

## Joint Statement on the WAM Adjustment Campaign

To the 20,190 students who have signed our petition for the WAM Adjustment Campaign, thank you.

We are incredibly grateful to everyone who added their voice to this campaign, provided testimonials, and shared the petition with their friends. We recognise the difficult time this campaign was placed in, and we thank everyone for their immense efforts.

To the many clubs and societies who have supported the campaign, thank you so much for using your platforms to raise awareness. We could not have done this without you!

We would like to thank you for your patience at what is a very stressful time for many students. We have been engaged in regular meetings with the Chancellery and Academic Board to advocate for these issues over the past month. Our representatives also spoke at the Academic Board to deliver these concerns, and the need for them to be holistically addressed, before the wider academic community.

That over 20,000 students signed our petition and engaged with the campaign reflected an urgent need for action.

Today, we would like to provide an update on the campaign, to talk about our actions, the University's response, and future steps.

### Our Rationale for this Campaign:

Over the semester, we received emails from students expressing their concerns if the University would implement a similar WAM adjustment policy as last year. During our “**Extension of Library Hours**” Campaign, a large number of students submitted further concerns about the WAM policy. After the lockdown announcement, a surge in those inquiries indicated that this may be a **concern shared by the wider student community**.

In response, student representatives from UMSU Education, UMSU International, and Graduate Student Association (GSA) launched a campaign to extend the WAM Adjustment Policy into Semester 1, 2021. To make sure that we reached a broad audience, we created a **video, a petition and a detailed public report** ([tinyurl.com/WAMreport2021](https://tinyurl.com/WAMreport2021)).

## Our Rationale for this Campaign (cont'd):

The report documents the **central role of WAM in students' education**, and consequently, their **well-being**. As part of the report's creation, we also collected student testimonials that conveyed adverse experiences in the University's wellbeing services. The report also outlined the current grade adjustment policies implemented at **Monash and La Trobe**, and the **barriers students experience in accessing support services**. We made a series of recommendations for a more equitable WAM Adjustment Policy, where grades lower than a students' current WAM are not counted in WAM calculation.

The petition was launched to understand the depth of our student community's concerns and share their collective voices with the University. Earlier this year, GSA conducted a subject cancellation survey which highlighted a number of student concerns about the **quality of online education** and **uncertainty around availability and cancellation of subjects**. Students also felt that the reduction in subjects may impact their ability to learn necessary skills and negatively impact their career goals.

In May 2021, there was a 35.9% increase in CAPS appointments from the same time last year, highlighting an **exacerbation of our students' well-being** as a result of the long-lasting effects of the pandemic beyond the duration of a lockdown. Furthermore, students applying for ongoing consideration with the University's Equity and Disability services had to wait for over a month before even accessing an equity advisor.

We also wanted to ensure that the University did not ignore the **experiences of our international students**, who have faced an especially difficult semester. They are stranded in their home countries, and have endured far worse during the pandemic, while balancing academic, emotional and financial stressors. When calling CAPS, they must contend with inaccessible appointments that can only be booked 24 hours in advance and are often overbooked. Those overseas must wake up at irregular hours to find a counselling appointment.

During the campaign, student testimonials revealed that Australian psychologists were **unable to provide tele-health services to our offshore international students** due to regulatory and legislative restrictions. Crucially, this had not been made transparent by the University, nor were any steps taken to resolve this. These findings showed that our **overseas students were often fundamentally disconnected** from university support services.

## Actions Following the Campaign and the University's Response:

Over 20,000 students signed the petition. We then approached the university and argued that there was a structural failing in the University's approach to support services.

Through our discussions, the University indicated that the "WAM adjustment policies in 2020 were primarily for the transition in teaching delivery services rather than the well-being of our students." Although the University acknowledges that the lockdown disrupted students' learning, the university has **unfairly dismissed our call to continue the WAM Adjustment policy** in Semester 1, 2021.

We strongly disagreed with this decision. We argued that **students are important stakeholders** at this university. When over 20,000 students sign a petition, it is these stakeholders that should guide the conversation.

Despite all this, the university is refusing to review its position. It is disappointing that the **collective voices of over 20,000 students meant so little** to the University. On an issue as crucial as this, the University chose to **sideline students in their decision making process**.

Nevertheless, our campaign has made the University take **significant action to address student wellbeing**.

The University has finally conceded that there are significant gaps in the delivery of services such as CAPS and SEDS, especially for our international students. They have recognised the need to holistically address students' well-being. They have further recognised the issues with meeting demand during busy periods and the barriers facing Australian psychologists serving our international students.

As such, the University has committed to

- Reviewing the current **CAPS** system, and move to **expand its services** to adapt to the increased needs of our students
- Exploring options to **compensate for inadequate psychological services** to offshore international students
- Developing an integrated wellbeing framework, which recognises the **relationship between mental health and academic outcomes**.

Student representatives from UMSU, UMSU INTL and GSA will ensure that students are consulted at every stage of development for this framework. The University has indicated that this framework will rely on evidence-based studies and reports like the *Towards a Health Promoting University* report, Orygen Mental Health Framework for Universities and CSHE's Framework for Promoting Student Mental Wellbeing in Universities.

We are currently working with the university to track progress on these issues. We will continue to hold them to account, to ensure they deliver for the most vulnerable in our student community.

We understand that this news may come as a disappointment to many of you. We are extremely frustrated at the University as well. Nevertheless, the **efforts of the student community** directly led the University to **re-evaluate structural flaws** in their current wellbeing and support services. This will **help thousands of students** in accessing these services, both in the near future and in coming years.

However, more must be done. We as student representatives will **continue to fight for a more equitable learning environment**, regardless of the challenges that come in Semester Two. We have represented the voice that you have shared with the University, and we owe it to the student community to keep on fighting with you. The campaign to put **students' needs first** has not ended, and we will use this moment to continue to push the University to uphold its commitments to students.

Once again, **thank you** to every single student who signed the petition, raised awareness of it through your social circles and clubs, and shared your testimonials with us. We cannot overstate our gratitude at such overwhelming support for amplifying the voices of our student community. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us individually if you have any suggestions or concerns.

Thank you so much for your contributions, your patience, and your trust. Take care and stay safe.

Kind regards,

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