expectations:

- 7.1.1. MSA staff are expected to provide professional advice to elected officials.
- 7.1.2. MSA staff are expected not to lobby elected officials or other participants in MSA student political processes.
- 7.1.3. MSA staff should not participate in or work to influence MSA election nominations, MSA electoral campaigns or the elections of bodies of which MSA is a member (except where the election is for a MSA staff representative).
- 7.1.4. Sections 7.1.2 and 7.1.3 shall not apply to MSA staff, who are not employed in a full-time capacity and are students of the University, as per the MSA Constitution.

8. Personal Affiliations

8.1. General comments:

- 8.1.1. Affiliations or alignments may develop between elected officials and MSA staff. These affiliations, alignments or relationships may be:
 - a) political;
 - b) social;
 - c) romantic or sexual;
 - d) gender-based;
 - e) family;
 - f) cultural;
 - g) academic; or,
 - h) a mixture of the above

- 8.1.2. There are issues for the organisation and the individual(s) in these affiliations, alignments and relationships. Key issues are:
- a) power imbalance between the people in the relationship;
 - b) favouritism and preferential treatment, whether actual or perceived;
 - c) conflicts of interest, whether potential or actual;
 - d) confidentiality;
 - e) exclusion: work relationships and work practices are problematic if they exclude others; and,
 - f) privacy

8.2. Expectations:

- 8.3. MSA staff and elected officials in personal relationships, affiliations or alignments should be aware of the key issues listed above, and take those issues into account in their work.
- 8.4. MSA staff and elected officials are entitled to privacy in relation to romantic relationships, unless the relationship becomes problematic or there is a need for a declaration of conflict of interest.

9. Accountability

- 9.1. MSA staff are accountable for observing this policy through their supervisor to the Executive Officer, MSA.
- 9.2. Elected officials are accountable to MSC for observing this policy.

10. Process for dealing with problems – where initiated by MSA staff

- 10.1. If a MSA staff member is in doubt about how to work with a particular elected official or how the relationship between themselves and an elected official should operate, they should consult their supervisor in the first instance.
- 10.2. If a MSA staff member finds that a request from an elected official conflicts with requests from other elected officials or from their supervisor, and the MSA staff member can't resolve the problem, then the MSA staff member should seek advice from their supervisor.
- 10.3. The supervisor will attempt to resolve the issue, consulting the Executive Officer, MSA where necessary. Where necessary the supervisor may refer the matter to the Executive Officer, MSA for resolution.
- 10.4. It is expected that MSA staff members will occasionally disagree with elected officials or with MSA policy, for instance on operational, political or ideological matters. However, if a MSA staff member finds themselves in significant conflict with an elected official then the MSA staff member should approach their supervisor.

11. Process for dealing with problems – where initiated by students

- 11.1. If an elected official is having difficulties establishing a satisfactory working relationship with a MSA staff member, or is concerned about the performance of a MSA staff member, then:
 - a) they should confidentially raise their concern with the President, MSA or Executive Officer, MSA;
 - b) if the matter has been raised with the Executive Officer, MSA, the Executive Officer, MSA will seek to resolve the matter;
 - c) if the matter has been raised with the President, then the President should seek to resolve the matter, consulting the Executive Officer, MSA where suitable
- 11.2. no elected official should raise a criticism of individual MSA staff performance in a formally constituted ex camera MSA meeting
- 11.3. Where an elected official believes that a MSA staff member with whom they work is not following this protocol, or the elected official is unable to receive sufficient MSA staff support due to workload allocation, they should raise this with the Executive Officer, MSA and/or the President, MSA.

12. Dispute Resolution Procedure

- 12.1. Where either a MSA staff member or an elected official believes that these protocols have been breached, a complaint should be lodged as per the Complaints Handling Procedure.

13. Related Policies and Procedures

Code of Conduct
Complaints Handling Procedure

14. Version History

Current Version

Finance/Risk/Governance

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MSC Approval: 5/16; 28/4/2106

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Prior Versions

1. MSC Approval: 14/13; 25/10/2013