

**School of Chemistry & Molecular Biosciences  
Research Student Advisory Group**

**DATE:** 11 Oct 22

**TIME:** 12 pm

**PLACE:** 68-306

**Present:** Alicia Kirk, Shahla Asgharzadeh Kangchar, Athyah Alenzi, Samuel Davis, Dean O'Brien, Tom Li, Connor Scott, Luke Guddat, Apoorva Prabhu, Shannon Hoe Min Qua and Khristine Vadellon

**Absent:** Dylan Bowman, Timothy Muusse, Sanjana Tule, Forhad Karim Saikot, Natalee Newton and Summa Bibby.

**1. Acknowledgement of Country**

An Acknowledgement of Country was spoken by the Chair, Alicia, in recognition of the traditional owners, the Jagera and Turrbal people, of the land on which the meeting was taking place.

**2. Welcome and confirmation of minutes held 20<sup>th</sup> September 2022**

The Chair, Alicia, welcomed members to the meeting, noting the apologies given prior to the meeting. Minutes of last meeting were confirmed by Athyah.

**3. Business arising from previous meeting (not elsewhere listed):**

- a. Update on responses from VC's regarding PhD stipends and cost of living. (see attached)
  - i. Luke contacted the vice chancellor and got a response which is attached at the end of the minutes.
  - ii. Shahla has also raised this issue at the student leader's forum and will continue to do so.
  - iii. The ANU letter (also attached) is promising for UQ students.
- b. Update on joint initiative with EDIC and student leaders forum - SCMB Mentor initiative
  - i. No update, meeting to happen next week.
- c. Student profiles:
  - i. Mark Starkey contacted other schools who have a general services staff members who manages the student profiles of the HDR students. SCMB currently doesn't have a staff member like this due to budget.
- d. Covid Extensions:
  - i. The Grad School/ University has declined most of the requests for anyone that was not confirmed by March 2020.
  - ii. SCMB has funded 3 covid extensions that were knocked back by the Grad School. They have budget for 3 more.

**4. Reports from the RSAG representatives on the SCMB Research Committee and the SCMB Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Committee (EDIC) and HDR representative for Student Leaders forum**

- a. No updates

**5. Annual SCMB Research Students Symposium**

- Poster Boards:
  - Alicia enquired on the number of poster boards able to be booked. Pelin said ~15 but will be double checked.
- Abstracts:
  - Outcomes of abstract submissions will be decided, and participants contacted by the 21<sup>st</sup> of September via email
- Draft timetable:
  - Poster sessions will be before and after lunch.
  - Opening and closing speaker:
    - Opening: James De Voss
    - Closing: Kate Stacey will be approached however someone else could also be good.
- Photography:
  - Friend of Dean, Owen, has agreed to be photographer for the day. A gift will be provided for him.
  - SCMB camera will also be booked.
- Judges:
  - Registration link will be sent to post docs and group leaders for judging of posters and talks.
- Social Drinks:
  - Tab system will be used with tickets provided in gift bag.
  - EDIC committee Speed networking to occur during drinks:
    - Athyah explained that the EDIC committee have provided templates for questions to be used, needs help to go through the questions to work out which are relevant to PhD students. Apoorva volunteered.
    - It was decided we would ask the EDIC committee to advertise this event as we are going to be the ones running it in the end.

**7. Other business**

**No other business**

**8. Next Meeting**

The next meeting was set for Tuesday the 25<sup>th</sup> of October at 12pm 69-306

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## VC of ANUs response to the low rate of pay for HDR students.

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Hi everyone,

As announced by the Prime Minister, following the passing of Queen Elizabeth II, Thursday 22 September will be a day of national mourning and a public holiday will be observed. This means most members of our community will not be on campus, attending classes or sitting exams; and we will ensure casual staff who were scheduled to work that day aren't out of pocket. Thank you to the staff who will still be working on this day to maintain University operations. Queen Elizabeth officially opened the Menzies Library during her 1963 tour of Australia, and you can visit the plaque, read the visitor's book or watch the [video of the](#) opening.

I am pleased to announce today that we are increasing immediately the PhD (and other HDR) stipend to help our students better make ends meet. We will raise the minimum PhD stipend from \$28,854 to \$34,000. This new pay rate will be paid starting in October. The University's financial position remains very tight, and we will run a very large deficit this year, but the Senior Management Group felt strongly that it was no longer ethical to stick to the underlying government stipend amount given the cost of living pressures on our PhD students. As a nation, we want the best and brightest students to undertake research and the benefits to society are immeasurable. I am advocating at the highest levels that, if Australia wants some of our best and brightest to undertake PhDs, the Government will need to raise the base PhD stipend rate. You can read more on the [Services website](#).

Two weeks ago, I chaired a panel on immigration at the National Jobs Summit. We talked about the entire system and how it can be improved - there are clearly some gaps. I contrasted the four days it took for my visa to be approved in 1994, to the slow and laborious process for attaining work visas many of our staff and students are current facing. This hurts Australia because it makes us a much less attractive of a destination for the smartest people around the world. Let's face it, our entire community has lots of options (even if it feels sometimes like you don't), and I and the University will continue to try to improve the visa situation to make that aspect of life much less troublesome than it is presently.

In other news, we held our first in-person Open Day since 2019 a few weekends ago. It was a massive effort from teams across the campus and I'd like to thank everyone who was involved. Open Day is our opportunity to showcase what ANU is like and what makes us different. One of the things we have already done to better support students was bringing forward applications (and offers) for undergraduate places, but also making conditional offers based on year 11 and indicative year 12 results. This means we can offer more certainty, earlier, so moving Open Day to better align with these dates makes sense (plus the weather is a bit more reliable than in August!). Mark your calendars - Saturday 18 March 2023 - we are on the clock with only 183 days to go!

Also in good news, our [Kioloa Coastal Campus](#) has finally reopened after closing at the end of 2019 due to the bushfires. Kioloa is an important site for research and teaching, and we've spent the last 18 months upgrading the accommodation, laboratories, kitchen and general site. It's great to see it open again and I encourage our staff to think about ways to incorporate this site into your academic programs. You can [contact](#) the Kioloa team for more information.

As foreshadowed in my previous Blog, the annual ANU 3-minute thesis final was held on 3 September and I had a great night judging. It was a tight race between our finalists, before [Jennifer Hung](#) took out the top gong for her pitch on mRNA. Congratulations also to [Sandaru Seneviratne](#), whose work on using AI to understand language picked up second place, and to [Ivan Vinogradov](#), who won the people's choice award for his research on how fish can count quickly. Best of luck Jennifer in the Asia-Pacific final on 19 October!

Finally, I'd like to give a shout out to [Professor Mary Lou Rasmussen](#) has been recognised as our HDR Supervisor of the Month. Undertaking a PhD is a tough but rewarding gig, and the support of mentors and supervisors is critical for any student to get across the line. Also, undertaking

research in non-traditional disciplines creates different challenges for students and having a trusted supervisor to mentor and champion this research is crucial to developing new ways of thinking.

Have a nice weekend everyone - last weekend Jenny and I finished pruning the orchard, thinning out the strawberries, and planting some seeds in trays and in the wicking beds. Hope you are ready for spring! While I love spring, I am suffering from Hay Fever right now, and so I hope whatever is causing me grief (the pollen count is quite low) doesn't get worse.

Brian

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### Response from UQ executive

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I also agree that the minimal increase on the national RTP set base rate and no increase to the Government funding of universities block grants is a challenge. I understand that the Graduate School, via the HDR Committee, is working on a proposal, with support from the APS (Association of Postgraduate Students) to examine options in recognition of the increased cost of living. You will appreciate this is a complex decision but can I assure you that it will be considered in detail.