

Josh Polak

General Secretary Election Platform

About Me

I am a fourth year Law and Political Science student. For the first 3 years of uni I lived at Fenner Hall where I was an SR for the last year. Whilst I have always been interested in ANUSA since first year, it was only this year that I decided to really get involved by running and ultimately becoming Secretary of Clubs Council.

Why I want to do the role

Anybody that knows me will immediately tell you that I'm a true Governance nerd. I believe I have the knowledge, skills and interests to ensure ANUSA's processes are fair, understandable and transparent. The simple truth is that I want to do a good job because I enjoy this type of work.

Past Gen Sec candidates have always reinforced the notion that ANUSA is not accessible to the wider student body. Despite many pledges ANUSA has often failed to engage the wider student body, this is clearly demonstrated by voting turnout. Do I pretend I know how to fix this, no. What I will do is ensure the Association continues to operate smoothly and remains open for those that choose to engage. After all everyone that engages in ANUSA chooses to, we have to make that choice as easy as possible. I believe my platform implements some realistic measures to increase engagement.

I am not someone that wants to embark on ground-breaking reforms, I do not want to re-write the Constitution. Reforms and constant review are of course good things. But 2022 will be the first year where the recent changes to the Executive structure take effect, it is important that the organisation gets those things right before we move on. Reform should never be a set and forget process.

My Experience

Being Secretary on Clubs Council has really been a crash course in how ANUSA operates. Being Secretary has meant I have engaged and read the Constitution multiple times. I have convened meetings, written minutes and interpretations. I have provided advice to other members of CCE about how they correctly go about performing their roles. I have worked with the standing orders and have chaired meetings. These things are at the core of what a Gen Sec does.

Platform

My platform will be outlined in 2 areas, Meetings and Governance. A Gen Sec platform should outline a candidate's qualifications and the style they will go about performing this role. I hope my platform provides some insight into how I will go about performing the role.

Summary

Accountability

- Introduce a Gen Rep question time at all SRCs
- Capitalise on O-Week engagement by running an introduction to ANUSA Meetings and how you can get involved.
- Ensure appointments and resignations are properly tracked and reported
- Improved tracking of meeting attendance and making this publicly available
- I will interpret the Constitution according to the rules and without a predetermined outcome.

Accessibility

- Improve how hybrid meetings operate
- Introduce a polling system to speed up voting
- Re-introduce live streaming of meetings
- Improve the way meetings notices are communicated including via a mass e-mail
- Run a training session for elected ANUSA Members guiding them through how meetings work and associated standing orders

Consultation

- Enshrine a Governance Committee in the Constitution with a greater scope and with the ability to review the implementation of past reforms
- Involve General Representatives and non-SRC members in Governance changes through the Governance Committee
- Open a feedback system to review the how recent structural reforms are being implemented

Meetings of the Association

Role of Chair

The role of chair demands impartiality. As General Secretary, being impartial whilst chairing meetings will be my number one priority. The rules should apply to everyone equally. The chair should, where possible, ensure all those who wish to speak be given the opportunity in a safe environment. Whilst chairing I will ensure everyone involved is reminded to be respectful towards others. Meetings should be a place of robust debate, but it should also be respectful for all involved. There is a balance to be struck here.

The chair should also have a competent understanding of the standing orders. During my time as CCE Secretary I have used and applied the standing orders over several meetings. I also have the knowledge over why the standing orders are the way they are. I will discuss standing orders more below.

Communication of meetings

ANUSA Meetings are open to all but in the past the organisation has faced challenges effectively communicating when meetings are held. Whilst student media has an important role here unfortunately, they tend to report on what happened in a meeting that is already over. To improve communication of ANUSA meetings I propose to send out all meeting notices and agenda links via mass e-mail in the same way the weekly ANUSA update is sent. I will do this by working with the ANUSA Admin team to make these notices more visually engaging through improved graphics. A mass e-mail will engage more students who don't use or regularly check Facebook.

Facebook however does have an important role in meeting communication. Unfortunately, in the past ANUSA meetings have been poorly communicated via Facebook on pages such as Schmidtposting. As Gen Sec I will communicate ANUSA Meetings regularly via such channels.

The future of hybrid meetings

There is no doubt the pandemic has changed the way we communicate with people and how we work. Indeed, last year all ANUSA's meetings were forced online and they have been again this year due to the current lockdown. We have all learnt how to use Zoom and it has provided us with a new way of facilitating meetings. However, most agree that in-person meetings offer a far more personalised and engaging experience. Throughout this year ANUSA has trailed in returning to the in-person world especially when it comes to meetings. In-person meetings improve accountability for ANUSA exec members. Nevertheless, platforms such as Zoom also offer an incredible opportunity to engage some who may never have come to ANUSA meetings in-person. Furthermore, the pandemic has meant that for some meeting in-person is simply impossible and sometimes lockdowns may prevent in-person meetings completely.

As a result, I envisage that ANUSA meetings will always have a hybrid element going forward. The issue then moves to how to optimise the hybrid format. Using the Graneek Room in Chifley Library is an excellent start, but I believe ANUSA can further. The Graneek Room works for SRCs and CRCs however, ANUSA should return to using lecture theatres for the AGM and OGMs. As Gen Sec I will work with ITS to find a room where we can integrate the room audio and visual software with Zoom. Doing this will allow Zoom participants to have a video feed of what's occurring. If this fails, I will attempt to invest in a camera to permit a video stream.

I will also work to implement a new polling system at meetings, this will improve the current situation of the gen sec being forced to count Zoom hands which is slow and may result in inaccuracies. A polling system will help to speed up meetings as well as allow confidential votes when required.

Live Streaming and recording

The pandemic has also meant student media has stopped live streaming ANUSA meetings. Live streaming has two major benefits first, they assist in engaging a wider audience and second, they provide a critical record of proceedings. I have used ANU Observer videos to work out what has happened in past Clubs Council Meetings.

As Gen Sec I will work to restore this important component. I envisage that live streaming will return via student media, or it may end up being the case that ANUSA will live stream meetings in-house. I will also work to upload the recordings to the ANUSA website, a bit like Council meetings. If meetings must be held completely on Zoom, they will also be uploaded to the website. Uploading to the ANUSA website is important because not everyone uses Facebook.

Clearly, lockdowns are still around. A lot of these meetings will have to be conducted solely on Zoom when a lockdown is imposed. Nonetheless, measures such as implementing a polling system as well as live streaming zoom meetings and uploading those recordings can still be done for online meetings.

Gen Rep Question Time

General Representative reports provide an important to keep Gen Reps accountable. However, SRC should go further to increase Gen Rep accountability. As Gen Sec I will move to introduce Gen Rep Question Time. This will be a new agenda item where anyone can ask any Gen Rep about their role or projects that they are currently working on.

Standing Orders

The standing orders are a complex area of ANUSA meetings; they stem from the rules of parliamentary procedure, which themselves are adapted from rules made in the 1500s. Whilst the standing orders are sometimes confusing, they are important in ensuring meetings move forward through the agenda. Standing Orders also set out the rules of behaviour and expectations of participants. For these reasons they are critical to have in meetings. I have an extensive knowledge of parliamentary procedure thus, I have an appreciation of why the rules are the way they are. I will ensure they are applied correctly. Nonetheless, they also require some reform. As CCE Secretary I have been working with the current Gen Sec to implement reforms especially in how they relate to Club's Council. I hope to continue these reforms by working with interested parties to make important reforms via the Governance Committee (see more below).

Training SRC Members

Many SRC members are new to ANUSA's processes and meetings. I have just described the complexities of the standing orders and the simple fact is we can't have an effective ANUSA unless everyone knows how the rules work. That's why as Gen Sec I will run an induction session for SRC members on the ins and outs of standing orders and their reporting obligations.

O-Week Engagement Capitalisation

Being a new student can be an extremely overwhelming experience, not knowing who is who or what is what. Most first years only get a basic idea of what ANUSA does, they often don't realise they can get involved and even if they do, they don't know how. O-Week sees the most engagement in ANUSA generally. To capitalise on this, I will run info sessions on the different types of ANUSA meetings and groups and how you can get involved. This will ensure that interested student feel empowered to get involve.

Governance of the Association

Governance Working Group Enshrinement and Reform

Over the years the SRC has established working groups on an ad hoc basis. This ultimately results in some groups existing intermittently when they should really exist permanently. To solve this, I propose to implement two main reforms. The first is to permanently enshrine the Governance Working Group in the Constitution as a Committee of the Association and the second is to formalise how such a group should be created.

A Governance Committee is needed permanently because it is vital that there be a perpetual body that takes charge of governance reviews and consultations. As Gen Sec I will also move to expand the scope and structure of a Governance Committee to not only propose and examine reforms but to also review existing processes and how new constitutional changes are implemented. The Governance Committee will be charged with investigating changes to ANUSA's Constitution and Regulations, this means the Committee will also review elections. The Committee thus, will be the place where people can provide reform ideas and it will also be the central place where consultation on proposed changes will occur.

The Committee will consist of a currently undetermined number of members some of which will be General Representatives, and some will be other non-SRC students. The Gen Sec will act as chair. Non-committee members will be encouraged to make contributions and give input.

(I understand there are plans to enshrine the current Governance Working Group in the Constitution. If this occurs, I will evaluate its scope and move to expand it by implementing my vision above.)

Review will be especially important in 2022 because it will be the first year of the expanded Executive. The Governance Committee will be the central location where interested parties can take reform ideas. Ideally it should become the norm that any proposed changes should be taken through the Governance Committee before they are moved at a General Meeting.

A permanent committee will also work to improve engagement in ANUSA processes because non-ANUSA members will sit on the committee.

Working Group Formalisation

When it becomes desirable to establish a new temporary working group there is no formalised framework to do this. If elected I will propose to amend the Constitution to outline the formal process as to how one goes about establishing a working group. The amendment will make clear how a working group should be established and what needs to be specified.

Interpretations

Being CCE Secretary has meant that I have become very familiar with how interpretations are made. At times there can be pressure to simply interpret a provision in a way that achieves a predetermined aim or outcome. To perform interpretations in this way is contrary to good governance practices and undermines the need to have clear and concise governance documentation. As Gen Sec I will conduct rule-based interpretations, they should be conducted according to the purposive rules of achieving business efficacy, but that must be always done in the context of what the words actually say. When I have interpreted Clubs Council policy, I can't tell you where I'll end up because I must give the words of the policy their intended meaning. Making interpretations in this way also reinforces the impartiality of the Gen Sec because it will ensure the Constitution and Regulations are not interpreted in a way that favours one group over another.

Tracking appointments, resignations and meeting attendance

In the past it can be difficult, without consulting the minutes, for the wider student body to track who has been appointed to certain positions such as working groups. Furthermore, resignations are often not widely reported publicly. I plan to fix this by having a publicly available register of appointments which are updated regularly to reflect changes. If someone resigns the register would not provide reasons for why someone resigned just that it has occurred. This would replace the 'Your Representatives' page on the ANUSA and include photos of all elected representatives and people appointed to positions. The page would allow anyone interested to see who is currently in a position, when their terms commence and if they were appointed because of a casual vacancy. This will be especially helpful to track Gen Rep as the current Electoral Regulations allow for vacancies to be filled by the ticket they were elected under.

Additionally, meeting attendance at SRC is not comprehensively tracked. As Gen Sec I will ensure attendance is taken and reported publicly. Meeting absences (not apologies) will be logged on the register for anyone to view. This measure will ultimately improve accountability because it will encourage attendance and engagement.

I believe my commitments are manageable, achievable and realistic. Ultimately, I am passionate about ensuring ANUSA achieves good governance outcomes so ANUSA can be an effective and relevant student union.